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Case study |  GEORGIA AQUARIUM

# Georgia Aquarium Transforms Guest Experiences While Improving Security with Evolv Technology

# Organization Overview

**LOCATION:** Atlanta, Georgia

**AMOUNT OF WATER IN TANK:** 11 Million Gallons

**NUMBER OF VISITORS ANNUALLY:** 2.5 Million

**SECURITY STAFF:** Approximately 15 (in-house and contract)

**PREVIOUS SECURITY SYSTEM:** Magnetometers

## Solution Overview

### Goals

- **Reduce** long security queues due to manual wand and bag checks
- **Improve** guest experiences with enhanced security screening
- **Improve** ability to detect weapons
- **Reduce** security footprint at entrance
- **Optimize** security staff utilization

### Solution

- Solutions Engineering Team
- Guard and Operations Training
- Upgrade from Evolv Edge® to Express Systems
- 2 Evolv Express® Systems
- Evolv Cortex AI®
- ConOps Guidance and Playbooks

### Outcomes

- **Improved** guest experience scores from 4.0 to 4.6 (scale of 5)
- **Shrank** security system lobby footprint by 50%
- **Reallocated** 50% of security staff to other areas in the aquarium
- **Optimized** operations and marketing programs with guest tracking
- **Reduced** security staff attrition—saving time and budget for training and onboarding



## Slow and Manual Magnetometer Security System

Anthony Rivera, the SVP of Hospitality and Operations at the Georgia Aquarium, notes that the day he started thinking about replacing the legacy security systems for guests was his very first day on the job.

“We had six security lanes and used magnetometers to manually wand every guest for weapons,” he recalls. “Every bag had to be manually checked as well.”

Once patrons purchased their tickets, they would need to stand in a queue—which could get quite long during peak times and seasons—before they could enter the aquarium. “We have over 18,000 guests on a given day during the summer season,” Rivera observes. “Even with all six security lanes running at full capacity, which was around 250 people each, we could have a significant queue waiting to get into the building. This had a direct impact on guest experience.”

The security queues, six security systems and tables for bag checks took up a large footprint in the lobby of the aquarium. “Aesthetics are important when it comes to first impressions,” Rivera notes. “Having our lobby full of security systems and bag-check stations simply didn’t convey what we wanted guests to first observe when entering the aquarium. This is space we wanted to use for other guest experiences, but we didn’t have any other option with our prior security setup.”



## Previous Guest Experience Detrimentially Impacted

One of the mechanisms Rivera put into place when he came on board at the Georgia Aquarium was the practice of surveying guests about their feedback and experiences at different points in their visit.

Based on these survey findings, he had insights on how different areas of the aquarium impacted guest experience. “We are very attuned to what our guests think and feel,” Rivera relates. “We had a lot of them telling us that the security queues to get into the building were frustrating and diminishing their experience. Making our guests stand in a security line in the hot Georgia sun was the last thing we wanted to do.”

▶ **“Right now, we literally have zero queue space. There is no need for it. Guests purchase a ticket and walk right through the dual lanes of the Express system.”**

— **John Chapman, Director of Outsource Services, Georgia Aquarium**

The manual security processes were also resource intensive when it came to the security staff. “It was very slow and tedious,” says John Chapman, the Director of Outsourced Services at Georgia Aquarium. “In addition, unless one paid close attention, which was hard to do after hours of work, you could miss something.”

Staffing the security systems required up to 12 staff at a time—two per machine with one person wandering everyone and another doing the bag checks. “During peak times, we would even need to add another person to direct traffic into one of the security queues,” Chapman says. Plus, knowing when those peak times were going to occur wasn’t always possible. “We typically would keep all six machines running and overstaffed, wanting to ensure that security queues were kept to a minimum,” Chapman says.

# Evolv Engaged as a Long-term Innovation Partner

In 2016, Rivera and Chapman brought a new security outsourcing partner on board.

"They were familiar with Evolv Technology and recommended that we look at the Evolv Edge system." In addition to the enhanced capabilities of the Edge system over our previous solution, we really liked Evolv's long-term vision," Rivera says.

After conducting a proof of concept (POC), Rivera and Chapman concluded the Evolv systems were the right choice for what they sought to do. "We weren't purchasing a static solution with which we were stuck, but rather we had the ability to upgrade to the latest Evolv system when it became available," Rivera says. The team also tested the systems for throughput and efficacy in finding weapons. They passed on both fronts.

**"We are very pleased with how the partnership has developed and grown over the past several years. The Evolv team gives us regular feedback on what they are noticing in the data that enables our security team to be more effective. It's much more than the technology. The people and process components of the solution are just as important."**

— **Anthony Rivera, SVP of Hospitality and Operations, Georgia Aquarium**

Five Evolv Edge systems arrived in late 2017, which Chapman and his team had configured and deployed within a few days of arrival with the support of the Evolv Solutions Engineering team. "The learning curve for both our full-time and outsourced security staff was almost zero," Chapman says. "After the training and deployment

was complete, the Evolv team has continued to provide us with ongoing support and feedback."

One of the outcomes that the aquarium saw was an improvement in security staff retention. Prior to the deployment of the Evolv systems, both the aquarium and the security outsourcing partner struggled with attrition rates for security staff. But this was reduced with Evolv. "Prior to the pandemic, our security staff remained relatively stable. Recruiting and retaining new staff is time consuming, and the fact that we spent less time on these tasks and more on guest interactions has been quite beneficial."

