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Building on **SUCCESS** in 2025!

By Sheila Wewers

President, ZAG

**Associate Director of Retail Operations,
Garden Safari Gifts Como Park Zoo and Conservatory**



For many of us, 2024 combined the vision and impact we have on our business, creating success in many ways: sales and metric increases, positive employee engagement, streamlined hiring, increased attendance, achievement of professional goals, etc.

For my organization, success in 2024 was defined by a committed staff with a love for what they do. Staff members actually came to work claiming, "I have the best job in Minnesota!" The strong sales we saw in plush, adult apparel, sensory/fidget toys, and bonsai trees would not have been possible without creating a culture where staff feels appreciated for their contribution, allowing them to take pride in and ownership of their role: prioritizing visitors. The end result was not only a win for increased sales, but a win for positive employee engagement and visitor enjoyment.

As I reflect on my organizational wins for 2024, I would like to also share some of ZAG's key successes of 2024 and our most impactful activities!



ZAG's newsletters kept our Members and Sponsors connected and informed of trends, educational topics, and national events.

ZAG hosted two fun-filled mixer events for Members and Sponsors to facilitate connections and networking in a relaxed and low-key social atmosphere.

ZAG increased participation in Member luncheons in Tennessee where Members shared what ZAG could do to best facilitate their success.

ZAG thoughtfully listened and responded to survey results, creating positive change thanks to Member and Sponsor feedback!

ZAG provided fixture replacement opportunities for two Member's institutions.

ZAG, in partnership with Show Partners and Sponsors, facilitated through scholarship opportunities the travel of 6 Members to national buying shows.

ZAG identified networking issues, assessed obstacles, and is developing ways to resolve them.

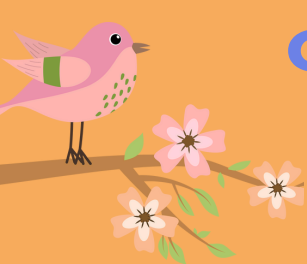


Stay tuned...building on these successes, ZAG has exciting education, scholarship, networking, and event opportunities planned for 2025!

March 1, 2025 | The Association for Merchandise Buyers of Zoos, Aquariums & Gardens | www.zaggift.com

ZAG VISITS LAS VEGAS





Conservation Psychology

By Rose Domas

Communications Officer, ZAG
Buyer, Wildlife Conservation Society



Recently I had the opportunity to take a short class at work on - **Conservation Psychology** – what it is, and how it can dictate customer retail preferences.

Conservation Psychology is the study of how humans relate to nature and how to encourage conservation. It's a field that combines psychology with environmental science to promote sustainable behaviors.

What does this study mean to the retail purchasing power of our guests? How do we capture the altruistic efforts of guests and their desire to support conservation efforts.

At the Wildlife Conservation Society – specifically the Bronx Zoo – we have a substantial part of the store dedicated to our Conservation Corner. The products sold in this section are traditional Faire Trade, recycled and/or promote reusability (IE water bottles, totes, etc.)

We have this section divided up into three categories –
Growing Up Green – toys and plush 100% recycled material

Green Your Routine – totes, water bottles, straws
Upcycled Treasure – faire trade items



The beauty of these three distinct, but common focus themes capture the conservation goals of most guests. Many guests identify with at least one of these themes and how their purchase can create a positive relationship with nature and how their efforts can directly impact the world around them.

In addition to product assortment and retail purchasing, Conservation Psychology speaks to educate our guests on nature, animals and the home in which they live. The ultimate success of Conservation Psychology is whether its research resulted in change of habits or preferences with respect to environmental sustainability.

The beauty of being a retail buyer in unique institutions like ours – is that our mission more often than not, focusses on the preservation of the natural world – and it is our job to reinforce this message – we are very fortunate Buyers 😊



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ZAG VISITS LAS VEGAS



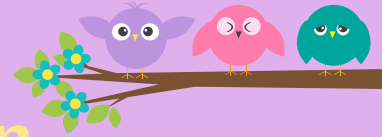


CARING about Conservation in Retail

By Sam Halligan

Treasurer, ZAG

Director of Guest Experience, Lake Superior Zoological Society



Retail is a great way to fuel your organization's mission! There are many ways to represent conversation in your stores from Fair Trade merchandise and products that give back, to upcycled displays, and even unique souvenirs like animal paintings that represent the programs your organization participates in. However, a key component to making those connections and impact successful is your frontline staff.

