

Case Study

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Segway PTs Help INNOVENTIONS at Epcot® Enhance Guest Satisfaction and Increase Operational Efficiencies

HOSPITALITY

INNOVENTIONS at Epcot® at the Walt Disney World® Resort

People from around the world have been drawn to the magic of the **Walt Disney World®** Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Florida since it opened in 1971. The resort is expansive, covering more than 20,000 acres of property, and operates 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. The sheer magnitude of space, quantity of guests and round-the-clock work environment, create operational challenges few other organizations ever encounter.

Evaluating Performance in a Round-the-Clock Operation

Located in the heart of **Epcot®**, INNOVENTIONS is a unique attraction where visitors can experience hands-on, interactive exhibits about science and technology. In early 2002 INNOVENTIONS opened an exhibit featuring the Segway® Personal Transporter (PT); just months after the Segway PT had been unveiled to the world for the first time. The exhibit featured information about the new technology while INNOVENTIONS cast members demonstrated the Segway PT and how it works. "The exhibit was well received by our guests and there were so many requests from our guests to try the Segway PT that we really wanted to develop other programs using the product," says John Eric Sovocool, Technology & Show Manager INNOVENTIONS at **Epcot®**. "We also recognized that there were benefits to using it in other areas of the resort."



Soon after the debut of the exhibit, the "Ride and Show" team began to evaluate Segway PTs via a loan program administered through Sovocool's department. Eight to ten different lines of business at the **Walt Disney World®** Resort and **Epcot®**, ranging from food and beverage, to merchandising and attractions, evaluated the Segway PT to consider which locations it would be most useful to employees. "We operate a 365-day/24-hour operation. At any hour of the day we are either taking care of our guests or preparing for the next day. That makes for a very demanding environment and it is challenging to find consumer products that meet our needs," said Sovocool. As soon as evaluations of the Segway PT began, Sovocool started to receive inquiries about how the different departments could acquire them to use in their daily operations.

Implementing Employee Training Consistently and Efficiently

As part of the evaluation Sovocool worked with Segway Inc. to train the employees, known as cast members, on how to safely and properly operate the Segway PT. Naturally, the Segway required a training protocol that could be consistently, efficiently and thoroughly implemented. "When you are looking at a new technology you have to invest properly in a training and safety program," Sovocool says.

Sovocool built upon the training program Segway Inc. had suggested, adding components that were specific to the needs of the busy resort. For example, throughout the four parks, cast members could experience a variety of riding terrain including gravel, carpet, concrete, tile, sand and more. As Sovocool and his team created the cast member training program they took these circumstances into account.

Training classes are taught by a core team of eight to ten trainers who are all working from the same materials and guidelines. At different points in the class, trainers review evaluation check points that help them determine whether the cast member is proficient enough at a particular skill. If the trainee can not reach the required proficiency they are not able to utilize the product. In addition, if the cast member prefers not to use the device, he or she will not be required to use the product. "We realize the Segway PT is not

Executive Summary

CUSTOMER

INNOVENTIONS at **Epcot®** at the **Walt Disney World®** Resort

MARKET SECTOR

Hospitality
• Custodial
• Engineering Services
• Employee Mobility
• Merchandising
• Parking Management
• Guided Tours
Attractions

THE CHALLENGE

- Increase cast member response times to enhance guest satisfaction
- Identify a transportation product that can withstand a demanding work environment that operates 365 days a year, 24 hours a day
- Create a protocol for the consistent deployment of specialized equipment and training to hundreds of employees throughout the organization

THE SOLUTION

- Deploy Segway PTs across different lines of business
- Create a consistent process to train employees, and procure and maintain Segway PTs
- Develop guest riding experiences that leverage the best practices for training and implementation already in place

BENEFITS TO THE CUSTOMER

- Increased response times enhance guest satisfaction
- Improves interaction between employees and guests
- Increase operational efficiencies and realize cost savings
- Enhance employee morale
- Provide a unique guest experience while in a supervised, controlled-access environment



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for everyone,” Sovocool explains. “One to three percent of the trainees will not reach the required proficiency level. Using the Segway PT is not required for any job. A cast member can opt out of the training at any time.”

Currently the training class is six hours in length and successful completion of the class is required prior to a cast member operating a Segway PT on the property. A Segway PT training class has been held once a week for the last three years. “It’s funny because some people want to come take the class just because it’s fun. But we do require that the cast member’s department own a Segway PT before they can participate,” said Sovocool. As of the end of 2006, more than 1,400 active cast members have been trained to operate the Segway PT.

