



CASE STUDY: GUIDED DISCOVERIES

Driving More Informed Business Decisions

How Guided Discoveries Leverages Alchemer to Help More Kids Learn Hands On

Founded in 1978, Guided Discoveries is a nonprofit in Southern California that has used Alchemer since 2011. The organization uses Alchemer to collect feedback from staff, chaperones, and students, and then shares the feedback across almost every group – from the executive level to maintenance and facilities.

Guided Discoveries operates three distinct, very hands-on camps for kids in fourth grade through twelfth. Catalina Island Marine Institute (CIMI) and Catalina Sea Camp, the original programs, offer marine science and ocean adventures on the island of Catalina. Launched in 1988, AstroCamp provides for those with an interest in rocketry and space and mountain adventure.

In addition to one, two and three-week summer camps, Guided Discoveries also offers three-day and five-day field trips for students in school. Even the three-day camps can make a huge impact on a child, giving them a greater sense of independence and willingness to try new things.

REMOVING THE GUESSWORK TO MAKE BETTER INVESTMENTS

“Alchemer helps us understand where investments should be made,” claims Matt Mishalow, CFO at Guided Discoveries. “Being a nonprofit, we’re not as concerned about increased revenue as we are about where we should make our investments for next year.” By analyzing feedback collected with Alchemer, Guided Discoveries moved from splashy ideas to more front-facing and program-related investments.

For example, the leadership team found that even though they changed from family-style to buffet-style dining, the ratings indicated it was time to outsource everything to a food-service operations specialist. Ongoing surveys about every aspect of the camp also help the team set benchmarks. That way they can tell if an investment moves the needle for people’s experience and satisfaction.

MAKING CHANGES QUICKLY WITH INSTANT FEEDBACK

Guided Discoveries have always used surveys, beginning with paper surveys until about 2011, when they went digital with Alchemer. “The logic and notification functions built into the surveys allows us to email results to an instructor or a staff member when their name was an answer for a question,” adds Matt. “This really helps the staff gather and compile feedback without requiring them to sift through all of the data every week, pull it out, and report on it.”

Live reports also allow the front-line staff to get instant feedback from guests so they can improve, instead of getting all the feedback at the end of the season, when it’s too late to change anything. “Before, we always felt like we were a season behind,” says Matt. “Feedback collected with Alchemer allows us to make changes pretty quickly.”

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CFO at Guided Discoveries



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COLLECTING THE RIGHT FEEDBACK FROM THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Each chaperone gets and gives feedback on their field trips. They and their students give feedback to the camp and the individual staff who teach classes. When a staff member is mentioned by name, they receive that feedback immediately so they can adjust how they teach throughout the year.

At the same time, the feedback is also passed on to the appropriate camp’s program director. “Our program directors act like COOs (Chief Operating Officers) for each camp,” explains Matt. “They’re coordinating the efforts between all departments and looking at the data from a higher level to understand how food service, maintenance, facilities, and programs are all married together.”

These directors report to the CFO and CEO during senior leadership meetings. At those meetings, everyone examines the aggregated monthly feedback, noticing trends, such as where people are making comments, so they can address those issues.

SPOTTING TRENDS AND AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT EARLY

“Alchemer really helps at the food service and facilities level,” adds Matt. “Are we having problems with a certain bedroom or bathroom? What are the food service challenges? Do we have bad reviews on one particular lunch?” The Guided Discoveries team then acts proactively, which improves satisfaction.

KEEPING SURVEYS AND RESULTS ORGANIZED WITH TEAMS & FOLDERS

In addition to the different camps, Guided Discoveries deals with many stakeholders and audiences, both for the surveys and the results. “We really love the ability to organize surveys between teams and folders,” says Matt. “It saves so much time for the people managing all of our surveys.”

STANDARDIZING FOR SIMPLICITY

“When we took time to rethink our strategy, we started looking at our systems, processes, and software differently,” says Matt. “We decided to standardize to simplify. We chose Alchemer because it was easy to use and offered functionality and flexibility we couldn’t find elsewhere.”

WHY ALCHEMER?

“Alchemer is a very intuitive off-the-shelf feedback tool,” says Matt. “All the functionality is built in to make it really easy to set up, collect data, and get reports. It’s not one of those things where you’re forced to look on YouTube for how do these things.”

Matt also notes that Alchemer does not offer the complexity or cost of Qualtrics. “Nonprofits like us are not going to have the budget for the big names, but we need more than Google Forms.” Guided Discoveries collects 30,000 to 40,000 surveys a year, which would be an additional cost with many solutions.

When the development director asked for an Alchemer login, Matt did not need to spend a lot of time teaching him how to use it. “He just dove in,” says Matt. “He gets reports and collaborates with other directors to change their questions so he can gather information that’s more helpful to him. He’s done a lot of that on his own to try to help our other directors collect the right things.”

You can learn more about Guided Discoveries at <https://guideddiscoveries.org/>

Call your account executive, or visit
www.alchemer.com/non-profit/ to learn more.

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