

ZAG NEWS

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Sales Trends for Summer 2004

ZAG contacted several zoo and aquarium buyers this past summer, asking them what was selling well or below expectations this season. Here's what they had to say:

Terri Scheunemann/Como Park Zoo (St. Paul, Minnesota): Strong sellers were African plates, platters, bowls and vases from Stoneage Arts; plush in the \$8-14.00 range from A&A Aurora, Wildlife Artists, Douglas and Fiesta; infant and toddler shirts, particularly in sizes 6M to 4T, from Stephen Joseph and Out of Hand Graphics, and the image didn't seem to matter. Slower selling items include hanging monkeys (she may continue to carry them but only select kinds like mom w/baby) and adult t-shirts in general.

Brooke Shuff/John Ball Zoo (Grand Rapids, Michigan): Nature Shades from Darnos were the hottest item for her; sales are 5 times higher than last year. Also strong are plush snakes from K&M/Wild Republic and Wildlife Artists, and anything ooey, goeey or stretchy, particularly the bulk stretchy reptiles from K&M/Wild Republic. Hanging monkeys are really slowing down for her.

Gail Anderson and Pam Blodgett/National Aquarium (Baltimore, Maryland): Strong sellers include aquatic-themed porcelain/resin figurines from Harmony Ball, with retails between \$26-48.00. Also glass dolphin figurines from Beachcombers, vinyl totes from Charles Products and visors in general. Also a worm ball from Dillon Importing is hot (they sell it as an anemone ball)...they are getting triple mark up on it and it is the #2 selling item in their stores after cameras. They originally ordered 144 and now they order 1200 at a time. Slower selling items include lustre/bisque dolphin figurines and baseball caps, regardless of animal.

Irene Harwood and Marie Masters/Cleveland Metroparks Zoo: Items that have done well include K&M/Wild Republic Eco box sets, Fiesta plush in

general ("fantastic" they said), Herco animal clocks and SV animal statues that look like pewter, Ocean East fleece jackets, and Darnos Nature Shades and Rep Pals.

Ellen Powell/Gulfarium (Fort Walton Beach, Florida): Ellen reports having a great summer in general, with these items standing out: Jellycat 15" plush mermaids, Malia Enterprises shark tooth jewelry, loose shark teeth and dolphin boxed cats eye necklaces, shell and beaded jewelry from Killerbeads, and sand and shell bottles from Trish Company. Not selling so well are any kind of gel candles and shell basket planters.

Sharing sales trends helps everyone, and it's fascinating to see how items sell differently at various locations. Thanks to all who responded! Want to put in your two cents? Send us your hot sellers and disappointments, and we'll include your comments in the next newsletter. The more information you can provide (vendor name, colors, sizes, featured animal, etc.) the better. Send it to Dave Albert at daalbert@brookfieldzoo.org, or fax him at 708-485-3530, or call him at 708-485-0263, ext. 685.

**2004
ANNUAL MEETING
Nov. 7, 2004 5:30 – 9:30pm
Ripley's
Aquarium of the Smokies
Information on page 3**

ZAG BUYERS ANNUAL MEETING SURVEY

ZAG holds its annual meeting during the November Smoky Mountain Gift Show. We created a questionnaire to find out how we can improve the meeting, dinner and vendor game to make them more useful to our buyers. Despite several technical glitches on ZAG's end, 17 buyers managed to send in their surveys. Here are the results:

Did you attend the annual meeting at Ripley's Aquarium in November 2003? If no, why not? 8 respondents attended the show. Of the 9 who did not, 4 plan on going this year, and 2 would like to attend. 6 of the 9 said budget and time constraints factored in to their not going to Gatlinburg. 2 felt their regional gift shows met all their needs. 1 buyer didn't attend the annual meeting because she was sending her son off to Iraq (well, at least she had a good reason...)

If you did not attend the ZAG meeting or the Smoky Mountain Gift Show, what could ZAG do to encourage you to attend? 2 buyers from smaller zoos said offering financial assistance for travel expenses would help. 1 buyer from a non-profit zoo felt that other gift shows, including the Museum Store Assn and the Gathering, filled all his needs, but he also was uncomfortable sharing financial information with for-profit parks and aquariums, and was unclear of ZAG's goals as an organization and its relationship with vendors.

Vendors' Bingo Game:

Did you participate in the game? If no, why not? Of the 8 that attended the show, 5 participated in the bingo game, and 3 did not. Reasons given for not participating included it being too much trouble, not enough time, it was a distraction from the core job of working the sales floor, and vendors didn't want to give tokens to each buyer if a zoo/aquarium had more than one buyer. Most knew about the game before they came to Gatlinburg, and all said it was easy to play.

