



Introduction

According to EBM-Solutions, corporate performance management means much more than a financial consolidation of turnover- and profit figures. For an organisation such as Center Parcs Europe, the occupancy of the bungalows is at least just as important, if not more important. The applications of EBM-Solutions not only offer insight in the planning of charges and turnover, (detailed) customer data, but they also give insight in customer satisfaction. The appraisal of guests is related to hygiene, price, quality, security and service of the park facilities, such as swimming pools and restaurants. EBM-Solutions also supports the timing of last minute actions: starting too soon means miss of income, starting too late leads to a lower occupancy.

By swiftly having the correct information, Center Parcs Europe is able to improve its position in the competitive leisure market. The applications of EBM-Solutions provide the park managers with the required information to be able to make the correct decisions. According to EBM Solutions, the Center Parcs-case illustrates the fact that successful corporate performance management is more than obtaining better insight in costs and turnovers.

- Customer satisfaction data available in 3 days instead of 6 weeks.
- Clearer overview of the guests' quality judgement
- Renewed, faster database
- Project realised in twenty days
- Average customer satisfaction increased
- Extremely fast introduction of major modifications such as IFRS

Center Parcs Europe – the organisation -

Since 2001 Center Parcs Europe has been a component of Pierre & Vacances and DB Capital partners. Center Parcs Europe has 15 parks on various locations throughout Europe – in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and France - with in total ten thousand bungalows. In the summer season Center Parcs has over ten thousand employees. The parks have a common turnover of 550 millions euro per year.

Center Parcs revolutionised the holiday market in the Netherlands over 30 years ago by offering short break holidays (i.e. midweek breaks from Monday to Friday and weekends from Friday to Monday) on a yearly basis, in addition to longer stays during traditional holiday periods. Indeed, its success can be seen by the occupancy figures of around 90% at all bungalows and repeat bookings of more than 60% within a year.

Name: Richard Verhoeff
 Age: 38
 Job: director technology
 Career: Since 1999 he works at Center Parcs, the first three years operating as e-commerce director. Formerly he worked at Eurocard/MasterCard and OHRA recreation/BexReizen as marketing manager and manager information technology.



High occupancy of bungalows vitally for Center Parcs Europe

FAST INSIGHT IN CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Six weeks. This time it could last before the Executive Board of a holiday park had insight in the quality judgement of a guest. A too long period to intervene or steer effectively. An adapted organisation process and renewed application have shortened the time up to three days. The first impact of it indicates on an increased customer satisfaction.

With more than three millions visitors – adding up to thirteen millions nights spent - the occupancy of the over ten thousand bungalows in the nineteen holiday parks (in four countries) of Center Parcs is 88 percent.

Measuring satisfaction

A high occupancy of the parks is vital for a profitable exploitation. The occupancy is mainly stipulated by satisfaction of the guests: satisfied customers gladly come back. About 33 percent of the park guests visit the park again within a year. It is therefore little surprising that a strong part of the efforts of the organisation is aimed on keeping and further raising the customer satisfaction. After all; The more satisfied the customer is, the bigger is the chance that he will come back.

The parks measure the satisfaction by requesting their guests to fill in an extensive survey. They can give their judgement concerning aspects such as hygiene and service, value for money, security and for example the availability of facilities such as restaurants and swimming pools. The feedback provides the parks of important and relevant management information. The redemption rate of the surveys is high: approximately forty percent of the guests leave behind a completed form at departure of the park. Based on the results the park managers are able to steer in negative developments and to give a more intensive continuation to positive developments.

Steer earlier

To be able to steer effectively, topicality of the data is essential. `After all, learning from findings of the early summer guests at the end of ending of the summer makes no sense, say to Richard Verhoeff, director information technology at Center Parcs Europe. `When, for example, appears many guests have complaints concerning the cleaning of their bungalow and you do not know about it for two months, then it's plausible that those many thousands of guests who have been there in the meantime will have the same complaints. When you already know at the beginning of the season that the cleaning activities are dissatisfying, the chance that your guests come back enthusiastically is much bigger.

