

Strategic Communications Report 2025

Date: February 5, 2026

To: Board of Management of the Toronto Zoo

From: Chief Operations Officer

Wards: All

SUMMARY

The Strategic Communications team manages public-facing communications to engage audiences with your Toronto Zoo's mission: connecting people, animals, conservation science, and traditional knowledge to fight extinction.

Driving Zoo attendance, promoting revenue-generating activities, programs, and events, encouraging science literacy and sharing stories reinforcing the critical conservation science role of our Zoo are all central to the communications team. This report provides a summary of key activities, statistics, and achievements from the past year including the launch of the 2025-2027 Guardians of Wild Strategic Plan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chief Operations Officer recommends that:

1. The Board of Management of the Toronto Zoo receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact resulting from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

DECISION HISTORY

There is no decision history available for this item.

COMMENTS

Supporting the Guardians of Wild Strategic Plan (2025–2027)

2025 was a transformative year as we launched the Guardians of Wild Strategic Plan - a renewed promise to protect wildlife and inspire a community of belonging, care, and environmental action. Anchored in our four key focus areas - Belonging, Nature's Insurance Policy, Wow for Good, and Wildlife Advocates - every campaign, partnership, and story shared throughout the year reinforced the Toronto Zoo's evolution from a guest-funded zoo to a community-powered conservation organization.

Bringing the Strategic Plan to Life

We launched the Guardians of Wild plan through a coordinated internal and external communications campaign that invited our community to see themselves as part of our mission. The year's communications centered on science, innovation, community, and animal well-being, creating emotional and practical touchpoints for audiences to act as "guardians" in their own way.

Our marketing theme - "*Find Your Reason to Become a Guardian of Wild*" - took the concept from mission to movement. Delivered across digital, social, and out-of-home channels, it invited new and returning audiences to connect with the Zoo in a personal way. This purpose-led storytelling directly supported our Belonging and Wildlife Advocates pillars, positioning the Zoo as a gathering place for shared environmental values and community pride.

Creating Wow for Good Moments

Throughout the year, high-impact experiences and new exhibits brought the "Wow for Good" concept to life.

Walk on the Wild Side, an animatronic exhibit in the African Savanna, was a pilot project brought in to engage audiences with an interactive learning opportunity during March Break and early spring as a valued added experience during our non-peak season.

The arrival of Blue and Jay, two Highland cows named in partnership with the Toronto Blue Jays brought joy and strong media visibility, aligning city pride with the Zoo's mission. This partnership reinforces our commitment to engaging youth through the Jays Care Foundation, an organization we remain committed to supporting through Zoo visits and educational opportunities. This partnership campaign also enabled us to reach new audiences as several sports networks as well as traditional media picked up the story extensively. We were able to attract over 2,000 guests to visit our Zoo using an admission promotion connected to the Blue and Jay campaign in addition to high organic social media impressions of over 235K.

The return of Komodo dragons created a fall "wow" moment for guests on site and inspired digital engagement. A naming contest generating more than 10,000 entries and 32,000 views, one of our highest engagement rates in recent years.

These campaigns not only delighted guests but deepened connections with our valued community.

Science and Conservation Storytelling

In 2025, we expanded storytelling around Nature's Insurance Policy - our science-based efforts safeguarding species for future generations. Increased content on platforms such as LinkedIn highlighted our global partnerships and initiatives such as Canada's Wildlife Cryobank at your Toronto Zoo. These stories positioned the Zoo as a leader in scientific conservation, reaching new professional and organizational audiences worldwide.

Key partnerships celebrated and shared included:

- Nuclear Waste Management Organization's Reverse the Red initiative
- IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) World Conservation Congress
- Polar Bears International
- Species360 Cryopreservation and global biobanking
- Ape Action Africa
- Chester Zoo/Dublin Zoo collaborations
- World Animal Protection Canada and the Bill 5 species protection announcement

Each collaboration demonstrated real progress toward conservation outcomes while strengthening our role as a trusted leader in the global environmental community.

Building Community Belonging

The year also emphasized creating spaces of inclusion and belonging. From our new Peace Collective merchandise launch to sustainability efforts with Friendlier Reuse, storytelling reflected the diverse communities we serve. We reinforced our identity as both a local landmark and a global advocate for stewardship - sharing our message through 9,000+ media mentions and reaching an international audience of 14 billion impressions, with earned media value exceeding \$400 million.

Digital communication continued to be a cornerstone of this outreach:

- Over 105 million social media impressions across all platforms, supported by balanced content in conservation, science, and lighthearted animal storytelling.
- 1.9 million website users generating nearly \$19 million in ticket sales, underscoring the Zoo's digital engagement strength.

Our E-marketing program drove direct results as well, with more than \$285,000 in promotional revenue and a remarkable 54% unique open rate, well above industry averages - evidence of strong emotional connection and audience trust.

Challenges and Resilience

2025 brought record-setting extreme weather events that tested our operations and impacted attendance trends. Despite these challenges, our marketing agility and storytelling focus helped sustain engagement, positioning the Zoo not only as a place to visit, but as a purpose-driven organization to belong to. As a result, we directed a portion of the advertising budget to promote Zoo membership sales which helped finished 2025 with a record in net revenues of \$5,593,339 in membership sales.

Advertising Creative Campaign, Media Buy and Partnerships

Diamond Marketing Group was the creative marketing Agency of Record for 2025. The goal was to build upon the 2024 Guardians of Wild campaign, that was successfully launched to coincide with the Zoo's 50th birthday and turn the campaign into an attendance and visitation driver. King Ursa was the media planning and buying agency that recommended and executed the media buy for the campaign.

Social & Digital

Our Meta strategy was to build a funnel through broad awareness and traffic campaigns, and test direct the conversion campaign.

