



From Non-Profit to Retail Startup: How the World Wildlife Fund is using eCommerce for Good



CUSTOMER STORIES WRITTEN BY ANDREA ZOELLNER

As we learn more about the environmental impact of the clothing industry, many online retailers are cleaning up their manufacturing practices to be more ethical and sustainable. In the case of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), being kind to the earth came first and has been driving their initiatives since. And it's no different for their recent foray into eCommerce, which reflects their commitment to promoting eco-friendly choices thanks to a well-designed product and an [equally slick online shop](#).

More Than Just a Store



Jason Liebenberg is the Creative Director at [Tenzing Agency](#), the team that built the World Wildlife Fund store. "Like all contemporary NGOs, the WWF faces challenges when it comes to funding," says Jason. "Whereas in the past, people would simply donate, they now expect something in return beyond the feeling of satisfaction that comes from giving to a good cause."

For that reason, the World Wildlife Fund launched the technical apparel project, an opportunity to push eco-friendly and

sustainability goals by creating high-tech, highly-desirable apparel that meets the needs of their supporters and the environment at large. Every sale of the jacket goes to fund initiatives of the WWF.

By developing a single product first, the Black Leopard jacket with iterations for men, women, and children, WWF was able to refine the product design to match the lifestyle and taste of their community. Everything from the fabric to the manufacturing had to meet their strict requirements for quality and sustainability.

According to [their catalog](#), their manufacturing partner is a leader in the South African clothing industry with a factory that boasts impressive sustainability credentials such as a solar-powered plant, water-saving technology, and low-energy consumption lighting. In fact, they recently won the LEAN Performance Improvement Award from the South African Department of Trade and Industry and the Cape Clothing and Textile Cluster.



The Startup Approach to Design

Although the World Wildlife Fund is nearly 60 years old, Jason and his team decided to treat this eCommerce project like a full-fledged startup venture rather than revamp one of WWF's existing digital properties.

Only offering one product did create a unique set of challenges and according to Jason, the MVP approach is an extreme version of one most eCommerce startups take. "In order to make it work, we had to effectively leverage the WWF's brand as well as using strategic storytelling and people-based marketing techniques to ensure that marketing for the store reached the people most likely to visit and buy from the store."

The startup approach also informed the decision to use the highly-scalable WooCommerce and WordPress combo, since the WWF store plans to grow its product line and are gearing up for a global roll-out, which would see the store being used by millions of people around the globe.

"We needed to use a platform that would allow us to develop the site rapidly with the ability to scale at ease, potentially becoming a multisite network," says Jason. "WooCommerce and WordPress made sense because of the out-the-box features as well as allowing us to develop as many custom features which we would need going forward – the custom functionality possibilities are virtually endless when it comes to WooCommerce".

The WWF store's checkout page

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Built for Fast Checkouts

Tenzing Agency recently joined Hoorah, an independent Digital Media Agency to round out Hoorah's eCommerce offering with an innovative approach to backend development that enables vital business focused integrations with product fulfilment and distribution networks.

Jason and his team custom developed the theme from the ground up to best suit the needs of the project. "Our studio is very focused from a design and UI point of view and so after doing a lot of user research and prototyping for about three weeks in Sketch and Marvel, we began developing."

Through their research, they found that almost all of WWF's current customers and supporters would be shopping on the site from their mobile devices. Ensuring the theme was lightweight and didn't load any unnecessary modules and page builder scripts that are a burden with many third-party themes was absolutely key. They also limited the number of plugins they used to these select few:

- [Jetpack](#), a must for optimizing WordPress.
- [SVG Support](#) to ensure safe and simple SVG handling for clarity across retina and non-retina displays.
- Advanced Custom Fields Pro to go beyond the standard available fields & WYSIWYG editor to support the content the WWF store needed.
- [WooCommerce Print Invoices & Packing Slips](#) to create clear and concise invoices for the customer with custom templates to be sent in order emails.
- [Ultimate Member Pro](#) to connect with the large corporate support network at WWF. Ultimate Member provides an easy and quick solution to create a new user group with predefined conditions for corporate customers ordering in bulk.
- Custom [Aramex Shipping](#) Integration to manage the partnership with Aramex to hold the stock and distribute directly from their warehouses. This custom integration logs a sale in their system and creates a waybill and gets the order out for delivery.



Bigger and Better

Now that they have a successful foundation, Jason is confident the World Wildlife Fund's store will be able to scale and grow to accommodate new markets and products. Even now, they are implementing changes to improve the experience and better align with the needs of the non-profit.

"A strategic approach to simplifying CTA's and key messaging has proven to be successful in the customer shopping journey on the website," says Jason. "We learned that although customers do appreciate that the profits from the sale of every Black Leopard jacket will help WWF fund various initiatives, they wanted to personally allocate their purchase profits. This was evident in a sales increase following our audit of a 'which initiative do you most value' dropdown selection on the women's page, just before the shopper adds the product to their basket."

Still, his favorite part of the project is knowing that his team has the ability to influence sustainable clothing manufacturing on a global stage. "That's very exciting for us. We've learnt so much around the end-to-end manufacturing process through to the logistics of courier companies."