



© Cleveland Metroparks Zoo

CLEVELAND METROPARKS ZOO  
SECURING A FUTURE FOR WILDLIFE

CLEVELAND METROPARKS ZOO  
SECURING A FUTURE FOR WILDLIFE

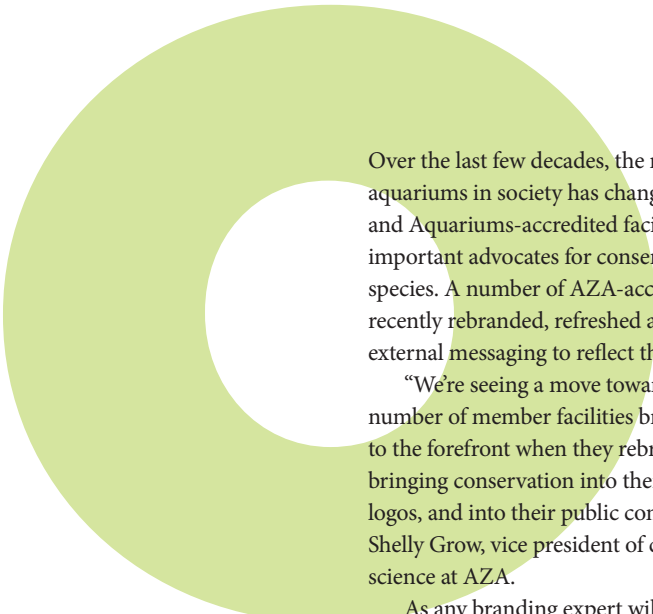
# CONSERVATION REBRANDING

BY HILLARY RICHARD

getting the  
message

# out





Over the last few decades, the role of zoos and aquariums in society has changed. Association of Zoos and Aquariums-accredited facilities have now become important advocates for conservation and protecting species. A number of AZA-accredited facilities have recently rebranded, refreshed and reworked their external messaging to reflect their conservation focus.

“We’re seeing a move towards an increasing number of member facilities bringing conservation to the forefront when they rebrand. They are now bringing conservation into their taglines, into their logos, and into their public communications,” said Shelly Grow, vice president of conservation and science at AZA.

As any branding expert will tell you, people can be wary of change. How do zoos and aquariums update their images in ways that inspire their visitors to learn more about conservation?

For some, like Pueblo Zoo in Pueblo, Colo., that involves using AZA’s Saving Animals From Extinction program as a blueprint. For others, like Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago, Ill., and Houston Zoo in Houston, Texas, it’s an independent process.

For many AZA-accredited facilities, the rebranding process came about because the public had little idea about what zoos and aquariums do for conservation.

“We feel it’s really important to continue to gauge the general public’s perception about zoos and the roles they play, particularly in wildlife conservation,” said Kelly Manderfield, the chief marketing officer of Cleveland Metropark Zoo in Cleveland, Ohio. In 2015, the Zoo did a study and found out that over half of respondents were unaware of what the Zoo did for conservation.

Cleveland Metropark Zoo began rebranding efforts in 2017. They created a new logo that

represented the global impact of the Zoo, the species at the Zoo that are supported through wildlife conservation efforts, and a new tagline: Securing a future for wildlife.

To make a splash, the Zoo paired the new rebrand with an exciting announcement last March: their endangered black rhino was pregnant. Leading up to the big reveal, they teased their big announcement on social media—including putting up an ultrasound photo and video, which got the local community very engaged in guessing what kind of animal it was. When they revealed the news with media partners, they used it as an opportunity to tell the story of why zoos exist and the important work they do in conservation—and for added momentum, debuted the new brand. The result was tremendous media coverage and a lot of buzz.

Cleveland Metropark Zoo has been focused on conservation for the last 20 years, “but it wasn’t something we were leading with from a marketing and visitor experience standpoint,” said Manderfield.

“It’s not just about shifting public perceptions but the higher purpose of giving the public an opportunity to take action. That’s the goal of all this work and all of this effort—to create an impact.”

Since the rebrand and repositioning, online surveys have shown that awareness has grown by 18 percent, guest connection to nature and wildlife has grown by 10 percent and wildlife conservation donations have increased significantly.

After polling 9,000 people, Woodland Park Zoo in Seattle, Wash., discovered an important dichotomy in understanding of the zoo and conservation.

“Most people do not associate a visit to the zoo with conservation and most people feel those two things are very separate. We learned that the zoo is this pleasant outdoor experience with family and friends with little responsibility. Conservation is often gloomy and full of responsibility, where you have to stop doing this and that because otherwise we’re destroying the planet. Those two mindsets are quite opposed,” said Dr. Alejandro Grajal, president and chief executive officer of Woodland Park Zoo.

Woodland Park Zoo started unveiling their rebrand in January 2018. “We changed our mission to tackle what we think is the biggest ethical question of our time, which is whether humans will be able to live on this planet sustainably with all its creatures. As such we defined a new mission and it is making sure that we not only inspire conservation but that we also engage people to consider conservation in every aspect of their lives,” said Grajal.







