

# ZAG NEWS

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## ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION SUMMARIES

*Round table discussions at last year's Annual Meeting yielded a vast amount of useful information. Summaries of those discussions are featured in the following article.*

### **TIME MANAGEMENT FOR RETAIL BUYERS**

Participants: Not available

#### **Telephone calls from vendors:**

- Request e-mail messages
- Request written proposals outlining how their line fits into your current assortment or improves your bottom line
- Prior to a gift show, change your voice message to advise if you will be attending or are making appointments
- Return vendor calls and e-mails promptly. It's quicker than listening to more messages from the same vendor.
- Create a product review sheet that vendors use to present product.
- Delegate someone else to review your messages and respond
- Add suggestion that vendor visits your web site.

#### **Vendor appointments:**

- Be stingy with your time. Require that the vendor see your shop prior to the appointment and not waste your time with inappropriate product
- Be straightforward in your opinion of an item. "No" is an acceptable response when the product is wrong for you.
- Remain in control of the meeting and move it forward quickly
- Always be open to looking at new product, but request either a catalog or e-mail on the goods before booking the appointment if you are not familiar with the line
- If the vendor is not prepared, reschedule immediately.

#### **Customer complaints/issues:**

- Listen compassionately and resolve as quickly as possible within your company's guidelines at the lowest level possible: empower your employees!

#### **Personnel issues:**

- Hire hard and manage easily
- Hire for attitude and train for skills
- Delegate scheduling: let a strong floor supervisor handle those chores
- "High maintenance" employees waste your time and drain your energy. Avoid them!
- Your job is to make sure all employees know what to do. A clear job description saves lots of time.
- When an employee brings a problem to you, request their solution first.
- Request that employees leave their personal problems at home.
- Try assigning duties and giving a time frame for completion.

#### **Interruptions:**

- Handle the issue quickly and try not to lose your focus.
- Work on projects that take thought early or late in the day.
- When you are under a deadline, a funny sign on the door of your cubicle will help avoid some interruptions.

#### **Disorganization:**

- Learn to file e-mails by vendor
- If you do not have an inventory control system, GET ONE!
- Use folders for every major project, market trip, event, etc. Keep all notes and information together.
- Try not to get overwhelmed. Use your employees' strengths to do your job more efficiently.

#### **Other:**

- Chitchat: be honest, kind and firm. "I'm really busy right now---can we talk later?"
- Meetings: Be on time and prepared---you may shame others into doing the same! If you are running the meeting, stay on point and have an agenda. Don't lose control.
- Mail: delegate someone you trust to review and throw out "trash."
- Filing: delegate to someone after you teach them your filing system.

**Next Issue**

ZAG Website / Annual Meeting Details / Sponsor Info

## TRENDS AND HOT PRODUCTS

**Participants:** Susan Allen/Brookfield Zoo, Mike Borders/Scovill Zoo, Steve Driml and Dennis Howe/Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo, Judy Edwards/North Carolina Zoo, Sandi Kiley and Alie Loman/Happy Hollow Zoo, Mo Nicodemus and Nancy Vanos/San Diego Zoo, Sue Pinkowski/Lincoln Park Zoo

### Plush:

- Trend toward cuddly and floppy, nice to touch and hug
- Trend toward bright colors (e.g. colorful hanging animals)
- Best price points are \$9.99-12.99
- Good companies include A&A Aurora, Fiesta (sharks, monkeys, octopus), Ty Beanie Babies, Steiff (San Diego does well with these), and custom items.

### Toys, Games and Souvenirs:

- Trend toward anything that lights up, moves, glows, flashes, glitters
- Bobble heads (Club Earth and Top Line are two sources)
- Nostalgic items
- Good companies include Ravensburger, Games to Remember, Lucy Hammett Bingo games
- San Diego improved sales of games by merchandising them on a gondola at kid's eye level

### Videos:

- San Diego has their own custom video, and Omaha has a locally produced tour of the zoo video that sells very well.
- Good companies include DK and KC Sales

### Music:

- Good companies include Putumayo, Summerset, and Four Winds.
- World music is a good seller

### Books:

- Good sellers include Barron's (baby rattle books, stroller books, animal-shaped chunky books), DK (Eyewitness, Pocket Guides, board books, pet care books), EDC-Usborne, Kane Miller, Zoobooks, Todtri, and zoo guidebooks.
- San Diego does well by having author book signings and book fairs (prices do not have to be discounted in order to attract customers).

### Apparel:

- Trend toward glitter and shiny gel graphics
- Trend toward faux fur and appliqué motifs
- Also hot are garment dyed tees, retro 60s/hippie looks
- Also distressed logos...the Abercrombie/Fitch look is still good
- Good companies include Stephen Joseph, Just Kiddin, Out of Hand, Black Mountain fleece.

