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## Metro Toronto Zoo

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Metropolitan Toronto Zoo faced the marketer's nightmare as they planned the 1995 season. 1994 had exceeded all expectations. Now the pressure was on to turn 1995 into another record year.

Enter two of the 28 White Lion left in the world. Cute and cuddly, definitely rare, possibly ferocious. And these beasts came with a story – Toronto had 'won' them from Philadelphia in a wager on the 1994 World Series. It might seem hard to lose with such a strong attraction. The trick was to make the Zoo's comparatively modest budget drive attendance from a population that might be 'zoo'd out' after many high-profile attractions in recent years.

We decided to re-examine the target audience, not only to cast a wider net geographically, but to re-think why people came to the zoo.

The case shows how this was resolved, with new creative and media, and superb results. Attendance increased 35%, and revenue 49%, easily setting a new record. As for the lions, in a well deserved tribute: *'In the jungle, the quiet jungle, the lion sleeps tonight.'*

### SITUATION ANALYSIS

The Metro Toronto Zoo has three objectives: (1) Research and Conservation (2) Education (3) Attraction. Funds come from government subsidies, corporate sponsorships, zoo memberships, and attendance revenues.

Attendance had been growing strongly. However, for 1995, we faced government spending controls, and tight consumer spending. We had an overriding need to increase attendance revenues, because attendance reflects consumer acceptance, and ultimately determines MTZ's fiscal direction. We had three variables to work with:

- Increased attendance itself
- Added value to each visit
- Additional revenue on and beyond the Zoo site

Advertising was chosen to drive attendance. Promotion and merchandising would build revenue from the other two variables.

### STRATEGY AND EXECUTION

#### Traffic Building

The White Lion would be an ideal traffic builder for summer 1995:

- Extremely rare animal – two of only 28 in existence
- First (and possibly the last) time in Canada
- Only at the Zoo for three months – a limited time offer
- Interesting – many people didn't know they even existed
- Magnetic – big and scary, but also cute and cuddly

- Extra appeal – Toronto had 'won' them in a bet with Philadelphia on the 1994 World Series.

The problem was that Toronto might be zoo'd out from high profile events like Catorama <sup>6</sup> and Giant Pandas in the past. We decided to re-examine the target audience, to see what motivated them.

## **Target Audience**

To hit the ambitious revenue and attendance targets we had to go beyond our current 'Toronto' audience – and reach lapsed users and out-of-town visitors (beyond the GTA). We had to make the White Lion the compelling reason to visit the zoo in 1995:

- one more time in the case of current users
- again in the case of lapsed users
- compulsively in the case of out-of-towners <sup>1</sup>

## **The Key Insight**

Many in our audience, particularly lapsed users, saw the Zoo as educational. This was in line with one of the Zoo's objectives, but our audience was more interested in adventure than ethology (the study of animal behaviour). We decided to create a new experience:

### **Edutainment.** <sup>2</sup>

We would humanize what some saw as a remote, educational experience. We would add charm and personality. We would make it fun! <sup>3</sup>

## **COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

The Zoo needed to be in the same arena as the CN Tower, Canada's Wonderland, African Lion Safari and Marineland. This required bigness. Our strategy reflected 'edutainment', but the focus would be on the rarity of the animals. In the words of the Creative Strategy:

### **Our Consumers thought at the time:**

What shall we do today? We can go to Marineland or African Lion Safari. Canada's Wonderland is close, let's go there

### **We wanted them to think:**

The Zoo really is a great place, and we really can't miss this once in a lifetime opportunity to see these rare lions

### **What was the most persuasive thing we could say to get them there?**

The rare White Lions are at the Zoo (for a short time only)

## **Media**

The Zoo had rarely used television, but we selected it as the main medium:

- It delivered 'bigness'
- It proved that the White Lion existed – seeing is believing
- It built reach beyond the GTA
- It opened up promotional and sponsorship opportunities

We added billboards and transit in the GTA, and Cantonese and Italian publications in Metro. We reached out-of-towners largely by television and newspaper, with some magazine. The total budget was \$650,000.

## **Promotional Leverage**

The White Lions had cachet, and this helped extend the media plan. With CFTO, we developed a promotional insert for the Blue Jays Play Book and the Toronto Sun. It featured the original baseball wager, with a luxury trip to Philadelphia as the grand prize. As an extra part of the promotion, an entire episode of 'Eye on Toronto' focused on the White Lions at the Zoo.<sup>4</sup>

## **The 'Last Chance' Push**

This ran four weeks before the Exhibit closed, to push procrastinators.

## **RESULTS**

The success of the White Lion Exhibit cannot be entirely attributed to the advertising campaign – it was an important Exhibit at the right time. However, tracking showed a strong correlation between ad awareness and the decision to visit the Zoo. (see [Figure 1](#))

The growth also correlated strongly with the objectives of attracting lapsed users, and out of town visitors: (see [Figure 2](#) and [Figure 3](#))

All of this translated into the record-breaking attendance and revenues: (see [Figure 4](#))

## **ISOLATING ADVERTISING AS THE VARIABLE**

Based on the foregoing, we believe it is clear that advertising was a major contributor to the White Lion Exhibit's success.