“... the Zoo paired the new rebrand with an exciting announcement last March: their endangered black rhino was pregnant. Leading up to the big reveal, they teased their big announcement on social media ...”





© Woodland Park Zoo

To achieve this, Woodland Park Zoo plans to change the way they talk about their conservation efforts, including redesigning exhibits to do adaptive interpretations and presentations. They will also put emphasis on social responsibility and showing opportunities people have to make a difference in their daily lives: civic actions, policy and advocacy, and consumer choices.

“We’re focusing very strongly on SAFE and on the social and community participation components of SAFE. We’re going to design outreach education and social media programs that allow people to participate in conservation instead of just being spectators,” he added, noting that Woodland Park partnered with the Oregon Zoo in Portland, Ore., as part of the initial western pond turtle SAFE program.

In 2016, Houston Zoo embarked on a strategic planning process with a new mission to connect communities with wildlife and inspire action to

save animals in the wild. The Zoo enlisted a local branding agency to help create a new visual identity that reflected this change, including a new logo. Houston Zoo unveiled the new logo at the same time they launched their \$150 million centennial capital campaign and a 20-year master plan. In addition to the new logo, the Zoo changed its entire digital identity, including a new website that will debut later this year. In-Zoo signage will slowly transition as they open new habitats, and this summer the staff will have new uniforms.

“Our new look is fresh, it’s contemporary, it’s very clean, modern, unfussy. It really lets us share and get to the heart of who and what we are, which is a zoo-based conservation organization,” said Jackie Wallace, director of public relations at the Houston Zoo.

“The good news is conservation is always who we have been. We have been a leader in conservation and doing the work for many years. We’re working hard to make sure our guests understand that by visiting the Houston Zoo, they are saving animals in the wild and that there are actions they can take in their daily lives.”

For nearly 150 years, Lincoln Park Zoo and its staff had tried to be everything to everyone. Their rebrand narrowed the Zoo’s focus in order to make a larger positive impact on wildlife.

“We needed to shift the focus from being ‘one of the oldest zoos in America’ to help the public understand that behind this iconic and historic zoo, we are building state-of-the-art habitats, at the forefront of cutting edge conservation and creating incredible learning programs with communities near and far,” said Jillian Braun, director of public relations at Lincoln Park Zoo. Like other facilities, they paired their rebranding announcement with big news: that the Urban Wildlife Information Network had been expanded nationally to 13 cities, an unprecedented initiative for urban wildlife.

For Lincoln Park Zoo’s rebrand, they overhauled their design, logo and color scheme and created a new tagline: “For Wildlife. For All.” The icon was inspired by the Zoo’s commitment to animals, the environment and the public.

Pueblo Zoo redid their mission statement and reworked their eco center into a SAFE space centered around the facility’s penguins.

“SAFE is a great opportunity for a small zoo to plug into something meaningful. SAFE symbolizes a collaborative, transparent, strategic approach and we feel that this has really resonated. It’s a simple easy way to understand what we’re trying to do,” said Abbie Kraus, executive director of Pueblo Zoo.

“Our mission is to empower people, to engage in the conservation of animals in their natural habitat. Empower, engage, conserve. Our previous mission



“Our new look is fresh, it’s contemporary, it’s very clean, modern, unfussy. It really lets us share and get to the heart of who and what we are, which is a zoo-based conservation organization ...”

- Jackie Wallace, Houston Zoo



© Houston Zoo



© Houston Zoo



“Pueblo Zoo recently raised admission prices and is dedicating 25 cents of each admission to conservation. The result showed that a small zoo can make a big difference.”

statement had similar words but didn’t give that firm commitment,” said Kraus. The public responded to the rebrand positively—donations are up and people are excited to be a part of something impactful.

Pueblo Zoo recently raised admission prices and is dedicating 25 cents of each admission to conservation. The result showed that a small zoo can make a big difference.

“We are always trying to make ends meet so when we wanted to give a significant amount to conservation, we were scared of what people would think of that,” said Krause. “We got no pushback. Our government supporters and donors appreciate that we are walking the walk.”

In 2017, the Vancouver Aquarium in Vancouver, B.C., took a dramatic approach to their rebranding by creating Ocean Wise, an overarching organization that incorporated the Aquarium as one of its pillars.

“We knew that when we did this we would cause a fair bit of confusion from a marketing point of view—and we did,” said John Nightingale, president and chief executive officer at Ocean Wise. “We’re trying to work globally, so we couldn’t do everything under the umbrella of Vancouver Aquarium.”

Their strategy stayed the same, with the added goal of engaging 100 million people by 2020 and one billion by 2025.

“If more people on earth understood the problems nature’s dealing with and their role in it, we know people will respond and help. It’s our job to make sure they know.”

---

Hillary Richard is a writer based in Bloomfield, N.J.