### Hats:

- Trend towards color!!
- Visors are very hot; a good source is Trinity Trading Co.
- Bucket hats are coming back
- Baseball caps continue to sell well
- Plastic or straw pith helmets from Pel-USA and Jacobson
- Good companies include Royal for infant bucket hats, Dorfman Pacific for women's straw hats, Squire Boone zoofari helmet, Stephen Joseph embroidered hats, and Sunday Afternoon Hats (based in Oregon) for sun protection hats.

### Accessories:

- Trends toward shiny, glittery jewelry for tweens and teens
- Names and initials in jewelry programs
- Charms and charm bracelets
- Children's umbrellas also sell well.

*(Summaries continued on page 3)*

## AZA Business Operations Group

AZA recently announced the creation of the AZA Business Operations Committee. The committee hopes to build a resource for merchandise, rides, food and beverage, admissions, and other departments that are part of the business side of zoos and aquariums. During the National AZA Meeting in September, the committee will hold its first session, with roundtable discussions and a presentation by Phil Conte of the Wildlife Conservation Society. The topic of the presentation will be "The Loch Ness Monster, Bigfoot, and Per Caps: Why do so many people still believe?"

If you would like more information about the AZA Business Operations Group, contact Cary Burgess at Zoo Atlanta (404) 624-5661 or Cheryl Del Pico at Roger Williams Zoo (401) 941-3910 x 376

## MANAGING SEPARATE RETAIL LOCATIONS

**Participants:** Kim Black/Denver Zoo & Ocean's Journey, Ron & Kay Brown/Zoo Boise, Mary Jo Mastrangelo/Texas State Aquarium, Laura Romano/Santa Barbara Zoo, Sandra Simmons/Virginia Zoo, Laurel Wright/Service Systems

- Theme the cart to specific exhibits. If you cannot have a cart, then create themed displays within the store to promote the new or featured exhibits or animals
- Set up a cart at the facility's exit to capture last minute sales.
- Limit the price point on the cart to under \$10
- Provide a sales incentive to employees (such as a \$5 gift certificate) who sell the most merchandise within the chosen theme.
- As another way to stimulate sales, the Virginia Zoo suggested offering pre-made gift bags to school groups. Offer three different price points between \$3.00-10.00, and make the order form available online when the schools book their trip.

## INCREASING YOUR PROFITABILITY

**Participants:** Not available

### **Vendors:**

- Negotiate better prices and terms. If cash flow is not a problem then often you will be able to get better prices by projecting quantities for an entire year.
- However, don't buy large quantities if you have questions as to whether the product will move. You will only be tying up valuable dollars that could be used elsewhere.
- Shop your vendors for those that allow small quantity buying. Increase your next order, if possible. Each situation differs, especially if it is a custom, overseas order.
- If buying in large amounts, check with your vendor if they have a rebate program. Ask about any specials or other programs you should be aware of before placing your order. If a rebate program is available, have the rebate dollars paid in your fiscal calendar year.
- Ask if free freight or free ticketing is available.
- Don't automatically accept backorders. Ask to be called first as backorders will incur additional freight charges.
- Inquire upfront about art charges. Some buyers never pay art charges at all. There may be dyes

or tooling charges for custom molds, but if it's a simple name drop, then artwork has already been created.

- Compare prices between vendors that offer similar products.
- If buying at gift shows, ask what show specials are available.

### **Freight:**

- Choose vendors by shipping locations. The closer the vendor the less the freight charges.
- Inquire whether any organization your zoo/aquarium belongs to (AZA, MSA) qualifies you for special freight discounts.
- Check with UPS or FEDEX for special deals based on the number of shipments, weights, etc. projected throughout the year.
- Do the same for freight lines, such as Yellow Freight, which may offer discounts if they are your exclusive freight handler.
- Ask vendors what level of order is needed to qualify for free freight.

### **Damaged Goods:**

- Mark down (suggested 40% off) and place a colored sticker on the product to identify it as damaged goods. Replace back in bins with undamaged goods. The colored sticker identifies to the salesperson that a discount should be given.
- Save broken parts in a fix-it box. During slow times, have staff do any possible repairs. Offer discounts on repaired items.
- Give employees the authority to offer a discount at time of check out if goods are slightly damaged.
- Create goodie bags of broken items and set at a low price at which guests will buy.
- Run an ad in the local newspaper for sales items and refurbished goods.

### **Other:**

Ask for credit from your vendor for product sitting on the shelf. Pay for excess inventory of that item when it is sold.

- Know your top sellers and remerchandising them to the front of the store.
- Cut the number of skus as much as possible.
- Begin with a 20% markdown. If you have large quantities then take 40-50% off. Don't go below cost if you can help it.

