

Ramping up to Re-Opening: A Pivot to New Business Strategies

As we look forward towards re-opening our institutions, our business thinking must be proactive, forward-thinking, and poised to take full advantage of the opportunities presented.

We need to think non-contact, cashless and clean guest engagements.

As a society, we need to **pivot** from talking about the pandemic to talking about planning for the new normal.

We must continue to
“think outside the building.”



New Business Models & Strategies: We will need to align our revenue and organizational structures to strengthen our balance sheets and operating reserves over the coming months and years so that we are well positioned to meet future challenges.

Here is a “checklist” of new business strategies for you to consider, assess and implement as we collectively get ready to re-open - organized into four primary categories, each targeting a key strategic goal:



Identifying New Business Opportunities...Now

- File for your **CARES/Paycheck Protection Plan stimulus funding** – do your homework as grants will be forgiven if you invest in your staff resources!!
- Explore **cashless options** - promote “pre-paid” on-line sales with print-at-home tickets or through credit card scanners and mobile apps
- Implement **timed-ticketing** -with reserved times for members with expedited arrival
- Talk with your food and retail **partners** to be prepared to offer “value” food and retail items including non-contact products
- Implement **mobile ordering** for food and retail sales with designated pick-up locations
- Coordinate **on-line retail sales** with merchandise pick-up at the Zoo and open-air retail marketplaces
- Consider new **mobile apps** that spark engagement for food, retail and round-ups



Planning to Generate More Revenue...Now

- Test **value-pricing offers** – options for a second day visit for later in the year for an incremental price increase now
- Share **discounts for COVID-19 Responders** as a thank-you
- Explore **evening hours and programs** - could be integrated with dinner options
- Promote additional **open space rentals** for community groups and activities – yoga classes as one example
- Boost **annual support** initiatives – make the case for supporting your institution and its mission – animals, conservation and education
- Call on your community to support an **emergency relief fund** that is tax-deductible and tax-free to the employees.
- If you have a public partner (City, County and State), **identify recovery funds** that support the community via free days for residents, school groups and/or senior citizen discounts



Aligning staff resources...Now

- Enact **reductions when necessary with compassion** and clear message points communicating the hope of rehiring in the future as soon as conditions allow
- Consider **across-the-board staff reductions** – 20% reductions with working 4-day work weeks instead of eliminating some functions completely
- Assess **opportunities to outsource**, balancing service-delivery with quality and fees/costs for such services as facility/ground maintenance, admissions, food & retail, to help us operate leaner
- Assess **technology leveraging** – less cash means less cash control needs and lower operating costs
- Assess and re-align under-performing operating departments and **restructure in the short-term**, then plan for “mission-growth” in the coming months - short-term focus must be on “break-even +” opportunities!
- Focus on your institution’s **long-term sustainability** - if there is depth within departments, make the tough decisions with your eye on long-term financial stability



Strengthening Your Balance Sheet...Mid-term Strategies

- Make the case for **endowment** and planned giving opportunities by individuals – need to create funding reserves
- **Engage your Board** and its Committees in supporting “balance sheet” funding – will be as important as balancing the operating fund

We hope these suggestions provide a way to help you guide staff and board discussions about key actions your institution should be considering and implementing now so that you are prepared to move forward in our new normal once we are past the immediate crisis. It is our responsibility to do everything we can to be ready when the time is right.

We at RS&S have been proud to work with the zoo and aquarium community for more than 3 decades. In that time, many of our relationships have grown from positive work collaborations into true friendships. We are here for you – for all of you. Whether engaged in active work with us right now, an old client, or a new friend we just haven’t met yet, feel free to email us: rbiddle@rssconsultantsllc.com or jmacauley@rssconsultantsllc.com. We are happy to discuss any of the ideas above or to serve as a sounding board for your creative thinking. **Remember, we are better together!!**