

To: Board of Management

From: Manager, Strategic Communications

Subject: **2020 STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS REPORT**

Date: 2021-02-05

SUMMARY:

This report focuses on the primary activities and achievements of the Strategic Communications Branch at the Toronto Zoo for the year 2020. The Strategic Communications team oversees all of the public facing communications outlets to connect our audiences to our animals, messages, events and activities. 2020 presented a great challenge as online engagement was often the only point-of-contact we had to connect the public to our Zoo, but also a great opportunity to shift our communications efforts and try some new tactics and approaches.

Our purpose is to support the Toronto Zoo Mission of connecting people, animals and conservation science to fight extinction, and we are constantly striving to employ new tactics and opportunities that align with the strategic plan.

Included in this report is an overview of the achievements and opportunities we explored as we continually adapted to new circumstances, in what was truly an extraordinary year.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

COMMENTS:

Key accomplishments in 2020:

Online audience and engagement growth

What do you do when your Zoo is closed – you find as many ways to connect people with our animals and conservation stories as possible, virtually. This is what drove most of our communications direction for 2020. Social media and online audiences were a tremendous focus for us.

The Zoo's social media community now totals **over 558,000** people across all platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok), a **50.5% increase from 2019 which ended with 370,975**. In 2020, the Zoo exceeded 212,855,489 impressions, and engaged 14,312,001 people, and saw over 10,000,000 YouTube video views.

The Zoo currently ranks #1 for Facebook and Instagram page engagement compared to other G5/Canadian Attractions including the ROM, AGO, Ontario Science Centre, Ripley's Aquarium, Calgary Zoo and Vancouver Aquarium.

Please refer to Attachment #1 for the full Social Media Report; Attachment #2 for Top 100 posts by engagement and Attachment #3 for Top 100 posts by impressions

New: Daily Facebook Lives

A great new undertaking for our team was delivering Facebook Live sessions at 1:00pm daily starting on March 16, 2020 after closing to the public. This series of videos (289 in total so far) reached over 19 million impressions and engaged over 1.7 million people. This was a great opportunity for viewers to directly connect with Keeper staff while at home, as each session offers a Q+A session similar to Keeper Talks offered on-site when the Zoo is open.

The popularity and live viewership of the Facebook Lives has fluctuated significantly since they began, but with the content living indefinitely on our Facebook page and YouTube channels, this has served to greatly expand our bank of online content for our audiences.

Facebook Fundraising

The Zoo also piloted using Facebook fundraising as a means to garner online donations to support the Toronto Zoo Wildlife Conservancy. The "Zoo Food For Life" campaign, (launched in April 2020) exceeded the Facebook page goal of \$50,000, closing out at \$84,230 in less than a month. The fundraising widget was also added to our daily Facebook Lives during the first closure from March to late June. This brought in an additional \$9000 to the Zoo.

New: TikTok

The Zoo added TikTok to its social portfolio in 2020. This platform is growing in popularity and reaches a younger audience and reaches more global based users, versus the local-based online communities we foster on Facebook and Twitter. Launching in February 2020, the account has grown to over 60,000 fans and has over 1,000,000 video views.

Media Opportunities in 2020

Our Toronto Zoo attracted extensive media interest throughout 2020 with the extensive experiences and offerings, engagement opportunities and content that was being shared. The media relations support remains an integral component of our strategic communications strategy to support our minimal budgets for advertising and marketing, especially in a year with reduced daily attendance capacity, a growing social media following and ongoing uncertainties around the pandemic. We made the decision to significantly reduce the advertising spend and instead focus on re-opening of the Zoo and a new process for booking.