*(Summaries continued on page 4)*

## INVENTORY CONTROL

Participants: Not available

The participants felt that inventory control can include many topics, including shrinkage, discounting and grab bags.

- Referring to Hogle Zoo's Leslie Martin's presentation on their recently installed software system, it was mentioned that several very good software systems are available, however a
- Majority of our shops are ill equipped, under funded, or at least in need of major upgrades.
- Although several inventory control systems are useful, no one system is perfect.
- Re: shrinkage, most zoos and aquariums required chaperones with each student group. Some shops were able to restrict admittance, while others could not.
- Floorwalkers and security personnel can be helpful in monitoring blind spots, but don't completely eliminate theft.
- Security tagging and surveillance systems were also mentioned, although the equipment costs and policies of the institutions may limit their usage.
- Re: discounting, the Brookfield Zoo mentioned that they only offer clearance pricing and deep discounting for a few weeks in the summer. Selected merchandise for clearance is moved to a two to three week tent sale. Another zoo simply moves tees to just one location once they have been discounted.
- Several facilities use grab bags as a way of moving old or slightly damaged merchandise. The biggest issue is the actual bagging of the product. One zoo buys clearance merchandise from vendors to be used only as grab bag fillers.
- Guests seem to have a fascination with grab bags, and are willing to spend \$5.00 for unknown goodies.
- Grab bags sell well in bulk to school groups that aren't allowed in the gift shops. Another facility sells the bags to company picnics as favors for kids, or as scavenger hunt prizes for their picnic.
- For more information on the topics mentioned above, contact Steve Fairchild at 1-316-942-2212, ext. 225.

## SHOPLIFTING

Participants: Not available

Ashley Whitehead of the Nashville Zoo wrote an extremely useful and comprehensive 10-page report on all aspects of shoplifting, including how to identify and prevent potential areas of shrinkage, how to deal with a shoplifter, and handling school groups, among many other topics. Following are just a few points from her report. To receive the entire report, please contact Steve Fairchild at 1-316-942-2212, ext. 225.

### Shoplifting

- Install convex mirrors that allow employees to observe all corners and aisles. Install security cameras in plain view.
- Have only one entrance and one exit to your business, and station a security officer there.
- Keep expensive merchandise inside locked cases.
- Use security tags that can only be removed by store employees.

### Handling Suspected Shoplifters

- Before stopping a suspect, you must establish probable cause. This involves actually seeing the suspect conceal the merchandise in their bag or clothing, maintaining continuous visual contact with the suspect, seeing the suspect fail to pay for the merchandise, and approaching the suspect outside of the store.
- Approach the suspect from the front. Immediately identify yourself as an employee, showing some identification. Try to have extra personnel available for witness purposes.
- Use non-confrontational language and voice tone. For example, "I'm with Seashore Aquarium, and I would like to talk to you about the dolphin paperweight in your bag. Please return to the store with me so we can clear up this matter."
- Give the suspect the option to return or pay for the stolen item.
- Local and state laws, and each facility's policies, can vary about suspects' rights, your rights as a merchant, and the legalities and consequences of detaining, questioning and charging suspects. All staff should fully understand their facility's policies and local laws before confronting a shoplifter.

*(Summaries continued on page 5)*

**Internal theft**

- It is estimated that 72% of a store's shrinkage is employee-related. Employees are 15 times more likely to steal from you than your customers.
- Screen all job applicants before hiring them. Check references and job histories.
- Conduct frequent inventories and cash drawer audits.
- Adopt a zero shortage policy (inventory, cash, etc.) and stress shortage control even if losses diminish.
- Have all keys stamped "Do not duplicate." Never have just one employee close the store for the night. Prosecute thieves rather than settle for an apology. Keep sensitive documents under lock and key.
- Have a strict code of conduct for employees. Make sure all employees know and understand the policy, including consequences. Inform employees of internal security measures, such as cameras, random cash drawer audits, etc. Many employees steal because they think they can get away with it.

**Cash Handling**

- Provide a receipt with each transaction, and encourage customers to expect a receipt by posting signs by the register.
- The cash drawer should be closed after each transaction. Never leave a register unlocked when unattended. Do not leave the key in the register.
- Train Employees to check for counterfeit bills. For charge card purchases, check that the receipt and card signatures match. For checks, make sure address on the check and customer's driver's license match.

**Roundtable Discussion Suggestions for Handling Large School Groups**

- Require one chaperone per 10 students. Post signs out front listing the rules.
- Set up a cart or kiosk outside the shop offering items under \$5 to decrease the number of kids who enter the shop.
- Have a door greeter to monitor crowd flow, check bags for receipts, and control the number of school kids in the store at any one time.
- Put security tags on apparel. This area was most frequently cited by the group as having the most shrinkage.
- Create pre-made gift bags available at several price points that schools can purchase ahead of

**ZAG INTERVIEW**

Karen Jones, the manager of Visitor Services at the Oklahoma City Zoo was interviewed in July 2003. She may be contacted at (405) 425-0272.