´The sooner the park manager knows about dissatisfactions, the better he or she can steer and prevent dissatisfaction amongst following guests. ´ That was exactly the problem at Center Parcs Europe: by the manner of processing of all guest inquiries it lasted approximately six weeks before the park managers had the satisfaction data of their own guests. To be able to steer effectively, this period had to be shortened considerably. Also the presentation of the data had to be improved. No vast overview with detailed information on all possible *satisfiers* and *dissatisfiers*, but a clear and concise overview, which gives the park manager an insight in the customer satisfaction in one single glance. Richard Verhoeff: ´In fact you have to look again at the way the process is arranged organisationally and technically. In that order, after all, the system is a resultant of the process. If you can simplify the process, you can also simplify the application. ´



Slowing down factor

In the old situation, all holiday parks sent their completed surveys to the head office twice a week; namely when the midweek guests leave and when the weekend guests leave. At the head office the surveys are collected by the marketing department, which scans the data in an own database. Richard Verhoeff: ` The working method was arranged in a way, so that the import occurred not until all data of all parks had been collected. That already was one slowing down factor. Another one was the complexity of import.

We have mapped that there are, judging by three millions visitors of which forty percent fill in and leave behind the completed survey, approximately three billion several "satisfaction combinations". To be able to process a clear reflection that, is demanding quite something of your system. After all the data were scanned, these were encoded and were linked up to the central database. Richard Verhoeff: ` We work with a year planning of thirteen times four weeks. Every four weeks we benchmark on the basis of the collected data. But because it takes at least two weeks before the most recent data have been processed, you use a benchmark, which is based on input of sometimes more than six weeks ago. `

Step one of Center Parcs was the decision of no longer collecting the data of all parks at the same time, but to do this by park separately. Richard Verhoeff: ` Also because a benchmark of a park in the German Sauerland is little relevant for a park to the Dutch coast, with other facilities. The best comparison material for a park is it's own data week on week. Not the data of another park. `

Transparent

Another improvement was removing a number of steps in the processing: now the entire process is a matter of the automation division of Center Parcs Europe. One department is responsible for scanning and coding the data. One and another had consequences for the underlying application. Roughly it meant that the existing application for the processing and analysis of customer satisfaction data had to be structured simpler. Moreover also the output - the eventual information on basis of which the park managers can steer - had to be more transparent and less detailed. Richard Verhoeff: ` The data, which rolled from the system, were rather extended en detailed, but were for the park manager very difficult to understand rapidly.

Therefore looking at the data was no fast and easy operation, but rather annoying and time consuming. Time, which a park manager must spend on the presentation of the park, and motivating his employees. His time is too precious to be staring at a computer monitor or a battery of paper, full of rows and numbers. An important requirement to the renewed application was that to the front information comes available, which is presented in such a manner that it is clear in a single glance for the end-user, the park manager.

The simplification of the output starts with the simplification of the structure, in which the collected inquiry data are read in. This way the classification - in fact the number of head indicators or drivers on which a park manager want to steer - is refined. Based on that, a new database has been built, with an adapted hierarchical structure. Thanks to the new database, which has been linked directly to the basic customer database, the processing of the many data goes much more rapidly.

In practice nowadays within two working days after entry the surveys have been scanned and processed. Another day later here from a concisely, synoptic document is generated that in PDF-format can be read by the park manager. Richard Verhoeff: ` Within three days he or she got the judgement of the guests who left last. With that it is possible that he or she immediately can steer where necessary. `

**Don't be fixated on something**

The project lasted six weeks, of which effective twenty days for renewing the application. A quick implementation. Richard Verhoeff: ' You can make it as difficult such as you want yourself. When you look at what substantially has been changed, it is in terms of system implementations or application development not spectacular. The change can mainly be found in the underlying processes. As a company, and certainly as an information technologist at a company, you must always realise that that is determinative for the performance of your venture. The reason why we can conclude that we have completed a successful improvement project, is because we were not fixated on systems, nor have approached it purely from a financial view, but that we has put 'insight in the total management' centrally. One of the traps in a project such as this is, that you put the technique or the financial angle centrally.

But what it's really about is getting insight in the motivation of a guest to return to your park. You can also measure purely the turnover by type guest, link conclusions in figures and for example adapt your marketing policy to it. Aspects, which are really important, but are not the core aspects. That is the satisfaction of today's' guest. Because this satisfaction stipulates the turnover of tomorrow.'

Judgement

Center Parcs Europe uses the renewed working method now approximately a year. Too short to actually conclude if the formulated objective of 'increasing the number of guests that return after at the latest a year with one and a half percent' has been realised; that can be done after the new peak season in 2004. However, one year is long enough to be able to conclude that most of the parks observe an increase in the average judgement of their guests.

Richard Verhoeff: ' The coming year we can measure if this has really raised the customer retention leads, or leads to an increase in recurrence visit. One and a half percent of increase might seem low, but in fact it's concerning almost fifty thousand guests which return éxtra. You don't need to make great marketing efforts to them. You "just" try the best you can to make their stay as pleasant as possible.