Highlight of Media Relations/PR activity included:

- 7 x live remotes/broadcasts

- 9 x media events
- 49 x radio interviews conducted (live and taped)
- 35 x phone interviews
- 192 x media requests coordinated (written statements, filming and virtual interviews)
- 42 x photo/video asset requests coordinated
- 4 x external podcast requests/recorded
- 28 x Newsletter submissions written and submitted (Tourism Toronto, We've Been Expecting You, SCRO, Highland Creek Villager, West Rouge Life & Live Green)
- 12 x Scarborough Mirror Columns written and submitted
- 59 x press releases written

Media Highlights:

- **Toronto Life Feature:** Enhanced an opportunity with Toronto Life which began as a simple online-only photo essay with a couple photos into a full feature on how the Zoo has adapted to Covid life and the conservation and research work being done at the Zoo. The feature expanded beyond online and was also featured in the July print edition with a multi-page spread presenting some outstanding hero images of some of our amazing animals to accompany the story.
<https://torontolife.com/city/it-costs-1-million-a-year-to-feed-the-animals-how-the-toronto-zoo-is-functioning-without-revenue/>



- **Scenic Safari Drive Thru Opening - Media Event:** We launched our new Drive-Thru experience on May 23, 2020 with many VIPs and dignitaries, including Mayor John Tory and the Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. The event was broadcast live with CP24 and pool fed to a number of media outlets to adhere to strict covid safety measures.



- **Maclean's Magazine advertorial:** To support women in STEM and highlight one of our Toronto Zoo's research experts, we submitted an advertorial in Maclean's Magazine in November 2020 to share Dr. Gabriela Mastromonaco's journey and inspiration for becoming a leading scientist in reproductive science.



Dr. Gabriela Mastromonaco
Manager of Reproductive Sciences,
Toronto Zoo

A Letter From a Toronto Zoo Scientist

Dear Young Scientists,

Albert Einstein once said, "I am neither especially clever nor especially gifted. I am only very, very curious." Curiosity is the foundation of all great scientific achievements. It was the driving force behind Marie Curie's discovery of radioactivity and Roberta Bondar's exploration of our fragile planet both above and on its surface. I was in grade 10 biology class when I became curious about the mysterious organisms inhabiting the tiny world that could only be seen under a microscope.

It started with cheek swabs and pond water on a home microscope kit, and ultimately moved on to the origins of life itself: sperm, eggs, and embryos. A sea urchin fertilization experiment in first-year biology led to further studies of sperm and embryos in cattle and dogs. My passion for understanding the reproductive biology of diverse species gave me the focus I needed through my university years and the foundation that prepared me for the job of my dreams.

As Manager of Reproductive Sciences at the Toronto Zoo, I'm fortunate to be continuously learning about the animals in our care, from pregnancy evaluation of our red pandas to artificial insemination of our wood bison. Our research has allowed us to develop much-needed tools to enhance reproductive success and store valuable genetic material indefinitely, both of which are fundamental steps in the long-term sustainability of threatened species.

The path to becoming Canada's only zoo-based reproductive scientist was neither direct nor easy. In the end, success wasn't based on my academic marks, choice of university, or who I knew. It came down to a simple rule that I never stray from: be willing to take on any task no matter how insignificant it may seem at the time and then work hard to gain as much as possible from that experience. While there were certainly many added challenges that I encountered as a woman in a STEM career, I never let them interfere with my goals. Curiosity, after all, has no gender bias. ■

Sincerely,
Dr. Gabriela Mastromonaco

i Learn more about Dr. Gabriela Mastromonaco and the Toronto Zoo's career opportunities at torontozoo.com/tz/wildlifehealthcentre. This article was sponsored by the Toronto Zoo.



- **W5 Giraffe Story with Anne Innis-Dagg coordination and filming:** In 2020, worked with CTV's W5 Production team to set up the interview with Anne at the Zoo and secured one of our giraffe keepers to be included in the segment (episode aired on Saturday February 6, 2021 on CTV).
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6wbF9X_Xxl

Website

Adapting our website graphics, media player slide and changing the options to make it easier to navigate throughout the many changes we experienced throughout this past year was a key priority to connect our audience to what was happening at the Zoo. From Zoo closing updates, to safety messaging, to re-opening videos and content for the various experiences as they presented themselves, our strategic communications team has been committed to adapting our content and messages to be impactful, clear and engaging. The Toronto Zoo website saw an overall 30% increase on sessions and total users in 2020, and that is despite being closed for approximately 3 months of the year. The number of page views saw a slight decrease, however this was to be expected as a number of pages and links were removed as our offerings/operations were reduced.