Did the bingo game encourage you to visit vendor booths you might not otherwise have visited? 2 buyers said yes, they did visit booths they might not ordinarily have seen. 6 buyers said no, the game did not influence their decision to visit a vendor...either the vendor had product they were interested in or they didn't.

What else, besides a game, would encourage you to visit ZAG sponsor booths? Most buyers had no suggestions, other than bigger ZAG signs or possibly giving the prizes directly to vendors to hand out randomly. 1 buyer suggested that prior to Gatlinburg, the ZAG vendors send literature to the buyers on what will be NEW in their booths this year, and not just send a general catalog.

Did the dinner and meeting meet, exceed or fail to meet your expectations? Most buyers said it met or exceeded their expectations, particularly the roundtable discussions. One buyer was disappointed with the discussions, although she did decide to add candy to her store based on conversations at the meeting.

Do you want to continue receiving a gift at the dinner, or would you rather have the money used on other things (such as sponsoring local ZAG meetings, etc.) 40% of the respondents had no opinion one way or the other. Of the rest, 40% enjoyed getting some kind of gift (a watch and travel bag from previous years were cited) and one buyer thought the open bar from last year was the best gift of all after a long day at the show. 20% said they would prefer either no gift at all or use the money for other things, such as sponsoring local ZAG meetings.

What other ZAG meetings that address specific topics would you be interested in attending during the show (perhaps for breakfast or lunch)? Of the 15 buyers who responded to this question, a meeting just for non-profit institutions received 7 votes, a meeting for institutions with attendance under 100,000 got 4 votes, and an aquarium-only meeting got 2 votes. One buyer suggested a "back to basics/Buying 101" session. Two buyers said they were so busy during Gatlinburg that they didn't feel they could spare the time for more meetings.

In general, what can ZAG do to make this a more useful and relevant organization for you? There were many interesting comments:

- Increase and continue with networking opportunities such as the contact list and the annual dinner, and local ZAG meetings scheduled for the slower times of the year. Networking was the #1 request;
- The newsletter received many positive comments. Respondents from Canada and from small zoos and aquariums felt finding out what the trends were was very useful.
- Start a web site with a chat room where buyers could post and answer questions quickly;
- Develop of mission statement for ZAG...what is ZAG's reason for existing and how will it serve its members?
- Better define to its members how it can/will serve both for-profit and non-profit institutions;
- Better define to its members ZAG's relationship with its vendors.

Thanks to everyone who turned in a survey! And to all our members, your input is important and valued! Please feel free to contact Dave, Steve or Judy with your comments, concerns, questions and suggestions!

2004 Annual Meeting and Activities Schedule

The 2004 Annual Meeting and other ZAG related activities will take place November 5 – 11 in Gatlinburg, Tennessee during the Smoky Mountain and Pigeon Forge Resort gift shows. The following is a schedule of ZAG activities that will occur during this very busy week. More information about the “ZAG week in Gatlinburg” will be provided in the October issue of ZAG NEWS. For immediate information contact Steve Fairchild at 316.266.8225 or sfairchild@scz.org.

Sponsor Mixer (buyers welcome!!)

Friday November 5
6:30-9:30
Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies
R.S.V.P. by 10/30/04

ZAG Annual Meeting and Dinner

Sunday November 7
5:30-9:30
Cocktails 5:30-6:30
Dinner 6:45-7:30
Discussions/etc. 7:30-9:15
R.S.V.P. by 10/30/04

Not for Profit Buyers Meetings

(NFP buyers only)
Sunday November 7
4:30-5:30
Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies
R.S.V.P. by 10/30/04

Monday November 8
7:30-8:30
Continental breakfast
At River Terrace Conference Room
R.S.V.P. by 10/30/04

All of the activities listed above are “no charge” to our members, however you must R.S.V.P. in order to attend.

R.S.V.P. to Judy Jones at:

Judith.Edwards@ncmail.net or 336.879.7361.

If there is interest in additional discussions or break out sessions contact us ASAP and we will attempt to schedule a time and place for your desired meeting.

LEND A HAND

Committee opportunities:
Steering Committee
Website
Membership
ZAG Forums

ATTENTION SPONSORS

During our Annual Dinner Meeting we have numerous tables set up with our sponsors' merchandise. If you would like to loan several of your products for us to display, please contact Dave Albert for details.

ZAG INTERVIEW: RACINE ZOO

Katie Stephan-Cothell, Director of Guest Services for the Racine Zoo, recently took some time to answer a few questions about her merchandise operations.

Describe your zoo (acreage, annual attendance, major exhibits, key animals, etc.)