Even though the aquarium team was quite pleased with their initial Evolv Edge solution, they wanted to further evolve their security footprint and capabilities. "The Edge systems are single lanes and we wanted to shrink our footprint and further reduce the number of required staffing resources." With the initial Evolv Edge deployment, the aquarium was able to reallocate its security staff used for screening by 50%. These initial results were extended even further with the upgrade to the Evolv Express system, to less than half the original screening staff prior to the Evolv Edge implementation.

Chapman explains that throughput on the Express systems is tremendous. "We really only need one machine but have two for backup purposes or in the event of an unexpected spike," he says. "We need one security staff member for each machine and a couple for secondary checks when a guest is flagged." The security staff who previously were charged with wandering and checking bags have been reallocated to other areas of the aquarium for enhanced security and guest services. "We are able to run security scanning with half, if not less, of the security staff we required before," Rivera adds.

# Evolv Express® Accelerates Security Transformation

In August 2020, the aquarium team began their upgrade from five Evolv Edge single-lane systems to two Evolv Express dual-lane systems.

A consultant from the Evolv Solutions Engineering team helped configure them for optimal aesthetic appeal and throughput. “We had reduced our lobby footprint by about 25% with the Edge deployment,” Chapman says. “We shrank it in half with the Express delivery. Right now, we literally have zero queue space. There is no need for it. Guests purchase a ticket and walk right through the dual lanes of the Express system.”

The response from guests has been tremendous. Three years ago, the aquarium’s security screening process and systems were cited as the number one issue when it came to negative feedback on Trip Advisor. This is no longer the case. “The Express systems completely transformed guest experience,” Rivera relates.

possible most certainly contributes to this ranking,” Rivera says.

The Express systems also automate guest counting for the aquarium. “Before implementing the two Express systems, we didn’t know how many guests entered, let alone at what time of the day,” Rivera says. “With the Express systems, we know exactly how many guests enter and at what time of the day,” Rivera says. Merging data from their Express systems with security video footage, the aquarium has deeper insights into their visitors than ever before. “The demographics are also a real plus for us. We know how many families versus couples, men versus women, adults versus children are entering. Our marketing department can leverage this information to determine programs and spend. Our operations team uses the data to make broader staffing decisions.”

As to the effectiveness of the Express, Chapman, his staff, and the aquarium’s third-party security provider put it through the paces. “We’ve found the accuracy to be quite good,” Chapman relates. “The system provides the Evolv team with constant and direct feedback on what is being found,” Chapman says. “The Evolv Cortex AI technology ensures that this data is used to tune the system for greater accuracy.” Overall, Chapman estimates the team identifies a handgun about three to five times per month.

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— **Anthony Rivera, SVP of Hospitality and Operations, Georgia Aquarium**

Even though other changes in systems and processes have contributed to an improvement in guest scores from 4.0 to 4.6 on a scale of 5, Rivera attributes the bulk of the change to the Evolv implementation. “Our aquarium is ranked one of the best in the U.S., if not the world, and making the security scanning processes as invisible as



## Looking to the Future

The evolution of the relationship with Evolv is something that Rivera appreciates.

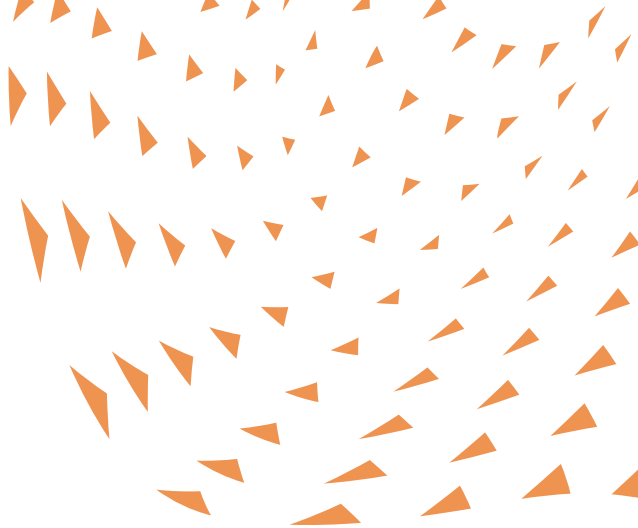
“The Evolv team physically visits us and virtually connects with the team,” he notes. “We are very pleased with how the partnership has developed and grown over the past several years. The Evolv team gives us regular feedback on what they are noticing in the data that enables our security team to be more effective. It’s much more than the technology. The people and process components of the solution are just as important.”

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Constantly looking at ways to improve security effectiveness and improve guest experience, Rivera plans to add more Express capabilities in the future. “We believe that cyber and physical security are intertwined and are looking into the possibility of integrating the Express data feeds into our security operations center,” he says.

Beyond improvements in guest experience scores, Rivera relates that the amount of time the team spends talking about a system or process is an important indicator. “Security scanning is simply something we don’t need to worry about,” he sums up. “In the past month, we’ve talked about countless issues. We’ve probably spent five minutes discussing security. That means it’s working.”



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[info@evolvtechnology.com](mailto:info@evolvtechnology.com) +1 781.374.8100



+1 833-673-8658 | [info@evolvtechnology.com](mailto:info@evolvtechnology.com)  
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