

SeaWorld profits plunge 84%

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Warmer

First, discuss what the answers to these questions might be. Then, scan the article to find the information.

1. What is SeaWorld?
2. What can you see there?
3. What is *Blackfish*?
4. What is PETA?
5. What other name are orcas known by?

2 Key words

Find the key words in the article and write them next to the definitions below. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. the amount of money that something is worth or can be sold for at a particular time
_____ (two words, para 3)
2. the American stock market _____ (two words, para 3)
3. attempt to stop something bad or to solve a difficult problem _____ (para 4)
4. kept in a place such as a park or zoo instead of living in the natural environment
_____ (para 4)
5. people or things that correspond to other people or things in a different place
_____ (para 4)
6. income from business activities or taxes _____ (para 6)
7. try to make people respect something again _____ (para 8)
8. total amount earned after taxes or costs have been deducted _____ (two words, para 10)
9. secretly joined an organization to find out information about it _____ (para 11)
10. suddenly became much lower _____ (para 12)
11. special areas where animals live in a natural environment protected from people
_____ (para 12)
12. equal parts of a company that you can buy as a way of investing money _____ (para 13)

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SeaWorld sees profits plunge 84% as customers desert controversial park

Company reports decline in attendance, sales and profits in continuing struggles for park since 2013 film Blackfish claimed it mistreated orca whales

Rupert Neate in New York

6 August, 2015

- 1 SeaWorld has suffered an 84% collapse in profits as customers have deserted the controversial aquatic theme park company following claims it mistreated orca whales.
- 2 The company, which trains dolphins and killer whales to perform tricks in front of stadiums full of spectators, has reported declines in attendance, sales and profits because of “continued brand challenges”.
- 3 SeaWorld has been in the headlines since the 2013 documentary *Blackfish* detailed claims that its treatment of orca whales provoked violent behaviour, contributing to the deaths of three people. Following the release of the documentary, attendance collapsed, the company lost more than half of its market value on Wall Street and its former CEO was forced out.
- 4 The company has since launched a nationwide marketing campaign to combat animal rights activists claims that, among other things, captive orcas die at a younger age than their wild counterparts.
- 5 Despite cutting ticket prices and spending \$10m on the marketing blitz, which features its veterinarians caring for whales, SeaWorld CEO Joel Manby was forced to admit that the company is still struggling to convince the public that it treats its whales well.
- 6 “We realize we have much work ahead of us to recover more of our attendance base, increase revenue and improve our performance, as returning to historical performance levels will take time and investment,” Manby said. “On the reputation side, early feedback on our campaign has been positive. However, we recognize that fully resolving our brand challenges in California will require sustained focus and commitment to correct misinformation.”
- 7 “We will continue to fight with the facts because the facts are on our side,” he said recently on a conference call with journalists and analysts.
- 8 Manby, who joined the company as CEO in 2015 to help the company rehabilitate itself, said he would set out his vision for the future of the company at a special event on 6 November.
- 9 Already in the pipeline are plans for a new shark exhibition in Orlando and an attraction in San Antonio that will allow customers to swim with dolphins in a “naturalistic” setting.
- 10 The company’s financial report, released on 6 August, showed net income in the second quarter dropped from \$37.4m in 2014 to \$5.8m in 2015, an 84% decrease. Revenue fell from \$405m to \$392m. Attendance dropped by more than 100,000 from 6.58 million to 6.48 million.
- 11 Analysts will now be closely watching SeaWorld’s sales and attendance numbers in the third quarter, which is traditionally the company’s most profitable and covers the summer holiday season. Attendance may suffer from a fresh scandal in July 2015, in which a SeaWorld employee was alleged to have infiltrated animal rights protest groups against the company.
- 12 Jared Goodman, director of animal law for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), which has been leading campaigns against SeaWorld, said: “SeaWorld is in the midst of a spying scandal, animals are dying in its tanks and tens of thousands of people have opposed its bid to build a new orca prison so it should come as no surprise that SeaWorld’s quarterly earnings have plummeted yet again in the second quarter. Families just don’t want to buy tickets to see orcas going insane inside tiny tanks and SeaWorld’s profits, like the orcas, won’t recover until the amusement park empties its tanks and builds coastal sanctuaries.”
- 13 SeaWorld’s shares, which were worth \$39 in 2013, were changing hands for just under \$18 in August 2015.

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3 Comprehension check

Use the words below to complete the summary of the article. Refer back to the article if necessary.

market value	Wall Street	bought and sold	net income	profits	shares
performance	lost	dropped	collapse	cut	revenue

In a recent financial report, SeaWorld said that they suffered an 84% _____ (1) in _____ (2) in the second quarter of 2015. During this period, _____ (3) dropped from \$37.4m in 2014 to just \$5.8m. At the same time, _____ (4) fell from \$405m to \$392m.

Some reasons for this were that they had _____ (5) ticket prices and spent \$10m on a marketing blitz. Attendance _____ (6) by more than 100,000 from 6.58m to 6.48m.

After the release of a documentary in 2013 criticizing the company, SeaWorld _____ (7) more than half of its _____ (8) on _____ (9). SeaWorld's _____ (10), which were worth \$39 each in 2013, were being _____ (11) for just under \$18 in August 2015.

SeaWorld's CEO says that they need to increase _____ (12) and improve their _____ (13).

4 Phrases

a. Use the words in the box to make two phrases from the text.

pipeline	midst	in	in	of	the	the
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- _____
- _____

b. What is each phrase used to talk about in the article?

c. Use the phrases in sentences of your own to talk about different topics.

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5 Quotes

1. Discuss the opinions below. Which can you most identify with? Which do you disagree with and why?
2. Write your own opinion into the blank speech bubble.

The tricks these whales perform are amazing! It's wonderful to be able to see them up close.

Whales and dolphins are too intelligent and too large to be confined. It's not right.

Theme parks give my kids the opportunity to see and experience whales and dolphins in 'real life'. They love it!

Theme parks are just prisons for animals. They must be shut down and the animals set free immediately.

Nature is cruel. The whales are safer in the theme park than out in the open sea.

6 Discussion

Your class has won an all expenses paid trip to an aquatic theme park. The only condition is that you must agree to be filmed for a publicity video during the trip. Discuss how you feel about this and what you will do.

7 Webquest

Watch the short clip from *Blackfish*.

www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/aug/06/seaworld-profits-plunge-customers

Find out more about SeaWorld and PETA. How do the organizations present themselves on their US websites?

seaworld.com

www.peta.org

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KEY

1 Warmer

1. an aquatic theme park company (There is more than one theme park named SeaWorld.)
2. whales and dolphins that perform tricks for visitors
3. a documentary film from 2013 that made claims that SeaWorld's treatment of animals led to the deaths of three people
4. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
5. killer whales

2 Key words

1. market value
2. Wall Street
3. combat
4. captive
5. counterparts
6. revenue
7. rehabilitate
8. net income
9. infiltrated
10. plummeted
11. sanctuaries
12. shares

3 Comprehension check

1. collapse
2. profits
3. net income
4. revenue
5. cut
6. dropped
7. lost
8. market value
9. Wall Street
10. shares
11. bought and sold
12. revenue
13. performance

4 Phrases

a. and b.

1. in the pipeline – plans for a new shark exhibition and an attraction allowing customers to swim with dolphins
2. in the midst of – a spying scandal (in which a SeaWorld employee is alleged to have infiltrated PETA)