The Racine Zoo is located on 32 acres of land right on the shore of Lake Michigan. Being a free admission zoo, we do not have exact attendance figures, but we estimate approximately 180,000 visitors per year. In the summer of 2002 we opened our newest exhibit, the Charles & Jennifer Johnson Land of the Giants, which features Masai giraffes, two black rhinos and one white rhino. During the summer of 2004 will be the arrival of a pair of spectacled bears. Favorite zoo animals include Amur tigers, African lions, blue-eyed black lemurs, snow leopards, orangutans and farm animals in our children's farm.

Describe your merchandise operations (number of shops, square footage of each, annual sales, number and location of seasonal shops/carts, etc.)

We have one main gift shop (approx. 1,000 sq. ft. of selling space) as well as a satellite gift shop/concession stand (approx. 300 sq. ft.) at the Land of the Giants exhibit. Because we are a small zoo, we do not have any additional gift carts. Our total retail sales are approx. \$150,000.

List some of your best-selling items and categories.

Our best selling items are paper fans and animal face masks (both from K&M), Mountain t-shirts with wolf and African themes, pinchers (naturally!!!), jewelry (Phillips Int'l), and animal figurines from Westland, again with wolf and African animal themes. A Best ever-plush giraffe also does very well. Being located between the Milwaukee and Chicago zoos, we tend to get more local visitors, so we have a high percentage of “several times a month” repeat visitors, and they are more apt to purchase items in the \$10.00 and under range since they are frequently in the gift shops.

(Continued on page 4)

Are any items trending downward in popularity?

We have seen a downward trend in plush and individual PVC pieces, although PVC sets are still doing fairly well.

What merchandise are you looking for that you can't find?

Spectacled bear merchandise, although buyers at zoos that exhibit them have been helpful with sharing their contacts.

What about 2004 trends?

Bright colors and unique fabrics in plush, interesting garment dyes in t-shirts, and we are putting extra effort (in conjunction with our Conservation Education Department) to sell products that enhance our conservation messages to the public. Our CE Department can teach a message with the community through their outreach programs, and we offer products such as shade grown coffee to reinforce the message

Do you have any merchandise projects that are unique to your zoo (for example, photo ops, special sale events, school bags, web site/catalog sales, off-site shops, gift cards, etc.)?

At this time we do not, but I would love to know what other zoos are doing and what is working for them. It is something I would like to begin to work on.

The Racine Zoo is a free admission zoo. How does that affect your sales goals, budget, etc.?

Since we do not have a firm attendance, I am given a goal based on last year's sales. We also track weather. Since we are free, people leave the zoo when it rains, as opposed to other zoos where they wait the rain out until it stops and then continue their visit. Therefore our sales drop dramatically when the weather is poor.

The Racine Zoo recently opened a combination gift shop/refreshment stand in conjunction with the new giraffe/rhino exhibit. Briefly describe the merchandise mix and food menu. What percent of sales come from food, and how much from merchandise? How has the concept worked for you, and what advice would you have for others?

The merchandise is basically African-themed: plush and PVC rhinos, giraffes, zebras, lions, etc. We also carry exhibit-specific t-shirts as well as a good selection of small pick-up items. Our concessionaire handles the food part. He has a selection of ready to eat snacks, such as cotton candy, chips, soda and ice cream. Nothing is fried, grilled or prepared at this location (so we don't have a problem of the plush smelling like french fries!). We keep separate registers, so I do not have an exact breakdown of sales, but it seems that a typical day's sales are about 40% gift/60% food. All in all this has been a successful venture. The only problem we had initially was making sure that the concessionaire's employees upheld the high degree of customer service that my employees are required to maintain. After several discussions, we decided on a plan that was agreeable to

both of us and everything has worked out well since. My advice? Try to keep a good relationship with the concessionaire so that when problems arise they can be handled quickly, smoothly and appropriately with both departments in agreement.

If I could do it over again, I would...? I would have insisted on getting a computerized register/inventory system YEARS ago! Mine just arrived a week ago, and already it has been a fantastic improvement!

GOT PICTURES?

One portion of the soon to be released ZAG website will be a "gallery of gift shops and kiosks". We hope to feature a wide variety of gift shop interiors, exteriors, kiosks or even unique merchandise displays. If you would like to submit photos for the gallery, please send them ASAP by e-mail (JPEG, 72 DPI) to Steve Fairchild, or call him for more details.

Not for Profit Discussion Sessions

Several "NFP" buyers have shown interest in a ZAG discussion session during "ZAG Week" that would be exclusively for "not for profit" buyers. This year the ZAG steering committee has scheduled two opportunities. One session will be just before the annual meeting from 4:30-5:30 P.M. at the Ripley's Aquarium classroom area. For those who can't attend that session, there will be a breakfast meeting the following day at The River Terrace Conference Room. Contact Steve Fairchild for more details.

For ZAG information**Dave Albert**

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