Fostering empathy for these conservation programs can be done in a variety of ways, and here are some of the most helpful ways we've found to work!

Conservation Bingo- This approach allows staff to engage in a way that is interactive and fun and meets your staff where they are at. Whether staff are introverts or extroverts this can be done alone or in a group and draws attention to the programs that your organization participates in. It can also be used to focus on different areas of conservation, not just retail!

Give Back Binder- Every time an item is added to our retail store that gives back or supports conservation, we add a sheet to our binder that gives a brief description of the product, the company, and information on how it gives back. This helps frontline staff answer questions by having it at their fingertips. \

Round Up Challenge- We host round up challenges monthly to encourage staff to get excited about conservation and drive more round ups for the animals at our organization. For prizes, we offer behind-the-scenes tours, animal feedings, and encounters to foster that connection to the animals that call the Zoo home and get staff excited about participating in their care!

Training- From day one we train our frontline staff on the importance of conservation and creating the connections that make a difference. We've built our training to encompass programs like SSP, AZA, SAFE, Fair Trade and more! Our trainings are offered in various learning environments so that we can create opportunities for all learning styles to participate in and have a greater impact on what knowledge they walk away with.

Creating and fostering an environment where frontline staff are encouraged to learn, care, understand, and champion your organization's mission is crucial to creating the connection within your store and beyond!

CONSERVATION				
B	I	N	G	O
Pick up 3 pieces of Garbage	Find a Solar Panel	Touch a Picnic table made out of milk jugs	Visit the PCC Garden	Find an item in the café that's compostable
A program that up-cycles, reduces or reuses	Zoo Train!	Find a pollinator garden	Find a bird safe window cling	Find a donation can
Take a picture of a local vendor we use in the café	Picture of the compost bin at ACC		Picture of a recycling bin	Download a QR code map
Take a picture on the nature trail	Picture of automatic hand soap	Find a bat house	Picture of the Creek	Find a compostable bag
Keep Talk/Feeding Sign	LED Lighting	Download iNaturalist	Biodegradable/eco safe cleaning	Picture of an ADOPT sign



UPCOMING SHOWS

ASD MARKET WEEK MARCH 9-12, 2025

THE REUNION APRIL 8-10, 2025

ASD MARKET WEEK AUGUST 3-6 2025

ROCKY MOUNTAIN APPAREL GIFT & RESORT SHOW AUGUST 4-6 2025

NY NOW AUGUST 3-5 2025

SURF EXPO SEPTEMBER 4-6, 2025

AZA ANNUAL CONFERENCE SEPTEMBER 13-18, 2025

LAS VEGAS SOUVENIR & RESORT GIFT SHOW SEPT 16-19 2025

ZAA ANNUAL CONFERENCE OCTOBER 1-4, 2025

THE GATHERING OCTOBER 7-10, 2025

IGES NOVEMBER 4-8, 2025

SMOKY MOUNTAIN GIFT SHOW NOVEMBER 6-9, 2025

OCEAN CITY GIFT SHOW NOVEMBER 13-15, 2025



Interested in joining the board?

ELECTIONS ARE RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER!!

AUGUST 1ST--CALL FOR CANDIDATES

SEPTEMBER 1ST--VOTING BEGINS

OCTOBER 1ST--VOTING CLOSSES

HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT BEING A BOARD MEMBER?

PLEASE REACH OUT AND WE WOULD BE MORE THAN HAPPY TO ANSWER THEM!





A Gift for Every Gathering: Taking Retail Beyond the Store

by Jamie Sheard
ZAG, Board Member
Associate Director of Guest Services
Elmwood Park Zoo

One way we have been able to take our Retail Experience beyond the gift shop, has been working with our Sales Team to create retail add ons for our events. Incorporating retail into events through custom gifts can elevate the experience for guests while providing a memorable takeaway. Whether it's a birthday party, wedding, or corporate event, thoughtful gifts create lasting impressions and enhance the overall atmosphere.