One Device, Many Applications

With a training program in place, and interest in the Segway PT growing by the day, the resort started to deploy units into different areas at the theme parks. Cast members started to use the Segway PT as a productivity tool to enable them to move more quickly and efficiently around the parks, responding to guest needs and coordinating the opening and closing of the park among other activities.

Over time, units were deployed to different lines of business and used by cast members with different roles at the parks. The Engineering Services and Custodial departments use the device to move around the parks more quickly, addressing repair and maintenance needs on the property. Cast members at various resorts use the Segway PT for room deliveries and lifeguards utilize the devices to move equipment and supplies from place to place. Some cast members even sell merchandise from the Segway PT – becoming somewhat of a mobile kiosk. As more lines of business adopted the technology into its operations, other departments became interested and the fleet of Segway PTs multiplied.

Parking attendants use the Segway PT to move around the lot, directing guests to the appropriate areas and answering questions. Sovocool says that the device offers some particularly unique benefits to these cast members, since the rider is eight inches (20 centimeters) taller when standing on the Segway PT. “Parking attendants are higher up, more visible and approachable, guests ask them more questions.”

Enhancing Guest Satisfaction by Reducing Response Times and Increasing Communication

It wasn’t long before Sovocool and his peers recognized that their guests were very interested in the Segway PT and were more likely to approach cast members while they were riding it. “We are a relationship company and we really count on those one-on-one relationships. Our goal is to ensure that each guest who walks through our gates has a magical stay and that they leave our property as a cherished friend,” said Sovocool.

“There were some cost savings in operations but the biggest advantage for us was that communications with our guests increased. Guest satisfaction is a key driver in our business. As guest satisfaction increased, so did the morale of the cast members who use Segway PTs in their jobs. The folks who use it on a daily basis absolutely love it. They can’t imagine going back to their roles without it,” Sovocool adds.

To keep all elements of the implementation consistent, all Segway PT programs ranging from purchasing, maintenance and training are operated out of INNOVENTIONS at Epcot®. “When you are working with a company as large as ours, consistency is key,” says Sovocool. For example, each line of business is responsible for bringing machines to INNOVENTIONS for servicing, where a team of engineers can turn around a unit in approximately 24 hours.

Unique Experience Leads to New Guest Service Opportunities

Using Segway PTs in the parks created so much interest among guests that in February 2004 INNOVENTIONS introduced the “Around the World at Epcot®” Segway PT tour. This two-hour supervised tour allows guests to operate a Segway PT through a designated course within World Showcase that maximizes the guest experience while minimizing potential for pedestrian contact via time, operational and course restrictions. In its first two years of operation, more than 10,000 guests experienced the tour and the offering has been expanded.

The tour concept represented a brand new opportunity for the park. “Our tour business has increased each year since we started,” said Sovocool. Currently guests have three different ways to experience the technology: the “Around the World at Epcot®” two-hour tour, a one-hour ride experience called “Simply Segway”, or a five-minute riding experience at “Segway Central” in the INNOVENTIONS West Pavilion.

Using the Segway PT cast members are able to serve their guests better by enhancing their approachability and decreasing response times. The product’s durability and versatility has proven to be beneficial in diverse lines of business including, maintenance and engineering, employee mobility, merchandising, guest tours and parking management. Deployment of Segway PTs continues as more cast member participate in training and new opportunities for the device are identified at the resort.■



ADOPTION TIMELINE

March 25, 2002

The Segway PT exhibit opened at INNOVENTIONS at Epcot®.

July 2002

Evaluations of the Segway PT began in lines of business throughout the Resort.

September 2002

The first cast members began using the Segway PT in operations.

February 2004

The “Around the World at Epcot®” tour on Segway PTs debuted.

December 2004

By the end of 2004 Segway PTs were being regularly used by cast members.

May 2005

Tour operations were enhanced with the introduction of the “Simply Segway at Epcot®” ride experience where guests could experience a Segway in a supervised environment with restricted speed and range capabilities.

May 2006

The Segway PT exhibit at INNOVENTIONS was expanded allowing guests to enjoy a five-minute ride experience on the Segway PT. The new exhibit area was named “Segway Central”.

September 2006

INNOVENTIONS started to utilize the second generation Segway PT for its guest ride experiences and tours.

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— John Eric Sovocool,
Technology & Show Manager
INNOVENTIONS at Epcot®