



Aza

BY BAXTER URIST, CEO ZAMWORKS!

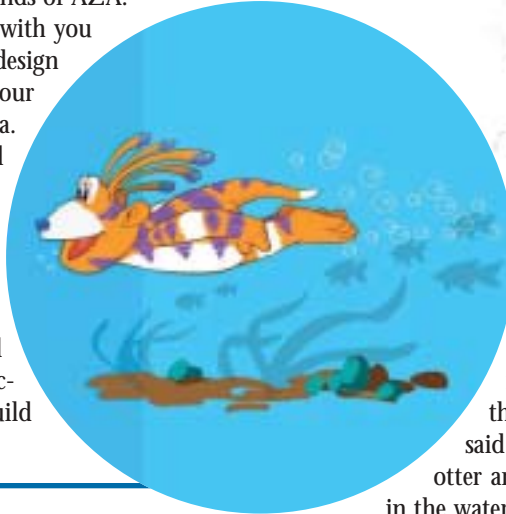
Welcome to the exciting new Aza and his world! Whether Aza is greeting his friend the polar bear, swimming with the fish in the South Pacific, jumping with a kangaroo down under or migrating with birds in North America...he is having a ball learning about nature. Whatever you call Aza—"spokescritter", "mascot", "friend" or "character"—it is wonderful to welcome him to the AZA. The cover of this issue of *Communiqué* is the official introduction of the new Aza to the membership and friends of AZA.

Today I would like to share with you the highlights of the character design process, research results and our roll-out plans for your new Aza. Throughout the article I will share various designs that were developed along the way so you can get a feel for the creative process we went through to develop the very best character possible for the AZA and therefore the best possible character for our shared mission to build awareness with the public.

We named the expressive antlers "plantlers" since they are part of his expression and yet the plantlers always seem to be moving like plants in the wind or seaweed with the current. The talented artist who designed this Aza used an otter, tiger and a lizard as his



Fig. 2
Swimming Aza



inspiration. We asked that Aza be able to help kids learn about all animals both in and out of the water. "No problem," said the artist, "Aza is part otter and loves to swim and play in the water."

We all felt that we had the makings of a fun, unique character, but we had to test "Plantler Pal" against our current Aza and other characters to make sure he appealed to kids.

A Resounding Success! - Through the AZA's National Awareness Campaign Committee and AZA Board of Directors, we reduced the favorites to four characters (including the original Aza). We then produced four 30-second spots and researched the characters via the internet among our target audience: kids 6 to 11 years old and their parents.

The only variables were the characters themselves—voice, motion and message was the same for each of the characters tested. The Aza you see on the *Communiqué* cover beat all the other characters by a significant margin. As you can see from the side bar research summary, we had a resounding success with kids and moms. At the suggestion of Bill Davis and the AZA Board, we also researched the characters with AZA members as well. Some of you may recall the internet study last year. The results were the same overwhelming appeal of the Aza character



Fig. 1

A New Character Is Born! - As many of you know, we have gone through an extensive process over the last ten months to re-invent, re-design and re-launch Aza. Over the winter we had over 50 different Aza characters designed! One of the characters seemed to leap off the page with fun and excitement, a character we code-named "Plantler Pal" (see Fig. 1, the first drawing of Aza on a log).

INTRODUCING





kids loved. Lastly, just make sure we had a winning character, we also researched among toy, licensing and retail professionals in the kids business. They loved the character as well. So we know we have a very appealing Aza.

What's Next For Aza? - Since the successful testing results, we have been working with the National Awareness Team refining the character for the many ways we are going to have Aza interact with kids and their families. We are in the process of testing joint logos and developing the following key components, which will all be completed by the AZA Annual Conference in New Orleans in September:

- New comic strips
- Joint logo treatments for member usage
- Style Guide for members to use at their local institutions
- New Aza on AZA's web site

The entire process of reinventing Aza with the National Awareness Campaign Committee, your leaders and more than 75 professionals from the industry was itself a tremendous success – and taught all of us what we can accomplish when we have open minds, open ears and open hearts. AZA and Aza have so much to do, we can't wait to get started.

Come to New Orleans, meet Aza, and get the Aza materials so your institution can start to use Aza to help build excitement and awareness for the AZA. ■



OUTSTANDING RESEARCH RESULTS FOR WINNING AZA CHARACTER

Likeability Scale: 70% of kids liked the character, both boys and girls.

Overall Rating: Just under half of kids and just over half of moms rating it “excellent” or “very good.”

Descriptors: “Friendly” is the descriptor most commonly chosen by both kids and moms. “Different,” “Smart” and “Interesting” were also chosen.

Agree/Disagree Statements: 70% of the kids and moms agreed with the statements about the character's knowing, caring and being able to teach about nature.

Desire to See More of the Characters: Almost half of kids and moms want to see this character again.

Where Respondents Would Prefer to See the Character Again: Television and the Internet are the overwhelming favorites, but most wanted to meet the character at their local zoo or aquarium.

Appeal to Zoo and Aquarium Attendees: Both groups preferred “Plantler Pal.”