



# How to Promote Shelter Dogs for Adoption

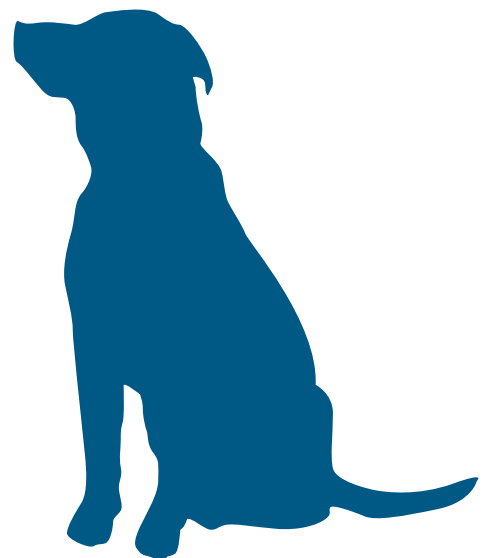
[bestfriends.org](http://bestfriends.org)



## How to Promote Shelter Dogs for Adoption

This two-part action kit provides resources and examples of ways to promote shelter dogs in order to increase their chances of adoption. In Part 1, we give creative ideas and advice for promoting individual dogs to help get them into good new homes. Highlighting the unique characteristics of a dog can make all the difference in getting that animal adopted. Part 2 offers practical tips for putting on adoption events. Holding adoption events periodically can really help increase a shelter's adoption rate.

This kit shows how you and your community can make a big difference in the lives of shelter animals, especially pit-bull-terrier-type dogs, who often need some extra help getting adopted because of the stereotypes and myths that surround them. By promoting these dogs for adoption, you can educate potential adopters and show them what wonderful companion animals these dogs can be.



## Part 1: Promoting Individual Dogs for Adoption

This section gives tips and ideas for showcasing individual dogs to improve their chances of adoption. Promoting individual dogs for adoption doesn't have to be restricted to bringing them to adoption events. You'll also want to use some of the following ideas for promoting dogs at the shelter, over the Internet and when taking adoptable dogs out into the community.

### 1. Make sure the dogs look snazzy.

When you have a job interview, you know it's important to look your best. The way you present yourself can make or break the deal. Presenting a dog as an adoption prospect is similar to a job interview, so make sure the dogs are clean, well groomed and look their best, whether you're taking photographs or video of them, or showing them at an adoption event. The dogs will feel better, and that will come across in their demeanor. Also, whenever adoptable dogs are out in public, make sure they're dressed in colorful "adopt me" vests or bandanas to let everyone know they're looking for homes.

### 2. Create doggie calling cards and flyers.

Calling cards and flyers are another way to showcase individual dogs and promote them for adoption. You can create calling cards yourself and print them out on card stock, available at office supply stores. On the cards, include the dog's photo, gender, age, shelter ID number, the name of shelter, the address, an email address, and a phone number. (See the resources section at the end of this document for an example of a doggie calling card.) The cards can be handed out when volunteers are out in public with the dogs. You can also place the cards at the shelter reception area, plus carry them with you so you can hand them out wherever you go.

Another fun idea is to create an individual flyer for each dog. Include several photos and a compelling adoption blurb. If you don't have a color printer, copy places such as Kinko's and OfficeMax can print your flyers for a fee. See the resources section for an example of this type of flyer. The flyers can be posted at the shelter and any locations where there are community bulletin boards (e.g., supermarkets, Laundromats). You can also ask local businesses if you can put up the flyers in their store windows.





### 3. Use appealing photos and videos.

It's true that a picture speaks a thousand words. Photos and videos of dogs looking happy, giving kisses and/or showing good manners can really show off their personalities and help them get adopted.

Since images help people make a connection to a dog, you will want to get good-quality photographs. Color photos are best. When you take photos, use a background that's in contrast to the animal, to highlight the dog's best features. Keep the photos simple and clear with few background distractions, though you might want to include a person in the photo to show the scale and size of the dog.

Before snapping the photos, take time to help the dog be as calm and relaxed as possible so that the images do not show a dog looking anxious or scared. You can use squeaky toys or

treats to get the dog's attention. Ideally, the photos you choose for your flyers or website should have the eyes of the dog looking directly at you.

Adoption videos on websites such as YouTube and Petfinder are proving to be not only popular, but also effective in finding homes for pets — and it's free to upload videos to those sites. As with photos, you'll want to get good-quality video footage to show off the dogs to best advantage. Creating video is a great way to highlight a dog's social skills by filming him interacting politely and playfully with both people and other dogs.

