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Columbus Zoo and Aquarium tames IT needs

At a Glance

Challenges

- Limited IT staff, supporting a wide range of business needs
- Needed a secure, off-site location to backup business critical data
- As a non-profit, IT budgets are tight and they need to stretch their dollars

Benefits

- Gain access to IT expertise and consultation when they need it
- Take advantage of the cloud business model in which they only pay for what they use
- Leverage secure off-site data backup with access to disaster recovery infrastructure

Cloud backups and colocation support animal care and millions of visitors a year

Our business runs on IT

When an African lion named Tomo had a nasty gum infection, the good people at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium did what they do best. They combined expert animal care with technological know-how to give the 14-year-old jungle king an aptly named "CAT Scan." After carefully positioning the 450-pound feline into place – soundly asleep under sedation – they proceeded to take hundreds of high-resolution X-ray scans. The cutting-edge procedure would help diagnose, then treat Tomo's infection – and would eventually be replicated on animals of all shapes and sizes including sharks, penguins, snakes, birds and reptiles.

Years later, those digital scans are available on demand, even if the Zoo were to suffer a major IT outage. The data from the scans have been shared widely across the globe, supporting researchers and conservation efforts far beyond the Ohio-based zoo. And while this is a great story for animal lovers, it's an informative one for businesses and IT leaders across all industries. It shows how organizations of all kinds – even your local zoo – run on IT.

"For us, technology hits every aspect of our business, from animal care to guest services, to conservation efforts and even education programs," says Kevin Bonifas, Director of Technology Services at the Zoo.

Survival of the fittest: Lean IT is the key

With over 10,000 animals to care for and millions of annual visitors, the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium occupies 588 of acres of land, every square inch of which is closely managed for safety, health and the enjoyment of its guests and full-time

residents. From CCTV security cameras, to point of sale terminals, high-speed Wifi networks and daily feeding and medical data, Bonifas' IT team has an elephant-sized responsibility. But they have just a mouse-sized in-house team to handle it all.

"As our technology footprint grows, the expectation is for us to do more and more," he says, explaining his team has just six fulltime employees on payroll. "We've often had to offload resources in one spot to reallocate them to another."

The need to do more with less is one reason the Zoo partnered with Racksquared Data Centers, a Columbus Ohio based company. Five years ago, the Zoo was looking to reduce the burdens of managing and maintaining the hardware and infrastructure needed to support its vast data center, backup and recovery needs. As they looked for a provider, one of their key requirements was that it be a local company.

"We chose Racksquared because it's a central Ohio business and has a really good reputation. We wanted to invest in the community," Bonifas says.

Roaring with cloud efficiency and resilience

In five years of partnership, the Zoo and Racksquared have teamed up on numerous critical IT and operational projects. Most recently, Racksquared guided the Zoo on a migration-to-cloud backup and recovery using Veeam. The result has been peace of mind and confidence, in a world where businesses everywhere are starting to face up to growing ransomware attacks and cyber threats.

"We now have best-in-class protection of our data, using the 3-2-1 backup model," says System Administrator Debbie McMasters, adding that the cloud data management solution has drastically reduced the manual efforts demanded of her team.

She also points out that, over the years, Racksquared has provided much needed support, guidance and services to her team.

"Racksquared is an extension of our team. We've relied on them to guide us through the big steps, to make sure we are moving in the right direction," she says.

Bonifas agrees.

"With Racksquared, we have a name and a face. We know them. We know we can talk face-to-face anytime we need," says Bonifas. "Not all hosting companies are like that. We are a small team and that close interaction is a real warm and fuzzy for us."

Find out how Racksquared can help tame your IT challenges. Visit www.rackquared.com, contact us at sales@racksquared.com or call (855) 380-7225.

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— Kevin Bonifas, Director of Technology Services, Columbus Zoo and Aquarium

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Racksquared Data Centers simplifies IT so that you can focus on growing your core business and evolve to meet the changing demands of customers. We do this by providing access to technical expertise, the latest technologies and a secure, reliable, resilient environment for your IT systems. We become an extension of your team, providing flexible designs and solutions while managing, monitoring and supporting your infrastructure, so that your business is always up and running.