Birthdays

We have added hoodie plush animals, as an add on to our birthday parties, to increase sales and encourage our birthday kids to walk away with a special gift from the zoo. Having the zoo's logo on the hoodie for the plush makes it a special gift and memory of their celebration. This gift can serve as both a party favor and a cherished companion long after the event. By offering hoodie plush animals at birthday parties, hosts create an engaging retail experience. This interactive element can be a fun activity, allowing children to pick their favorite plush toy, and it adds an extra layer of excitement to the celebration.

Mugs for Coffee & Snack Bars

Incorporating custom mugs into event coffee & snack bars is another excellent way to blend retail with memorable experience. At a wedding, for example, guests can enjoy their favorite hot beverages in custom mugs that they can take home as a giveaway. This approach serves a dual purpose: it provides functional drinkware during the event and doubles as a souvenir for guests. By making coffee bars interactive, where guests can fill their mugs and mingle, the overall experience becomes more engaging and enjoyable.



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Zoo and Aquarium Buyer's Group



A Gift for Every Gathering: Taking Retail Beyond the Store

Tote Bags or Pillows as Guest Books



Weddings, in particular, offer a wonderful opportunity to incorporate custom gifts in a creative way. Instead of a traditional guest book, we began upselling a custom tote bag or pillow featuring an illustration of the wedding venue in the zoo. Guests are invited to sign their names and write messages using fabric markers, transforming the item into a beautiful keepsake for the couple. This approach not only provides a unique alternative to the conventional guest book but also results in a stunning piece of art that couples can display in their home. Each signature and message adds a

personal touch, making the tote or pillow a cherished reminder of the special day. Additionally, guests will appreciate the opportunity to contribute to something meaningful, further enhancing their connection to the event.

Conclusion

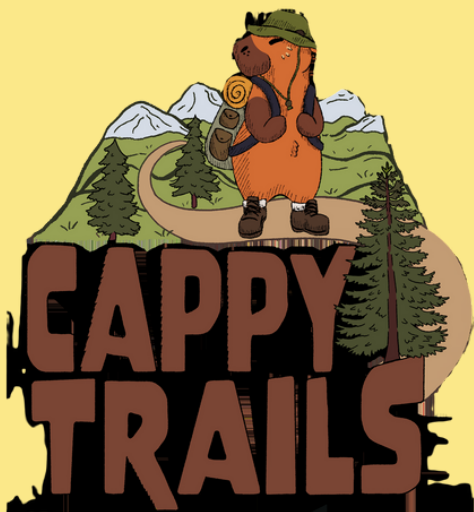
Incorporating custom gifts into events has significantly enhanced the overall experience for guests while creating lasting memories. From hoodie plush animals to personalized mugs and custom tote bags or pillows, these retail items not only serve functional purposes but also act as delightful keepsakes. By integrating unique gifts into events, hosts can create engaging and unforgettable experiences that guests will cherish for years to come. So, consider these creative options for your next event and make retail a special part of the celebration!

Don't Forget to find our ZAG Sponsors at the shows! ZAG plates will be displayed in their booths.



THANK YOU, SPONSORS!!

WELCOME NEW ZAG SPONSORS!



Cappy Trails is an online nature store specializing in all things wildlife through illustrated products that give back. We aim to express wildlife conservation through vibrant colors, playfulness and a positive outlook with our stickers, pins, apparel and more. Between the artist and her animal ambassadors, we want to bring wildlife preservation and education closer to home that can resonate with all ages!



At Shubug we believe the stuff you put on your skin to protect yourself from bugs shouldn't just be effective but should actually be safe. We're here to provide a much-needed effective, healthy, and light-hearted alternative so people can get out and have fun in nature. "Work and play all day with a single spray."





Buoy is a mission-driven, high-design company that makes all its products from 100% recycled ocean-bound plastic. Our instantly iconic bottle won the 2024 Red Dot award in the category Best of the Best and is carried by the MOMA design store. Our plastic is collected from rivers and streams in south Mexico then brought to the US for processing and manufacturing. If you credit us with the carbon impact of the plastic collected, each bottle is carbon negative. But mostly, it's a cool bottle.