For more tips on shooting appealing photos and videos, see "Perfecting Profiles" in the resources section. For examples of some fun videos, go to these websites:

[video.bestfriends.org/promos/m/adopt/default.aspx](http://video.bestfriends.org/promos/m/adopt/default.aspx)

[www.cityofrc.us/cityhall/animalcare/available/dogs.asp](http://www.cityofrc.us/cityhall/animalcare/available/dogs.asp)

[www.familydogsnewlife.org](http://www.familydogsnewlife.org)

(click on Piteo Programming under About Us)

### 4. Write compelling adoption bios.

To go with your adoptables' photos, you'll need compelling adoption bios. Potential adopters are attracted first by a photo, but then they'll want to know more about the dog. Keep the language in the bios simple and conversational; avoid animal welfare jargon or technical terms whenever possible.

You'll need a punchy first sentence — something that will grab the attention of prospective adopters. The tendency is to give a list of details: "Joey is a five-year-old neutered male pittie/Lab mix with white markings, up-to-date on shots." This is useful information, but it isn't compelling. Instead, try to capture something unique and endearing about Joey, and express

that feeling in the first sentence of his bio. For example: “He may look like a tough guy, but Joey is actually a champion snuggler.”

Once you’ve grabbed potential adopters’ attention, you can share other information such as age, breed, tendencies, quirks and challenges. Focus on the positives first. Here’s an example of how not to do it: “Joey unfortunately has leash reactivity, which means he behaves offensively toward other dogs when he’s on walks. He can live peaceably with other dogs, as long as they’re submissive.”

Here’s a way to emphasize the positives without ignoring the negatives: “Joey is that rare sort of pooch whom a child can climb all over and hug. He’s so gentle and sweet around everyone. Well, except other dogs when he’s out on a walk. He’s not so good with other pooches when he’s on leash.”

You can include restrictions, but be gentle and choose your words carefully. For example, instead of saying “Andy must go to a home without children,” which could scare off even a childless couple, put a positive spin on it: “Jo-Jo’s such a goofy bundle of energy that he might be a bit too much for small children.”

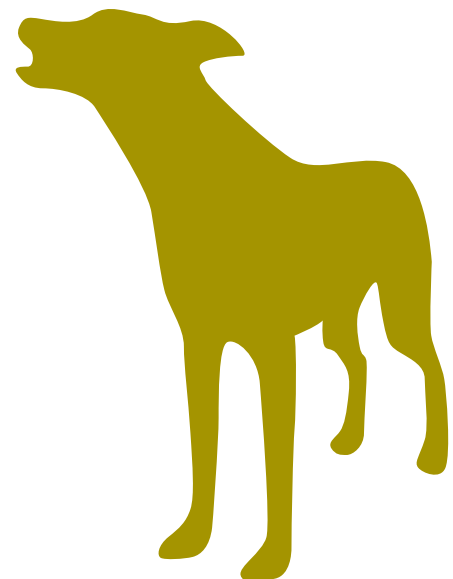
At the end of the bios, remind people how much you want to hear from them, and include contact information (a phone number and email address). For more tips on writing adoption blurbs, see “Perfecting Profiles” in the resources section.

### **5. Get the dogs out into the community.**

The more a homeless dog is seen, the better his chances are of getting adopted. To help educate the public about shelter dogs and promote your adoptable dogs, look for op-

portunities in your community to set up a table at different types of events. Ask about bringing adoptable dogs to sports events, car shows, parades and farmers’ markets. Don’t forget to dress the dogs in “adopt me” vests or bandanas. Be sure to have a banner made with the name of your group or shelter and the website address. If you aren’t allowed to bring dogs to the event, set up a table anyway and hand out your custom-made flyers about adoptable dogs and the dogs’ business cards.

If your shelter has days when it is closed to the public, that’s a perfect time to get the dogs out on walks in public areas like parks or on hiking trails where they can meet people and be seen. Besides giving the dogs more exposure, these walkabouts are excellent socialization opportunities for the dogs, which ultimately will help them get into homes.



## Part 2: Putting on Adoption Events

Adoption events don't have to cost a lot of money or involve a huge investment of time. To pull off a successful event, though, you need to do some planning. The goal is to bring the dogs to the people in a festive, fun atmosphere so you can increase the dogs' exposure to the public and better their chances of adoption. A successful adoption event (one that draws a crowd and results in many adoptions) benefits all the animals at the shelter because it publicizes your efforts, thereby encouraging even more adoptions.

### Here are some steps for holding a successful event:

- Establish a catchy theme for your event.
- Decide where and when to hold the event.
- Recruit volunteers to help before, during and after the event.
- Fundraise to cover event costs.
- Publicize the event.
- Promote the event through social networking.
- Showcase the dogs as individuals at the event.