Key audience segment:

- Parents, Local Parents, Women, Singles and Lookalikes (targeted audiences who have digital and scrolling patterns that mimic the type of audiences we are seeking for advertising)
- Pinterest Test Campaign: Focused on Awareness within Parent segments.

Overall, Meta delivered effectively on awareness goals, with a much larger impression base as well as lower cost per mille (CPM – represents the cost of securing 1,000 impressions). The total impressions for the paid marketing campaign was valued at close to \$25 million.

The social media campaigns delivered 20 million+ digital impressions through Facebook and Instagram, and the digital resulted in 3 million+ impressions. We tested a small campaign through Pinterest this year, which also resulted in 1 million+ impressions and produced a similar click through conversion (CTC) as the larger campaigns, but had a more targeted audience reach that we had not tested before, but proved successful enough to possibly investigate for further campaign options.

All the Zoo's social media platforms total 1,291,989 in followers, a 4% increase from 2024 when we had 1,245,801. We saw an overall total increase across all platforms of 46,188 followers for 2025.

Promotional/Advertising Partnerships

We continue to leverage strong partnerships and in-kind promotional opportunities to supplement our advertising. A few significant partnerships in 2024 include the following.

- Toronto Star: Partnership continued with the Toronto Star in developing targeted ad campaigns and some advertorial to achieve a blend of event/visitation drivers and a deeper dive of information surrounded the Zoo's science-based mission and conservation science work.
- City Parent Magazine: City Parent continues to be Canada's largest free family publication reaching 125,000 readers in the GTA. Our ongoing partnership includes full page ads in monthly issues (value of ~\$3k per issue). Value of \$36k/year.
- CP24: Coordinated TV advertising with CP24 primarily leading up to long weekends or holidays, leveraging extra value with promotional breakfast television.

- Radio: (CHFI and 680 News) campaigns were secured promoting the Zoo for visits during March Break (Animatronics) and leading into long weekends (May, Canada Day, August long weekend and Labour Day).
- Minicards: continued promotional opportunity with Minicards Canada that provides high visibility within hotels and attractions throughout the city and provide an incentive offer for people who use it. In 2025 ~2,500 guests used this promotion to visit the Zoo.
- Attractions Ontario – continued supporting various promotional opportunities with Attractions Ontario through online contesting and exchange of passes for digital promotions.
- Destination Toronto – participated in various campaigns and initiatives to promote the Zoo to larger tourism markets through.
- Destination Markham – broadening our partnerships north of the Zoo to take advantage of the number of tourists visiting and staying in Markham and encouraging visit to the Zoo by working with them on cross-promotions.
- NFL Canada - Superbowl Partnership – once again, we proudly partnered to develop and share content with the “superb-owl” making predictions, along with other animal predictions, leveraging cross-channel content tagging NFL Canada/Toronto Zoo. This partnership strongly supports our efforts in reaching out to new audiences.
- Royal Ontario Winter Fair – worked closely with the Royal to promote discounted visits to the Zoo to their database and offered Zoo members discounts to horse shows and admission.

As a wonderful way to finish off the year, Partnerships and Events coordinated the Noon Year’s Eve event for the second year on December 31st. This family friendly event was once again supported by Coca-Cola and exceeded our expectations with attendance and was a wonderful way to end the year.

Website

Your Toronto Zoo website remains one of the most active tools for providing up to date information and facilitating revenue generation for tickets and experiences. We continue to invest in design enhancements for improved user experience navigating the site, but also to optimize the functionality and availability of information for users. Accessibility features and responsive designs are always considered in design.

Website Stats and Performance Metrics for Jan 1 - Dec 31, 2025

Usage: There were 1,935,066 total users over 3,487,125 sessions.

Website Traffic and User Engagement: our website served an impressive 9,865,9090 page views (compared to ~9 million page views in 2024) to over 3.4 million users (exceeding 2024 numbers which was just over 2 million users). This highlights the website's continued popularity and its effectiveness in attracting and retaining guests and interest.

Toronto Zoo Experience App

In its second year of operation, the Toronto Zoo app continues to be a success and an additional tool to support revenue, guest convenience, and communication. In 2025, the app had more than 94,000 downloads, improved guest experience on site, directly

contributed to \$30k in revenue generation from admission promotions pushed out to guests who had not visited recently, had 23k guests opt-in to receive Zoo emails which according to our development partners at Attractions i.o. continues to show strong performance and adoption relative to other attractions.

In 2025, we also launched a new Membership passholder integration feature and guest admission pass upload capability. One of the critical app functions remains the wayfinding capabilities. Data shows that each app user is visiting at least 4 locations using the wayfinding technology on the app per visit. Over 13,000 total users have used a wayfinding action, with a total of 54,000 total wayfinding routes explored.

In 2026 there are plans to expand the revenue integrations and financial capabilities to order tickets through the app and add the integration of onsite food services.

Looking Ahead to 2026

As we enter the next phase of the Guardians of Wild Strategic Plan, we are deepening the use of AI and analytics to connect audience insights with mission impact - tracking engagement, conversion, and awareness more precisely. With expanded app integrations, personalized e-marketing, and cross-departmental data collaboration, we are building the foundation for strategic growth rooted in science, sustainability, and community impact.

Our focus remains steadfast: to inspire belonging, champion wildlife, deliver moments of Wow for Good, and ensure that your Toronto Zoo continues to serve as Nature's Insurance Policy - a place where every visit, story, and partnership helps protect the future we share.

CONTACT

Katie Gray
Manager, Strategic Communication
kgray@torontozoo.ca
(416) 938-5283

SIGNATURE

Jennifer Tracey
Chief Operations Officer

ATTACHMENT

Attachment 1 – Creative Examples and Performance