See Attachment #4 for full details on the web report.

With these quickly changing/new circumstances, offerings and operations, our strategic communications team did a tremendous job with being creative and impactful with targeted, clear and engaging digital graphics. Here is a small sample of some of the digital graphics/campaigns/concepts that were designed in-house by our talented team members:

CLOSURE NOTICE:



Please note the Toronto Zoo is Closed

The Toronto Zoo's top priority is to ensure the safety and well-being of our guests, members, staff, volunteers and animals amid the COVID-19 virus. Health officials for Toronto, Ontario and Canada have advised that the risk from contracting the virus remains low, and we will continue to monitor this situation as it progresses. Check Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and our website for continued updates.

SCENIC SAFARI DRIVE-THRU:



YOUR TORONTO ZOO CAMPAIGN – developed to tie together the multi-faceted approach we were engaging with our virtual and online opportunities when we first closed.



RE-OPENING CAMPAIGN:



FAMILY CAMPING EXPERIENCE:



ZOO'S BIRTHDAY



Use of new clean icons to share details about new online and virtual opportunities:

WATCH FOR MORE GREAT ANIMAL CONTENT DAILY



The Toronto Star Livecam is moving! Stay tuned for a new exciting animal coming soon!

TORONTO STAR



Join us for our **Facebook** LIVE at 1pm daily with one of our amazing Keepers to learn more about the 5,000 animals that call the Toronto Zoo home.



Follow us on **Instagram** for adorable animal photos and watch our Insta stories for live Q&A's!



Follow us on **Twitter** for your daily dose of cute!



Subscribe to our **Wild For Life podcast**, that brings you behind-the-scenes and unveils the "hidden zoo". Each episode, posted every other Wednesday, brings you information on the critical conservation work that protects endangered species and works to preserve biodiversity.



Checkout our Toronto Zoo **Youtube channel** to watch some amazing animal videos, including past baby animals, Training Tuesdays with our Keepers and much more!



PARENT RESOURCES

Fun home activities, lesson plans and worksheets to further your child's understanding and connection to the animal kingdom.



ZOO SCHOOL TO YOU!

Join us for a virtual tour on a variety of curriculum-linked topics listed [HERE](#). Plus, check out our supporting resources/activities to extend student learning with each video.



EDUCATOR RESOURCES

Engage your students with educational activities and resources! Both Elementary and Secondary resources available.

Partnerships

The need to leverage strong partnerships and in-kind promotional opportunities has never been more important. A few significant partnerships included:

- **Toronto Star Livecam:** A strong partnership with the Toronto Star digital team afforded an opportunity to present a livecam of our ring-tailed lemurs, followed by our gorilla troop and then finally our giraffes from April to June 2020.
- **City Parent Magazine:** City Parent is Canada's largest FREE Family publication for 35 years reaching 125,000 readers in the GTA. Negotiated a new partnership that supported the installation of a new City Parent magazine box at the Zoo's front entrance in exchange for full page ads in issues from September - December (value of ~\$3k per issue).
- **Retail Pages:** Front page advertisements in a monthly publication called Retail Pages which is distributed free in Durham region in exchange for Zoo passes. The Zoo has a different ad for each month of the year and will continue to utilize this to promote Zoo events.
- **Toronto City Key** program – connected with this new exclusive program that offers opportunities for “key holders” to access discounts and special offers to explore some of the most exciting attractions in the City. Launched the opportunity with Lumina right before the Zoo closed in March, and then began developing further opportunities which will continue being developed in 2021 for Zoo experiences.
- **Attractions Ontario** – continued supporting various promotional opportunities with Attractions Ontario through online contesting and exchange of passes for digital promotions.
- **ParentSource.ca and Toronto4Kids.com** – maintained partnerships with these targeted family online resources to share updates and information about the Zoo in exchange for Zoo passes/giveaways
- **Metroland Media** – leveraged free credits that were earned as part of previous media buy to promote experiences to audiences digitally in Toronto and Durham regions

Advertising Campaign

The traditional paid advertising campaign was not executed as had been originally planned for the year. This was in part to achieve some cost-savings, but also with new limits on the daily attendance capacities, it was not required as many days were already selling out due to the demand. Two small digital campaign flights were coordinated to support:

- 1) Lumina – 2nd season re-opening early in August
(note: Lumina advertising comes out of a separate budget)
- 2) General Zoo visitation awareness and new online booking-only.

