

Profile: Dollywood, Pigeon Forge, TN

Dollywood Streamlines Cash Handling

CA

Wilma Longfellow sets up "Bertha" to process currency.



Carol of the Trees highlights Dollywood's Smokey Mountain Christmas festival.



Families enjoy the rollercoaster and other rides.



Cecilia Alderman inspects currency transport path and facing module.



Being fed more and more cash can make it difficult to maintain tight control of the cash handling system, but measures taken by Dollywood's cash control department to streamline their system have kept it as trim and controlled as Dolly Parton's waistline.

As the theme park grew, so did the burden of handling the daily cash receipts. Alleviating that burden required an overhaul of the processing procedure, aided by more robust equipment such as the MPS 4100 Currency Sorter from Cummins-Allison Corp. The folks in Dollywood's cash control department affectionately call the machine "Bertha."

"We process cash from about 240 different Dollywood profit centers ranging from entertainment venues to restaurants to gift shops," said Debi Gott, cash control supervisor for the Smoky Mountain area theme park in Pigeon Forge, Tenn. "The revenue from all of those areas comes to our processing center twice a day. We also reconcile ATM cash from everywhere in the park."

Although the park has been in existence since 1961, Dolly Parton's participation in it took place in 1985. At that time, the attractions were mainly rides, a theatre, a restaurant and some museum venues focused on Dolly's life and career. Since then, Dollywood has grown into a 10 sector theme park, containing multiple rides, theatres, interactive play areas, restaurants, museums and historic attractions. It also is the site of at least five major festivals each year.

"Dollywood has grown exponentially in recent years," Gott said. "Even just a few years ago when we drew a million people a year we could handle incoming cash with a few standard currency counters. We had a system that worked. Now we're attracting about three million people annually, and the processing requirement is much larger."

The old system consisted of 4-5 stand alone work stations with single-pocket currency scanners. Separate work stations handled coin and the park's

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Cash Processing Solutions Profile

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Ray Carter prepares machine to run day total report.



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own Dolly Dollars, an in-park currency substitute. Currency that was counted and manually bricked at the separate stations was then collected and assembled for deposit at the company's bank.

"With separate stations, operators had to process currency in multiple passes," Gott explained. "Even though currency was sometimes source separated by denomination, each batch of currency had to be processed first to face the bills and then again to count them. Bills that happened to be the wrong denomination had to be separated out and processed again with like-kind bills. It took several hours to process the batches of currency from the various profit centers. Then it took several additional hours to pool and verify the currency so that it was ready for deposit. With the addition of Bertha, we've been able to cut our processing and deposit preparation time in half."



Peggy Johnson extracts configurable, 2000-note-capacity sorting cassette.

Adopting the advanced technology of the MPS 4100 changed the nature of Dollywood's cash processing. The machine runs a mixed batch of currency at a speed of 1,000 notes a minute, separating the denominations to different collection points, and facing the notes on the fly.

Each note is scanned for authenticity and counted by denomination as it enters the system, then it is counted again as it reaches its final destination to verify the batch count. Notes suspected to be counterfeit or unfit for circulation are off sorted so that they can be examined by the operator as the batch is being processed. The machine also provides detailed reports by batch and total, and can download that information directly into the company's accounting software.

Dollywood's MPS 4100 machine is equipped with six cassettes to collect denomination-separated bills for deposit. Count accuracy in the cassettes is so good that the notes are simply bagged and tagged for deposit. A couple of independent workstations with single-pocket scanners still process Dolly Dollars. The batch information from "Bertha" is combined on a spreadsheet with Dolly Dollar and coin counts so that the performance of each profit center can be accurately tallied and later evaluated.

Recycling of currency and coin is important to Dollywood. "Coin is processed through our Cummins JetSort® Coin Sorter and then wrapped for reuse in cash drawers throughout the park. Some of the currency is used to refill our ATMs, and singles are in such high demand within our various venues that they are rarely deposited. We also recycle fives and tens as needed," Gott said.

An option on the MPS 4100 is an advanced scanning module that detects soil, holes, tears, folded or missing corners, tape and limpness so that better quality currency can be used to fill ATMs etc., and unfit currency can be removed from circulation.

"It was clear from the beginning that there would be a reduction in processing time by switching to Bertha, but it took some time for our staff to adjust. Once the crew felt comfortable with the machine and recognized that they could rely on its accuracy, the process seemed to streamline itself. We are blessed with folks who are always looking for faster and more efficient ways of processing and getting the job done. Most of the changes that we made have been at their suggestion, and their efforts have almost cut our processing and deposit preparation time in half. That also makes us much more responsive and productive for all of the other tasks we need to handle," Gott continued.

There has been a significant increase in productivity since making the procedural change. Cash from some areas had been processed remotely, but now is handled in the main office, so control is enhanced. Gott reports that the lower overall staff time requirement for cash processing has opened up time for her staff to handle higher-level report generation so that management can better evaluate profit center performance.

Dollywood's MPS 4100 machine now operates four to five hours each day, so there is still capacity to handle more expansion of the theme park's business. The machine also is built to accept add-on features so that its capability can be improved as needed.

"It would be hard now to imagine processing without a piece of equipment like this," Gott concluded. "Everyone who works with Bertha loves her."

CA CUMMINS
CUMMINS-ALLISON CORP.

852 Feehanville Drive
Mt. Prospect, IL 60056 USA
800-786-5528 847-299-9550
Web: www.cumminsallison.com
Email: inquire@cumminsallison.com

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