

Mixing Marketing and Education

in Johannesburg Zoo to the benefit of the 2008 The Year of the Frog campaign

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In 2006 the Education Department married the Marketing Department. Amidst horror-stricken faces, furious frowns from both sides and the ever-knowing nodding heads of those who knew it would not work and some positive thoughtful faces, we forged ahead ... and with great result.

Reasons why we took this drastic step included the size of our visitor numbers – ranging from 400,000 to 500,000 annually not to mention the fact that we have a very limited budget for both entities. The Education budget could be likened to an anorexic cheetah – very fast to spend and nothing but skin and bone.

The marketing budget did not do much better. Marketing has always been below the line and dependant on public relations. Both departments were focusing on the same target group and both shared similar functions – so we thought – make them one. It has not been without its challenges but has worked remarkably well for a number of reasons. The one case study to share would be the global frog campaign.

Frogging it

When the Johannesburg Zoo decided to sign up for the 2008: Year of the Frog, we got all excited – hopped and skipped around like nobody's business. Reality soon set in: we had no extra budget to do anything spectacular. One of our greatest resources was the fact that the Zoo had already started on a frog conservation programme in 2006 and the frog breeding centre was well set-up and had already started to draw some national and international attention.

The question still remained – how do we get people excited about frogs?

Another reality is: you don't get people excited about frogs in general. People either like or hate them but more often actually THEY DO NOT CARE.

Our action plan worked as follows:

The *education* section designed an educators resource book, an educators training session, a learners training session and resources for learners. The Discovery Centre was turned into a "from rivers to oceans" display, focusing on the importance of clean water for all life. The DVD presentation in the Discovery centre shared some views on pollution, litter, the importance of water and frogs. All learners that visit the Zoo (annually approximately 120,000) are invited to explore the Discovery Centre free of charge. The Zoo educators set themselves the tasks of designing information sheets on frogs and their plight and these are handed out to all people who attend school sessions, visit exhibits on and offsite of the Zoo and the information is inserted in all promotional packs. Frog information is displayed at our curio shop and at all the administration buildings and in some of the public toilet blocks. The educators resource book has been distributed to all interested zoos and aquaria in South Africa free of charge.

The *marketing* heads got together and since we could not afford to pay for advertising nor arrange events specifically for this cause, we allocated space on our public bill boards announcing the Year of the Frog.



All events were flavoured with frogs: Biodiversity events were linked with frogs such as Water Week in March, The Sasol Bird Fair in May (some owls and other birds eat frogs, etc), World Environment Day on 5 June focusing on global warming and how it effects frogs to up coming events such as Arbor Day in September and how frogs need trees.

Normal public events such as our Mothers' day concert (11,000 people attended this) had posters with mommy frogs and their babies displayed round the Zoo. In actual fact the exact poster looked more like frogs locked in amplexus.

The value of linking the frog theme with our entire events plan meant that the media picked up on the frog theme and used it quite successfully in the sponsored advertising campaigns. In the media campaigns it was mentioned that you could get much more information free of charge from the zoo and its educationists.

Public value added programmes such as our 'adopt an animal' programme had special rates if you wanted to adopt frogs in our Zoo. The adoption promotions took place at all of the previously mentioned events. Frog stickers were printed and these were handed out with each adoption.

Public exhibitions were focused on frogs. Our Horticulture Department participated in a gardening exhibition off site. Their theme: you guessed it – frogs in your garden. The education section participated in a science fest off site – focused on frogs.

Having a common goal

The plan may sound very familiar to you as you may be in the fortunate position of having a Marketing Department who likes to make use of education



programmes for marketing and who work hard at promoting education in your facility. This was never the case in Johannesburg Zoo. We always had a tug of war kind of relationship with the educationist – fiercely purist and wanting to make sure all were properly educated. Awareness was simply not enough. The Marketing department always knew that people should have fun – not be schooled all the time and that people were not attracted by pure education themes.

In our case we are all thinking of frogs – whether it is to educate, raise awareness, get a picture in the paper with a frog and a famous person, or arrange radio interviews. The main focus is frogs and the two sections, now one department has a common goal and work well together.

Lessons learned: you do not need a lot of money to participate in global campaigns; you simply have to recognize the opportunities within your own organisation to participate. ♦

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See the Johannesburg Zoo website www.jhbzoo.org.za for a breakdown of the structure of their Marketing and Education Department.

Visit www.izea.net to see what other IZE members are doing to raise awareness of the Amphibian Crisis.