Starcom Agency (formerly ZenithOptimedia) secured the digital advertising on behalf of the Zoo as our contracted media booking agency. First flight ran August 17 to September 7 and included both Lumina and Zoo General Awareness and Visit Campaigns. The second flight ran from October 5-11 to promote General Zoo visit awareness for the long weekend.

The creative designs for both campaigns were developed in house by the Zoo's digital marketing coordinator in order to mitigate the cost. Both creative campaigns included CTA for online booking for both Lumina and regular Zoo visitation, which was the primary strategy for using digital with the minimal advertising budget.

Campaign # 1 – Lumina
Ran August 17 – August 30, 2020
Budget - \$10,000



Campaign # 2 – Zoo Awareness Campaign
Ran August 17 – September 7, and again
October 5 – October 11
Budget - \$40,000 for Aug-Sept, and \$10,000 for Oct 5-11



Toronto Zoo Display						
Week	Impressions	Clicks	CTR	Viewability	Total Spend	CPM
Flight 1						
2020/08/17 - 2020/08/22	8,750,862	11,234	0.13%	51.78%	\$ 12,995.83	\$ 1.49
2020/08/23 - 2020/08/29	8,635,217	41,550	0.48%	64.32%	\$ 19,411.07	\$ 2.25
2020/08/30 - 2020/09/05	5,800,667	44,497	0.77%	66.36%	\$ 13,172.78	\$ 2.27
2020/09/06 - 2020/09/12	1,047,261	9,400	0.90%	69.43%	\$ 2,405.32	\$ 2.30
Total	24,234,007	106,681	0.44%	59.84%	\$ 47,985.01	\$ 1.65
Flight 2						
2020/10/04 - 2020/10/10	2,156,337	11,964	0.55%	65.70%	\$ 8,289.30	\$ 3.84
2020/10/11 - 2020/10/11	456,315	3,915	0.86%	68.56%	\$ 1,008.72	\$ 2.21
Total	2,612,652	15,879	0.61%	66.16%	\$ 9,298.02	\$ 3.56
Grand Total	26,846,659	122,560	0.46%	60.48%	\$ 57,283.03	\$ 2.13

Toronto Zoo Display						
Placement	Impressions	Clicks	CTR	Viewability	Total Spend	CPM
Toronto Zoo Lumina EN blogTO	177,940	328	0.18%	84.28%	\$ 1,838.64	\$ 10.33
Toronto Zoo Lumina EN Rogers	375,365	317	0.08%	63.82%	\$ 4,280.16	\$ 11.40
Toronto Zoo Lumina EN Toronto Star	444,091	700	0.16%	61.72%	\$ 3,481.50	\$ 7.84
Toronto Zoo Prospecting EN Categories	25,849,263	121,215	0.47%	60.16%	\$ 47,682.73	\$ 1.84
Grand Total	26,846,659	122,560	0.46%	60.48%	\$ 57,283.03	\$ 2.13

Campaign Highlights:

- The campaign ran for 35 days throughout the two flights
- CTR performed higher than the agency's reported industry benchmark of 0.10% at 0.46% which achieved our goal given the shift to online ticket purchase

Award-winning Accomplishments!

We were proud to be the recipients of some signature industry awards in 2020:

- **TIAO** (Tourism Industry Association of Ontario) award for **“Event of the Year”** for our Terra Lumina Experience



- **Toronto Star Reader's Choice Awards:** The Toronto Star presents the Readers' Choice Awards to highlight outstanding people and businesses in the GTA. Toronto Zoo was a big winner in 2020, voted “best of” in SIX categories: Platinum (1st) in Children's Entertainment, and Gold (2nd) in each of Day Trip, Family Activity, Local Water Park, Local Tourist Attractions and Outdoor Tourist Attraction categories.



