Success Story

Nation's 9th largest zoo uses real-time financial visibility to outmaneuver COVID-19 shutdown

Nashville Zoo

"Sage Intacct simplified everything for everybody, and I have time to ensure the accuracy of our reports instead of scrambling to get them finished."

Kim Pridgen
CFO, Nashville Zoo

Company overview
Nashville Zoo's mission is to inspire a culture of understanding and discovery of the natural world through conservation, innovation and leadership. The progressive and dynamic zoological park is located on 188 acres, making it the 9th largest zoo in the country by landmass.

Executive summary
Previous software:
- Sage 50

Results with Sage Intacct
- Accelerated monthly close by 50%.
- Increased finance team efficiency by 30%.
- Cut days from monthly report preparation.
- Achieved thousands of dollars in cost savings via better spend analysis.

Company
Nashville Zoo

Location
Tennessee, US

Industry
Nonprofit

Sage Products
Sage Intacct

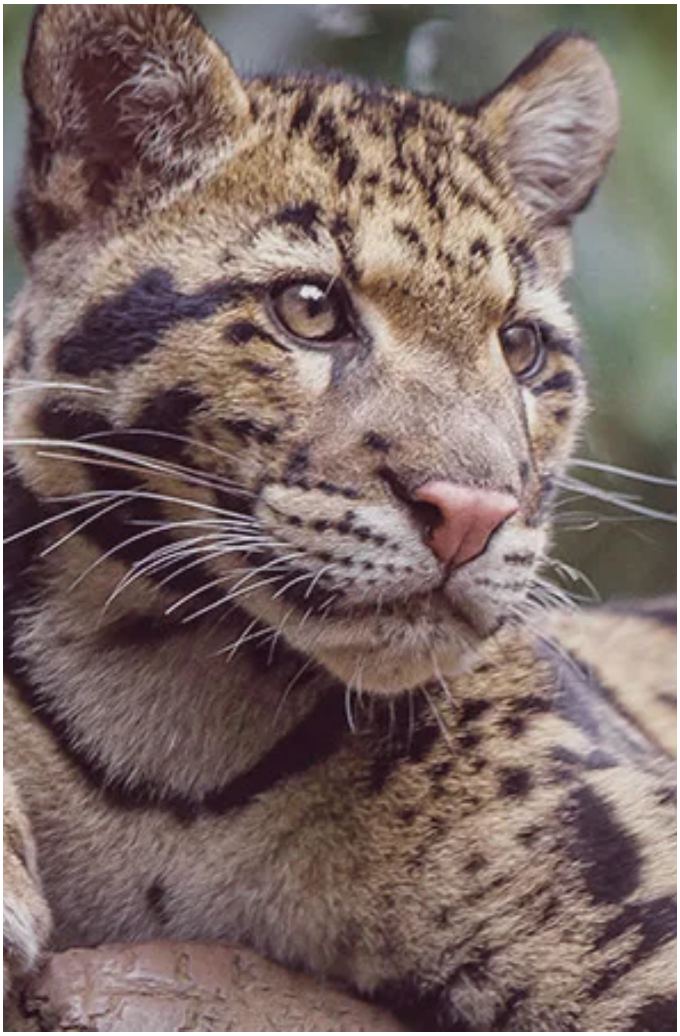
Sage

In search of a solid foundation for growth

Since opening its doors in 1991, the Nashville Zoo has grown from a small, private operation to an AZA-accredited facility that welcomes more than one million visitors each year. Although the private nonprofit organization collects admissions and event fees at its 188-acre location, it is also funded by donations. As the zoo experienced rapid, continued growth in recent years, its leadership looked to the future and made big plans to develop new animal habitats and unique visitor experiences.

However, the finance team initially worried about whether they could support the planned expansion, because of their heavy reliance on paper-based processes and some limitations with their Sage 50 accounting system. “Until COVID-19 hit, we had been on a straight upward trajectory, and this made it hard to shed some of the old ways of doing things,” remembered Kim Pridgen, chief finance officer at Nashville Zoo. “Yet, we knew we had outgrown the reporting capabilities of our legacy system and needed to embrace new technology,” Kim said.

After conferring with several other zoo CFOs and evaluating solutions such as Microsoft Dynamics GP, Oracle NetSuite, and Blackbaud, Sage Intacct rose to the top of Kim’s list. She selected the cloud-based financial management solution for its easy-to-use reports and dashboard capabilities, as well as its partnership with LBMC Technology Solutions for reliable consulting services. After upgrading from Sage 50 to Sage Intacct, the organization slashed its monthly close in half, boosted efficiency, and saved thousands of dollars through improved spend analysis.



Sage Intacct increased Nashville Zoo's efficiency by 30% and cut the monthly close from 10 days to five.

Speeding the monthly close by 50% via automated workflows

With the help of trusted local advisors from LBMC Technology Solutions, the Nashville Zoo went live on Sage Intacct just weeks before the massive disruption of pandemic-related shutdowns in early 2020. Not only did this enable the finance team to effortlessly shift to remote work, it increased their efficiency by 30% and cut the monthly close from 10 days to five—while personally saving Kim a full day each month that she previously spent on tedious report preparation for the board.

"Prior to deploying Sage Intacct, closing our books was difficult because everything was completely manual and our prior reports wouldn't balance," Kim recalled. "My team would spend at least 30 minutes a day extracting data from our point of sales and events systems, formatting it in Excel, and then re-entering it into Sage 50. But Sage Intacct simplified everything for everybody, and I have time to ensure the accuracy of our reports instead of scrambling to get them finished," Kim said.

This significant process improvement would not have been possible without Sage Intacct's multidimensional general ledger, which helped shrink the zoo's unwieldy chart of accounts by 75%. As a result, the finance team can produce profit and loss statements for individual events at the push of a button, rather than spending weeks sorting out how to allocate expenses. In addition, their new accounts payable workflows are entirely paperless, and they simply upload data from their Accesso point of sale system.

Uncovering cost savings and donor funding during uncertain times

The Nashville Zoo especially appreciates the complete transparency it gained through the Sage Intacct implementation. “We used to check our cash flow just once a quarter due to the unwieldy report structure in the prior system, but now we view it weekly, which has been a big factor in helping us survive the loss of our busiest season this year,” commented Kim. “With Sage Intacct, we’ve scrutinized every expense and found ways to save thousands of dollars without impacting animal care staffing. The system also lets me quickly run budget projections for different scenarios to determine how long we can get by if faced with another shutdown,” Kim said.

The zoo’s development team leveraged Sage Intacct to look into spending by vendor and costs per animal—helping them make compelling cases for donation requests. Since traditional named sponsorships on capital projects are less compelling while foot traffic is low and construction projects are on hold, the team pulled granular operational insights so they could offer donors and large vendors new opportunities, such as feeding a giraffe for a month. Thanks to these fundraising efforts and impressive levels of community support, the organization has managed to fund most of its necessary operating expenses this year, and even expects to increase its overall budget slightly next year. “We’ve been selling out in our limited capacity and our ‘Boo at the Zoo’ Halloween program for kids brought in exactly the same revenue that it did last year, which was a pleasant surprise,” Kim shared.

Kim and her team now have stronger financial controls and all the visibility they need at their fingertips—without tapping into the zoo’s limited IT resources. Next, they look forward to adding operational data, such as keeper hours and visitor attendance, and building roles-based dashboards to monitor overall performance and demonstrate program impact. They also plan to implement Sage Intacct’s purchasing module, which will help the organization adopt centralized purchasing practices and fully prepare to ramp up growth again when the time is right.

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