Fahlo partners with conservation nonprofits to support their work protecting endangered and at-risk species, preserving habitats, and promoting peaceful human-animal coexistence. By pairing thoughtfully-designed bracelets and plush with the ability to track real animals on an interactive map, they've pioneered a uniquely special way to save wildlife.



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They will make a fantastic addition to your retail shop.
Join us in our bird conservation movement!

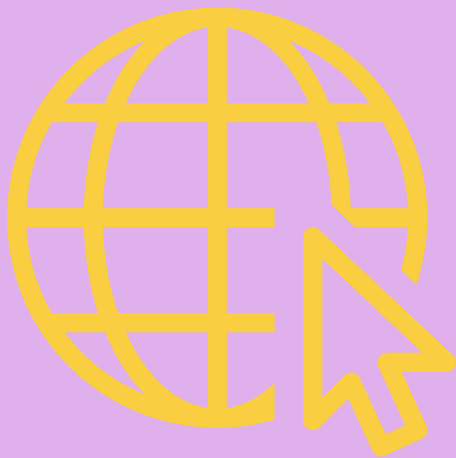
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Charles Products Inc. is a global supplier that provides custom gifts, apparel, and souvenirs for clients around the world. With over 70 years of experience, we are your one-stop souvenir shop featuring the largest selection of responsibly sourced top-quality products in the industry. Our world-class art team utilizes trending designs and styles to create custom masterpieces for any attraction or event! We aim to be your creative retail partner that helps make memories last a lifetime!



VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT
WWW.ZAGGIFT.COM

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special exhibits, adoption events or parties, we provide the perfect
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We also offer full custom options in both stuffable or fully stuffed and finished
plush. Let us help you bring your plush ideas to life with our diverse offerings!



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NATIVE NORTHWEST

ART BY INDIGENOUS ARTISTS



Native Northwest's story began over 40 years ago with a social worker, a rack of postcards, and the vision of building everyday connection to Indigenous cultures. The values behind our brand originate with the founding reason for the company: Native artists and cultures, designed by Indigenous artists, built on a foundation of respect and authenticity. We tie authentic designs to bold, new concepts where artists can tell the stories of their communities and cultures through their distinct designs.

Native Northwest products are guided by the following principles:

1. 100% of the art featured on Native Northwest products is designed by Indigenous artists
2. All artists have provided consent and contractual permission for their art to be featured on Native Northwest products
3. Artist names are acknowledged on all product packaging
4. Cultural traditions are honoured by acknowledging cultural on product packaging
5. Artists are paid in fees and royalties

Each of our exchanges, from the sourcing and compensation of Indigenous artists, to our staff and merchants, are part of a lifelong relationship between Indigenous cultures and the communities we pledge to honour and respect. Connect with us on Instagram and Facebook to follow our story.



Sevierville, TN | November 4-6, 2025
Pigeon Forge, TN | November 5-8, 2025

2025 SHOW HIGHLIGHTS

To get more information about any of the items below, visit IGES.US

Exclusive Pavilions at Sevierville



Sustainable



Made in America



Toy + On Trend



Campground

Onsite Perks



Win daily at the Swag Station



Enter daily to win a cash prize!



Sustainability Fireside Chat & Tour

ZAG Lounge + Annual Meeting Luncheon - hosted by IGES

Join your fellow ZAG members as we celebrate Opening Day at Pigeon Forge with a delicious lunch hosted by IGES. In addition, there will be an exclusive ZAG Lounge that will be open to ZAG Members every day of the show in Pigeon Forge, Meeting Room N3.

Luncheon Details

Date: Wednesday, November 5, 2025

Time: 12:30pm

Location: Meeting Room N3, LeConte Center at Pigeon Forge

Scan the QR code to receive an email reminder when registration opens for the 2025 show or visit iges.us/reg-reminder

If you have any IGES buyer related questions please contact:
Lynn Schulte | Attendee Relations Manager
(678) 982-5107, Lynn.Schulte@emeraldix.com





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