- **CAZA:** Canada's Accredited Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA) **2020 Outstanding Achievement Awards** recognize organizations for their commitment to animal welfare, conservation, science and education. Our Toronto Zoo proudly received the Eleanore Oakes Award for our #EveryActionCounts campaign supporting the Washed Ashore Exhibit.

Brizicam Pilot

The Zoo launched an exciting new Live Cam pilot project with a company called BriziCam in the summer of 2020. This live camera technology currently uses the Twitch platform to stream real-time video content to large audiences from around the world. What differentiates this platform from other live video content is that the camera is crowd-controlled, and users can navigate through different animal habitats to get the best vantage points to view the Zoo's animals.

We launched a live cam featuring our Masai giraffes in June 2020, added a second camera featuring the Western lowland gorillas in October and added the third camera featuring the African penguins in November. Since launching, we have also offered daily live Q+A chats with both Keepers and Zoo volunteers as another avenue to connect with viewers while at home.

Next steps for 2021 will be applying our extensive learning from this pilot program and inviting RFP bidders to suggest options to offer this type of service on a more permanent and longer-term basis.

UoIT (Ontario Tech) – Game Development Partnership

We have been supporting and participating in a third year UoIT student game development project for a program called the Game Develop Workshop - GDW. Our Toronto Zoo Project Team is called "Sedna", which is comprised of seven University students. They have eagerly been immersed in the Zoo's mission, vision and strategic plan to ensure the game concept that they are developing will weave in accurate and impactful Zoo and animal information for their players, while still balancing the integrity of their gaming learning and expertise. When completed, the game is an engagement tool we are hopeful will be valuable in connecting younger audiences with important and fun messaging.

Podcast

In our second year now of "Wild For Life", the podcast continues to provide a valuable opportunity to share stories, connect audiences to important conservation stories and offered a unique and turn-key way to support audio accompaniment for onsite experiences from this year with the Scenic Safari Drive-Thru commentary and then in December with the Holiday Drive Thru podcast which was narrated by "Darren and Mo" from Toronto's Top Morning Show, 98.1 CHFI. The current total unique downloads for the Zoo's podcast is currently at 225,942. 27 podcasts were recorded, edited and shared in 2020.

2020 Highlights for Strategic Communications Support

Zoo To You – website, assets, resources

Wildlife Conservancy "Zoo Food For Life" Campaign - design and launch

Scenic Safari Drive Thru - graphics, website, podcast, media support

Zoo Babies – Madagascar Spider Tortoise, Arctic Wolves, Giraffe, Red Panda, Zebra (#BabyLongLegs)

Virtual Events – May long Weekend, Canada Day -
Re-opening – launch, digital, video, media support
#BabyLongLegs Naming Promotion
Lumina launch (2nd season) – website, media, social
Wild Tails Camping – design, website, social support
Red panda (#BabyRed)
Marketplace
Virtual programming
Corpse Flower
Boomobile
Holiday Marketplace then Drive-Thru
Baby Zebra and Naming - #BBZeebee
Community Partner and MOU support
Conservation Story Sharing – wildlife release programs, reproductive programs

Ongoing Communications Activity

Social Media
Website updates
Graphics (onsite and online)
Marketing and Advertising
Podcasts
Membership communications
Partnership Communications/Support:

- Clean Tech North
- DeRo Foundation
- East Scarborough Storefront
- Nuclear Waste Management Organization
- Ontario Tech University
- Pollution Probe
- Royal Canadian Geographical Society
- Second Harvest
- The University of Toronto Scarborough
- Toronto and Region Conservation Authority

And all the while, we always try to have a little FUN!



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ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment I – Web Reporting 2020
Attachment II – Post Performance Top 100 Posts (Engagement)
Attachment III – Post Performance Top 100 Posts (Impressions)