

The Virginia Zoo Africa Exhibit

Overview

The Virginia Zoo is located on 53 acres adjacent to Norfolk's Lafayette Park and bordered by the Lafayette River. The Zoo was established in 1901 as a City Park. Accredited in 1974 by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association, the Zoo has over 375 animals and features one of the finest Africa habitats in the country. The 8-acre Africa exhibit is aptly named Okavango Delta, because it is representative of the actual Okavango Delta region in Botswana, Africa.

This \$15.8 million project was the largest expansion in the Zoo's history and different from anything they had done. It was the first continent in a master plan that will represent five.

The Challenge

Being a non-profit organization and therefore having a small marketing budget, the first goal was to change the public's perception of the zoo and to dispel the notion that it lacked quality exhibits and generate interest in the new Africa Exhibit.

The Approach

The Meridian Group created an advertising campaign using print and television entitled "It's Big It's Africa Big".

Because of the tight budget, The Meridian Group encouraged The Virginia Zoo to take the allotted television budget and create two high quality :30 spots. The Meridian Group then worked with the zoo to solicit the help of several local television stations to play the spots as public service announcements. Many of the TV stations complied and donated the airtime.

The Meridian Group also developed a dynamic print campaign and worked with local publications to give the zoo substantial discounts for placing the ads.

The Results

The campaign was a large success with 30,000 people attending the zoo the first day the exhibit was open to the public. Since the opening of the \$15.8 million Africa exhibit two years ago, yearly attendance is now up to 303,000.