



Aquarium Reacts to Changing Tide Through Outsourcing



The New England Aquarium (<http://www.neaq.org>) is a pre-eminent aquarium and educational institution promoting the understanding and conservation of aquatic life and environments. Delivering on its promise, however, has become more difficult over the last few years due to decreased tourism's effect on visitor traffic. The Aquarium has had to take steps to reduce costs while remaining focused on its mission.

Research and animal care functions are central to the Aquarium. Other support functions, such as general maintenance and custodial services, while still important, are not core operations. Over the last few years the Aquarium has taken a hard look at all areas to find ways to become more efficient.



One of the ways was to consolidate operations, in particular the shipping and receiving operation reporting to Joe Zani, New England Aquarium's Controller. Zani quickly realized that it didn't fit with his department's other responsibilities and was not a core function. Yet, shipping and receiving is necessary because it supports all of the Aquarium's departments.

Furthermore, since it handles not only standard supplies, but also medical supplies for the animals, it has to be closely managed. For instance, medical supplies require the signature of the receiving clerk upon acceptance and then a staff veterinarian's signature when they are delivered to the pharmacy. Although a small operation, shipping and receiving required a relatively high level of management attention.

Zani discovered that outsourcing was a viable alternative. The Aquarium had been working with UNICCO Service Company for its custodial work for several years and was pleased with the quality of services. UNICCO also has an administrative services unit dedicated to providing outsourced office services, such as mailrooms and copy centers.

Zani invited UNICCO and a few other vendors to submit proposals. After review, he turned the entire shipping and receiving operation over to UNICCO.

“I knew that shipping and receiving didn’t belong in my department. It was not big enough for us to make it into its own department, yet it took too much of my attention and affected my other staff. For instance, if there was a staffing problem on any given day, I had to find a replacement. I ended up reassigning a staff accountant for the day, because supplies had to be delivered and there was no one else. It was clear from the start that this was not a good use of resources.”



Now, a UNICCO employee accepts the shipments in the morning and contacts the ordering manager to arrange delivery by the same afternoon. The UNICCO staffer personally delivers the items to the appropriate location and obtains a signature from the responsible person. UNICCO also handles shipping, including the fulfillment of online orders to the gift shop.

“Now, I’m completely relieved of day-to-day management of shipping and receiving. UNICCO takes care of the staffing and replacements, and manages the workflow. Since office services is one of their core competencies, they are able to keep everything running smoothly. I’m also reaching another major goal by saving money,” Zani concluded.



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