

## STRATHMORE SUSTAINABILITY PORTFOLIO

The new Strathmore Sustainability Portfolio features the inspiring stories of six companies that are pioneers in environmental and social stewardship. It is intended to empower designers to initiate their own sustainable initiatives at work, at home and in communities across the country.

MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM FOUNDED 1984 MONTEREY BAY, CALIFORNIA 450 EMPLOYEES, 800 VOLUNTEERS  
WWW.MBAYAQ.ORG

One of the country's most prestigious aquariums. The aquarium's Seafood Watch Program helps consumers and businesses make purchasing choices that are healthier for ocean wildlife and the environment.

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START: ANN WILLOUGHBY'S INTERVIEW WITH JIM ALES, DESIGN DIRECTOR, MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM

*Ann: Jim, tell us about the Seafood Watch Program.*

**Jim:** We put on an exhibit back in 1997 called Fishing for Solutions. It was an awareness campaign about fisheries around the world and how bad fishing practices were depleting fish stocks drastically, especially larger animals, like tunas and dolphins. Some of them were depleted by about 90 percent. So this is a real, real issue and we decided to build special exhibits just around this awareness campaign. What's interesting is that our visitors began asking questions about what kind of seafood they should be buying and eating. In response, we developed our Seafood Watch Pocket Guide. "Who's going to carry around a little card about fish?" was my first reaction. I was skeptical to say the least, but the project had a meaningful, timely goal: to inspire ocean conservation. It quickly became important for us to make this thing work. I'm both pleased and amazed at how successful our Seafood Watch program has become. Public interest was immediate and we quickly invested in the program, adding staff—administrators, science researchers, writers and support staff. You put all these resources together and you begin to understand the cost and commitment of what we're doing.

*Ann: So, what was your role?*

**Jim:** We weren't the first to develop a seafood conservation guide. Other conservation institutions had similar programs, but they were complicated and somewhat confusing. Our challenge was to organize and clarify complicated research and instructions and deliver it as simply as humanly possible, so that the consumer can pick it up and immediately understand what it is, why it's important to them and how easy it is to take action. The entire program design follows a simple and unthreatening tone. **Since the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch program was launched, it has been by far the most successful seafood awareness campaign in the country. In fact, this year our target goal is to distribute 3 million pocket guides, and we will achieve that.**

*Ann: Do you have any newer stats on how the awareness is changing people's habits?*

**Jim:** We began distributing cards for regional seafood here in Monterey and Northern California. Several institutions asked if they could distribute cards. So we brought them on as partners. A Seafood Watch partnership is simple. If you raise your hand and say, "I want to be part of this", we'll produce a quantity of cards for you with your logo on the back. Funding comes from our Foundation grant. Our non profit partners are not charged for their pocket guides.

*Ann: Give us an example of some of your partners.*

**Jim:** Our first group of partners came from zoos and aquariums in the U.S. Then institutions like the National Marine Sanctuary and Coral Reef Alliance signed on, followed by universities and several marine science organizations. What's been really exciting is that we're now signing up corporations, grocery chains and related food service industries. This is a direct result from our consumer campaign

and the pocket guides. Seafood sustainability has become a very public issue. Our corporate partners have displayed a refreshing sincerity and their support for the program has been genuine. These partners are some of the largest buyers and sellers of seafood in the world. Using Seafood Watch recommendations at this level makes an immediate, positive impact on our oceans.

**Ann:** *I've been a card-carrying member since the first TED celebration event at the Aquarium. I did feel a little guilty eating sushi in front of the fish in the tanks. I love that the Aquarium serves beautifully prepared food.*

**Jim:** We believe that food trends and food-buying trends are driven more and more by influential chefs and restaurateurs. For instance, monkfish was a real hot item a few years back. Every time you went to a restaurant, monkfish was offered on the menu, and it turns out, monkfish are endangered. How do you create alternative trends without alienating your core audience? Our solution was to create "Cooking For Solutions", our own food event that brings celebrity chefs together with the purpose of promoting sustainable seafood. It's a three-day food fest, culminating in our Evening Gala, where chefs set up cooking stations throughout the aquarium serving recipes developed from our "Good Choices" recommendations. Their support, influence and ability to set new standards have been instrumental for the program. It generates a great deal of media visibility, and at the same time develops lasting relationships within the culinary industry. It's also a great night out.

**Ann:** *This Strathmore portfolio has many important ideas and examples that support what you are sharing today. Basically the message is this: Designers and corporate leaders, sustainability is more than a passing trend. Look at all of the choices companies in this portfolio are making to become more sustainable. Notice the rich business and social networks and partnerships they are forming together. Is sustainability a part of your culture and strategy? What sustainable choices can you easily make? One choice is to support sustainable businesses like the ones in this portfolio who are making products and experiences. One simple choice is to specify the newly reformulated Strathmore Script, made from 30% to 100% post-consumer waste and wind energy, for your identity and important corporate communications.*

**Jim:** The aquarium has sought and supported alternative paper solutions for many years. What's encouraging is that companies are beginning to respond to the demands for responsibly produced products. Strathmore's new initiative is a good example.

**Ann:** *For the Seafood Watch Brand, do you have a standards manual?*

**Jim:** There is a great deal of equity in the Monterey Bay Aquarium brand. Our aquarium visual program has been recently updated, and the strategy was to fold the Seafood Watch program into the brand identity. When it comes to a standards manual, outside of protecting the basics, I'm not big on regimentation. Subtle shifts occur naturally and I'm not interested in suppressing them. I believe in the energy and emotion of design and I want our audience to feel that energy. We are consistent with the quality of our communications and that commitment to quality keeps us focused.

**Ann:** *How do you extend the Monterey Bay Aquarium brand?*

**Jim:** The aquarium has been an extraordinary success since the day it opened. Many of our exhibits are never-been-done-before "inventions." There is a great deal of risk taking here, with some flops and skinned elbows along the way. But always inspiring. Over the years, we've built a hard earned public trust and we take great care and responsibility to nurture that growth. People trust that we do the right thing. Our conservation programs mirror that spirit of invention and trust. Seafood Watch has become an extension of the aquarium's commitment to conservation education at a time when it is most needed. When I travel around the country people say, "Oh, I have one of your pocket guides," or "I've heard about your Seafood Watch Program." It's become a natural brand extension. It wasn't planned that way, it just happened.

**Ann:** *How many times have you had to redesign the regional cards for new information?*

**Jim:** Our research staff continually updates information. We now have seven regional cards and 50 something partners. To be cost effective, we limit press runs to twice a year, creating large runs, which drive unit cost way down.

**Ann:** *How long have you been at the aquarium?*

**Jim:** I'm entering my 10th year. It's been a good fit. To be engaged in meaningful work at this level is incredibly rewarding. There's just this really positive connection with people, and I'm really proud to be a part of that.

**Ann:** *Well, it shows.*

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END: ANN WILLOUGHBY'S INTERVIEW WITH JIM ALES, DESIGN DIRECTOR, MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM