

Utilizing Wish Lists to Boost Animal Enrichment Programs at Milwaukee County Zoo

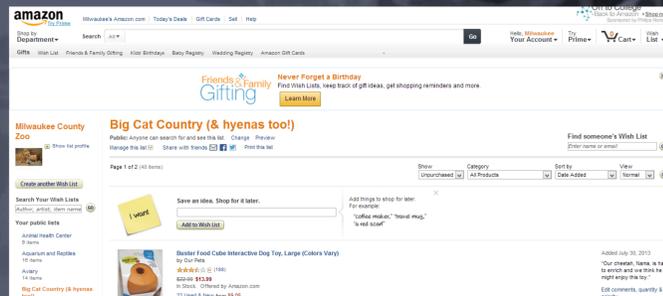


Amanda Ista
 amanda.ista@milwcnty.com
 Milwaukee County Zoo
 Zoo Keeper – Big Cat Country



ABSTRACT:

Most zoos' budgets are tight and finding extra money for enrichment items can be tough. Drawing from inspiration of the ideas of several other zoos, the Milwaukee County Zoo began to utilize an Amazon.com® wish list to help with some of these costs. In early 2013, keepers found that smaller toys were needed to use during socialization sessions with a pair of young jaguar cubs. By creating a wish list that was linked to the live webcams, donations of enrichment items for the cubs poured in and the lists were soon expanded zoo-wide. In less than four months, nearly 300 items were purchased for the Zoo's enrichment programs with all areas benefitting. This poster will examine the creation, management and promotion of the wish list. It will also discuss how it was used as an educational tool to share information regarding the animals' natural histories and to connect the public to the animals not only at the zoo but also with their wild counterparts.



Tips for Creating Your Own Lists

- Make sure items are approved for use before listing them.
- Amazon does not send the name and address of a buyer automatically; you have to specifically mention in the list's "About You" section to include your address if you want a thank you sent.
- Look at other zoos' and animal organizations' lists for ideas (don't forget to search their lists for what has been purchased also).
- Even though you can add items from other websites, it can be hard for buyers to navigate those sites so try to look for items on Amazon first before going off site.
- Be specific in the comments section. Buyers love to read about the animals and this is your chance to convince them that this item is important for the animals and also to educate them on enrichment and the animals.
- Make sure your stock room or main office area is aware of the purchases and work with them on how to get them to the correct areas.
- Use the items as intended; buyers do like to see their items used and will visit the zoo just for the chance to see a specific animal play with the item they bought.
- Try to link the lists up with a webcam so buyers who don't live in the area can see the animals they are buying for and see the items being used.

Creation

A proposal was presented to senior animal staff to try out the list specifically for enrichment items for the jaguar cubs. Once the jaguar cub list was tested, the list was expanded so each animal area had its own list. Signing up to Amazon.com® is free and easy. We created an email address specifically for the list. Information about each area's animals and a mailing address unique to each area was added (i.e. Milwaukee County Zoo – Big Cats verses Milwaukee County Zoo – Pachyderms). This was done so the stock room would know which area the items were to be delivered to. Approved enrichment items were added and comments were filled out for each item. The comments section was used not only to tell buyers who the items would be going to but also to discuss enrichment and its importance in the lives of the animals. Whenever possible, the natural history of the animal was related back to the goal of that enrichment item.

Management

A team was created to help manage the lists so that each area had a liaison to make additions and changes to the list. Lists were checked on a regular basis to know which items had been bought and areas were given a heads up to be expecting an item. A master spreadsheet was used to track items bought and estimated costs. Thank yous were sent to buyers who wished to include their name and address with the gift.

Promotion

The initial jaguar list was attached to the webcams that were on the jaguar holding dens. During cub socialization sessions, many of the items were used so buyers might be able to see their toy with the cubs. More durable items were able to be left in with the cubs. Once lists for all the areas were completed, promotion via the Zoo's website and Facebook were started. Birthdays of animals were highlighted to draw attention to the lists and signs were hung around the zoo promoting the list. Articles in member's newsletters were also published and the lists were mentioned in keeper talks and tours.

Results

Within the first four months, over 300 items were purchased for the animals at the zoo. By month six of the list, over 450 items totaling an estimated \$9000 have been purchased for the animals at Milwaukee County Zoo. The Zoo has been able to use items that may not normally be purchased through an enrichment budget and also has engaged the public in the use of enrichment. Most importantly, the animals are active and displaying natural behaviors with some very unique items.

