

The Houston Zoo Story

How to Help Your Business Succeed in an Interactive World

By Katherine Craig

When The Houston Zoo was faced with an overnight transition from a city-run entity to an independent private organization, we knew that finding new ways to communicate with the public would be critical to our success. Finding the right tools and right team for a website overhaul was at the top of our agenda. In the marketing department, communications efforts in the non-profit or business world are conducted with *very* limited resources. At the same time, these marketing and public relations efforts are mission-critical because they are the prime means to generate the support needed to continue the mission of any non-profit organization. At the Zoo, for instance, we must be able to cultivate interactive relationships with our volunteers, donors, and all constituents who are interested in supporting our mission of conservation and education.



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Privatization afforded the Zoo many new opportunities. Zoo leaders were excited to have the opportunity to expand our talent base within the organization, enhance the animal experience and improve habitats, broaden the Zoo staff's conservation outreach involvement around the globe, and work towards establishing the Houston Zoo as one of the leading conservation and educational facilities in the world. In concert with senior management's vision for the *new* Zoo, the new marketing department saw a great opportunity, but realized that the hurdles were large. We knew we needed to realign the Houston Zoo's brand identity to show Zoo members and potential members as well as the public at large that changes were coming. The 80-year-old city-run institution was about to undergo tremendous change. But we needed to communicate that the change would take time. We saw a perfect opportunity to revamp the website into an interactive mecca of information and innovation! In order to initiate a successful project, we established critical goals:

1. Establish an overall website mission which would mirror the mission of the Zoo. Not all businesses have the same interactive or online needs and we needed to set forth our goals on the front end in order to succeed in a confined budget.
2. Find the right partners. This was not something our limited staff could handle in house, but we knew we would need endorsement across the organization since we were dependent on all departments for website content. In addition, we did not have the budget to hire an outside interactive one-stop agency.
3. Establish a firm business plan with key objectives in order to make the project a success