## **CONCLUSION**

In a world of me-toos, who wouldn't kill for the product uniqueness of the White Lions. Even so, product alone is not the story. The team extends the target audience; digs for the 'edutainment' insight;<sup>5</sup> and uses 'bigness' to put the Zoo in the same arena as Ontario's other major attractions.

## **Endnotes**

1. Noteworthy media. Extending the Target, geographically and psychographically.

2. Digging for an Insight. See also the note after the Conclusion.

3. Humour in a 'serious' category. (We may not think of the Zoo as 'serious', but attractions like Museums, Zoos, Historic Buildings often have that aura.)

4. Integration. Promotional Leverage.

5. When a campaign is being developed, it can be stopped in its tracks by a 'killer question', typically phrased as: 'Is this idea right for the brand?'

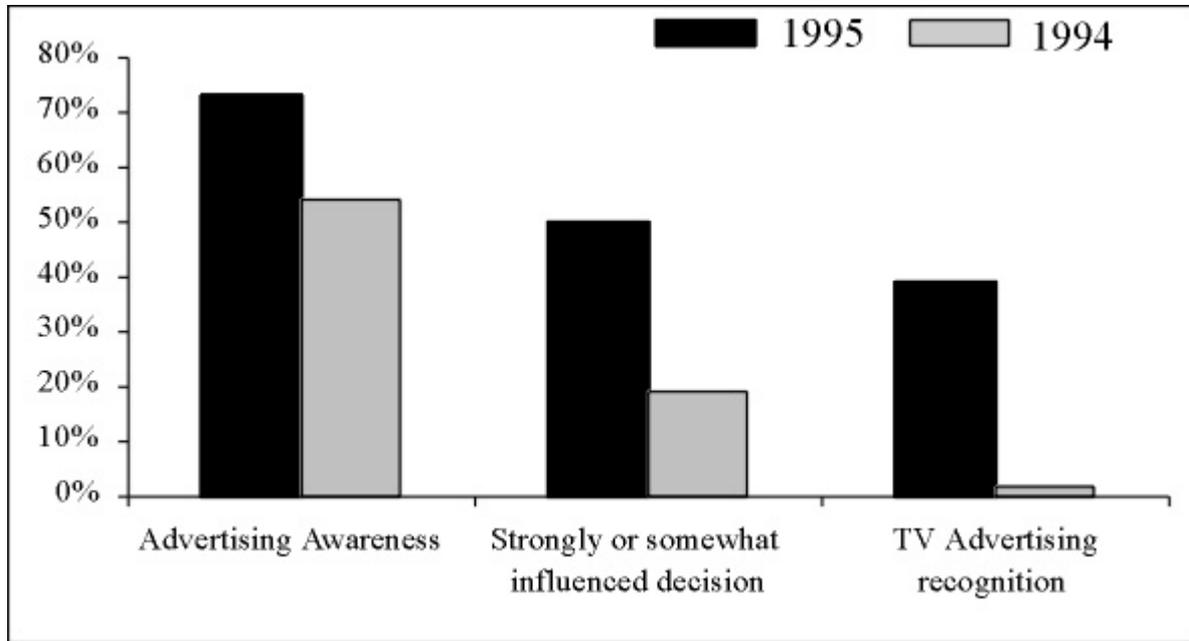
6. Editor's Note: see CASSIES II)

Along the same lines, a stickler for the education mandate could have asked, 'Is Edutainment right for the Zoo?' The answer is clearly yes, but the whole idea might have been killed by the question.

A conclusion from the CASSIES is that asking 'Is the idea right for the brand?' is certainly good practice; but giving (or expecting) cookie-cutter answers is not.