**Trials and Tribulations of Gift Shop Construction Projects****General Information**

Institution: **Oklahoma City Zoo**

Guests per year: **640,000**

Prices: Adult \$6.00 Child \$3.00

Under 3: Free

Type of Project: **Zoo and Botanical Garden**

Square Footage: **Before: 2000 After: 3000**

Sales per square foot: **Before: \$200 After: \$227**

# of SKUs **Before: Approx. 1800 After: Approx. 3000**

**Describe the gift shop prior to construction:** *It was a series of added on rooms and an enclosed porch that were built in the 1980s, it backed up to the Main Food Concession Stand and smelled of fried food. The ceilings were low, lighting was minimal and fixtures were odds and ends. An attached warehouse and office predated the Gift Shop. We called the Warehouse the "Scary Place." We would often find snakes and other unwelcome guests there.*

**How long did the project take, from planning to opening day?** *About 4 years.*

**Did your shop close or move to a temporary location during the project?** *We moved to a Triple Wide Trailer. It worked out really well!*

**Were per caps affected during the project?** *Very little, the temporary shop was placed in a better location on the entry plaza and guests could visit on the way in and out.*

**Were you involved in the project planning and design?** *Yes, this was a 5 million dollar new entry plaza complex that included a gift shop, snack shop, stroller rental facility, ticket booths, turnstiles, guest relations, security building, member's office/entrance, additional office spaces and a training room.*

*(Interview continued on page 6)*

**Who designed the store (walls, office, stockroom, etc.)? Zoo staff? Professional designer?** *A little of both, the architects had laid out the space. Then we drew a sketch of how the space could be best utilized. Then, they made it happen.*

#### ZAG WEB SITE

During the past few weeks, three web site design firms were asked to submit bids for the development of a ZAG web site. We asked for a web site proposal that would include a home page with general information about ZAG, and other areas of the site that would be accessible to our members by password. The password protected pages would be designed to include: a forum for sharing ideas, an area to include our current and past ZAG newsletters, a section that profiles our sponsors and their products, a page for a calendar of up coming shows and industry news items, and a site administrator. If a bid is submitted that meets our budget and technical expectations, we will hope to roll out the ZAG web site by the end of the year.

**Who created the floor plan?**

**Zoo staff? Professional designer?** *This was probably the hardest part. We made a scale drawing of the floor, then made lots of copies then visualized how to display the categories including drawings of walls, floor plans and displays. We considered what needed pegs, tables, shelves, free standing spinner racks, how much counter space was needed to accommodate six registers, adequate display space and room for wide aisles for strollers and wheelchairs. Mike Gill, my gift shop consultant reviewed it and made suggestions. Then we sketched them out several more times until everything had a place.*

**Who chose the fixtures?**

**Zoo staff? Professional designer?** *From our sketches the architects designed our fixtures. Our plush wall has wooden shelves with small open front drawers at the bottom for small plush and beanbag animals. Our Décor and Book walls have closing cabinets underneath for back stock. Display cases, fabric pin boards, and showcase areas were also part of this step. We left of room for any freestanding spinner racks we might need.*

**Any significant changes in the design as construction progressed /any last minute changes worthy of mentioning?** *We were lucky everything went as planned. It just took longer than planned.*

**With a new or remodeled shop, did you alter the product mix?** *We chose to carry less of the traditional "zoo" souvenirs and mixed in a little high-end merchandise with more home décor, books and educational toys. I firmly believe that to be successful, product mix must always be changing to stay fresh and appealing.*

**What is the estimated pay back time?** *This was a new front entry complex, so that was not considered.*

**Did the construction budget include any "pricey" but necessary items?** *Yes, we have a skylight and garden area. This included a 25-foot tree and a stonewall with a faux garden. It is the first thing you see when you walk in and the impression was worth it.*

**How did the reopening (or grand opening) go? Please be brief if there are any horror stories!**

*Our reopening was great! The only problem was that we opened with a new POS System. We began training on opening day!*

**The shop has been opened for 2½ years. Tell us about the changes that you have made, if any, to make things run more smoothly.** *We have not modified much. Our floor fixtures can be moved so we re-arrange for each season. Our store is feels very warm and comfortable and we play (and sell) world music, which adds to the atmosphere. Guests do not expect it to be so nice and the prices to be so reasonable.*

**Last of all, what advice would give to others who are about to remodel a store?** *Plan! Then plan some more. Plan for changes in displays, merchandise and floor moves. Be patient and enjoy the birth of your new beautiful store!*

#### 2002-2003 STEERING COMMITTEE

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