

BUILDING CUSTOM APPS TO IMPROVE COMMISSARY OPERATIONS

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Abstract

Like many zoo commissary/ nutrition operations, the Lincoln Park Zoo (LPZ) Nutrition Center (NC) supports Animal Care in addition to excellent nutrition by providing supplies such as PPE and cleaning equipment. However, the LPZ process was cumbersome and often led to confusion and frustration with placing and filling these requests. Keepers would fill out an excel spreadsheet choosing from a list of items and e-mail this to the NC team to fill and deliver. The list of available items was very long, had vague descriptions, and no photos resulting in many requests having incorrect items or amounts that would need correction. The goal was to improve this process to be simple, user friendly, prevent item modification, and able to track information such as which areas are ordering certain items and how much any item is being ordered. Microsoft Power App in conjunction with SharePoint was used to build two custom apps: one “shopping cart” app that keepers use to order their supplies and a second “filling” app that the NC team uses to track and complete the requests. Customizations such as item pictures, e-mail notifications, and order status greatly improved communications and overall efficiency for the NC team. As of the writing of this document, the Microsoft Power App platform is available to users with a Microsoft 365 account through their organization or can be purchased through a variety of licensing plans. An array of tutorial videos on YouTube helped us build and troubleshoot the app, and there are many online resources (free and paid) available to assist with building and running Power Apps. Other Microsoft business intelligence tools such as Power Automate (formerly Power Flow), and Power BI can be used in conjunction with Power Apps to help streamline processes and analyze data. LPZ is currently exploring integrating those platforms to further automate and streamline processes. The Microsoft Power App platform is flexible, easy to use, and has improved LPZ Nutrition Center efficiency and has the potential to easily improve other zoo commissary/ nutrition operations.

Disclaimer: The author is not intending to promote one software program or company over another. The intention is solely to share how one specific tool assisted with improving zoo commissary operations.