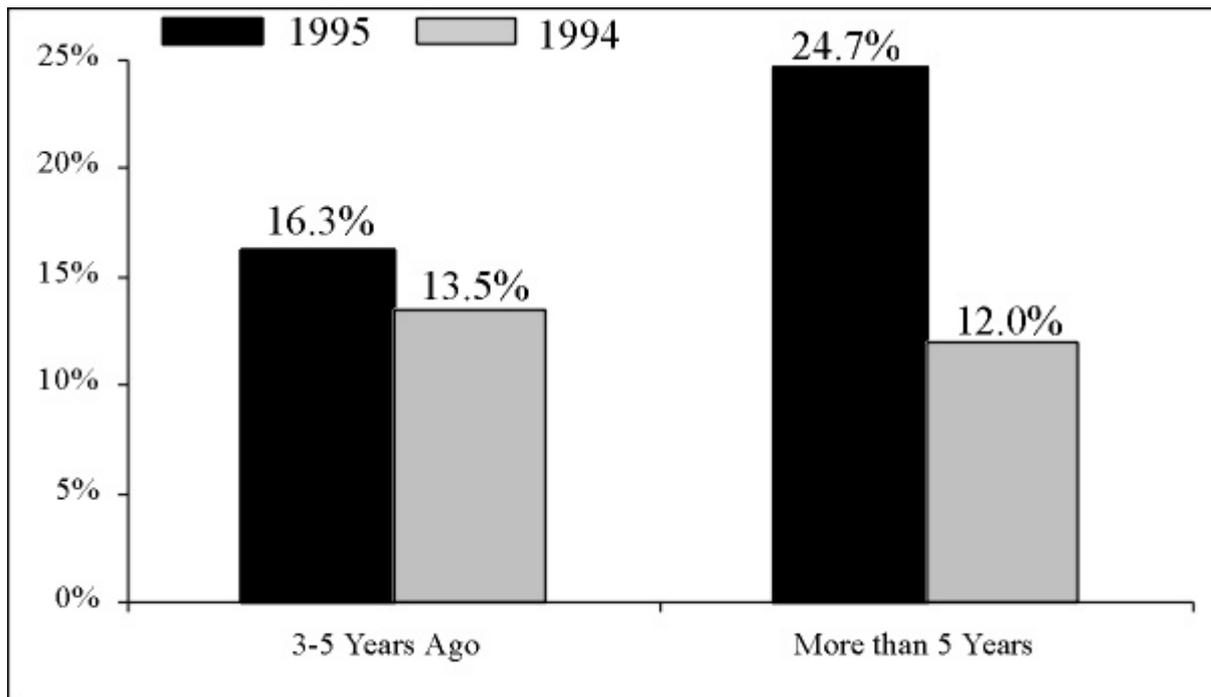
**NOTES & EXHIBITS**

**FIGURE 1: M T Z ADVERTISING TRACKING**

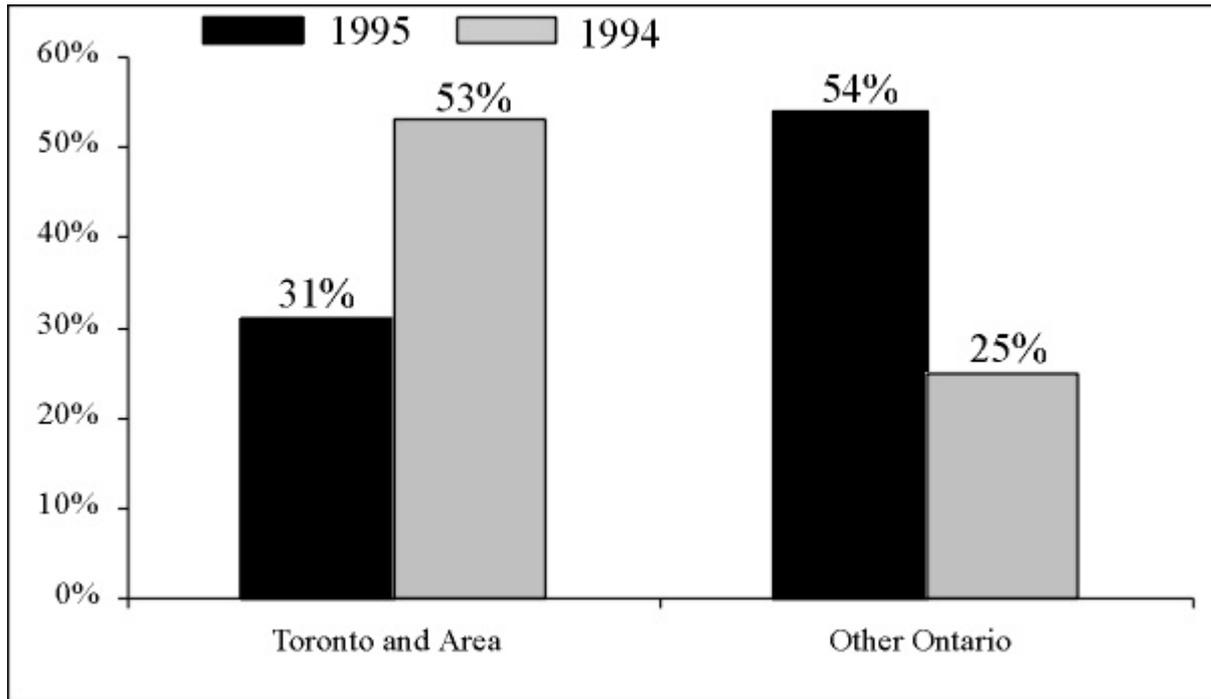


Based on 1995 on site visitor survey

**FIGURE 2: M T Z TIME SINCE LAST VISIT**



**FIGURE 3: M T Z RESIDENCE OF VISITORS**



**FIGURE 4: M T Z 1995 REVENUE AND ATTENDANCE VERSUS 1994**