### 1. Establish a fun theme for your event.

The first step is to establish a specific theme to promote your event. You can use the time of year to help inspire a theme: seasons, holidays (e.g., Valentine's Day, Halloween), sports events (e.g., the Super Bowl, the World Series) or school events (e.g., homecoming, prom night). You can also use TV shows, awards shows, and current trends.

Here are some examples of successful promotion ideas:

**Pet Idol** (or Pit Idol, if the event is showcasing pit-bull-terrier-type dogs)

This theme is a take-off on the TV reality show "American Idol." The goal is to get prospective

adopters into the shelter. To participate in the contest, people are encouraged to go to the shelter and vote in person for their favorite dogs. In the process of deciding which dogs to vote for, participants meet the dogs and get to know them as individuals. By registering to vote, participants are automatically entered in a drawing for a chance to win donated prizes (e.g., flat-screen TV, iPod, Kindle, gift card).

### Homecoming

In this promotion, the annual rite of passage for high school students goes to the dogs. The public can vote for their favorite dogs and help crown a homecoming king and queen. Those who register are entered in a raffle drawing for donated prizes.

### Petcademy Awards (or Pitcademy Awards)

This promotion can be launched in advance of the annual Academy Awards show. Staff and volunteers choose 10 VIPs (Very Important Pets) to promote on flyers and over the Internet. The dogs can be nicknamed after Oscar-nominated films to reflect their individual personalities (e.g., *Little Miss Sunshine* or *Billy the Kid*). Each dog can be given a "Walk of Fame" Hollywood gold-star sticker that can be placed prominently on their kennel cards to let voters know which dogs are contestants. People who adopt a VIP dog can be given a "swag" bag containing items such as dog treats, collar and

leash, and gift certificates for grooming or training services. At the end of the promotional period, the votes are tallied and a winner is chosen and announced. For an example of a poster to promote this type of event, see the resources section.

### **“Adore-A-Bull” Adoption Fair**

This promotion focuses on finding homes for pit-bull-terrier-type dogs. Dressing up these dogs helps to soften the image people have of them, making the dogs easier to relate to. The dogs can be dressed up in glittery collars, feather boas, tutus, bowties and other gear guaranteed to make people smile. Consider having a short parade of costumed people and dogs that ends at the shelter with an adoption fair that includes entertainment, refreshments and dog training demos.

Other promotional ideas include a speed-dating event featuring adoptable dogs as the “dates,” a walkathon that incorporates adoptable dogs and a costume contest for homeless animals.

## **2. Decide where and when to hold the event.**

You can hold adoption events inside your shelter, outside in the parking lot or in an open area near the shelter entrance. If you decide to have adoption events at your shelter, put up posters and banners outside to attract visitors, and set up a table with information about the available dogs. To highlight the dogs’ individual attributes, create attractive cage cards that contain comprehensive info about each dog. (See the cage card template in the resources section.) On the day of the event, have volunteers walk the dogs, wearing “adopt me”



bandanas, around the facility or grounds, to allow people to meet and mingle with them. Also, make sure the shelter is clean and cheerful; to create a festive atmosphere, put up decorations appropriate to the theme.

If you want to have adoption events off-site, select a venue that has high traffic and is a pleasant place. Some possibilities are pet supply stores or parks that have plenty of space and parking. You’ll need to get permission from store managers or park officials, of course, and work out the details of event logistics.

You can also collaborate with other local rescue groups or shelters to put on adoption events. Pooling the resources of several groups allows for larger events and attracts more potential adopters.

Whether your events are large or small, it’s



generally best to hold them on weekends, when most people are off work and kids are out of school. If you're holding the event outdoors, spring and fall are great times for larger adoption events. Be sure to choose weekends that do not conflict with major religious holidays or other big community events.

### **3. Recruit volunteers to help before, during and after the event.**

Depending on the size of your event, you might need to recruit volunteers to help with tasks such as putting up posters, handing out flyers, walking and grooming dogs, staffing an information booth, helping to process adoption applications or serving refreshments. Invite volunteers already working at your shelter to help, and be sure to send them a save-the-date email so they put it on

their calendars. Also, use social media and local events to encourage involvement and recruit additional volunteers.

Word of mouth is another way to recruit volunteers. You can ask existing volunteers to invite their spouses, co-workers, friends and family to participate. Previous adopters can be a source of potential volunteers as well. Send out email invitations or make phone calls to former adopters inviting them to help with your event.

### **4. Fundraise to cover event costs.**

You can get items to use for prizes and adopter gift bags through donations from volunteers and businesses. Volunteers can hold fundraisers to raise money for the prizes, or even donate prizes themselves.

A great way to solicit donations is to send a letter to local companies explaining your adoption promotion and specifying what you would like the business to donate. If you don't get a response, go to the business location and ask to speak to the business owner. When a business agrees to donate, be sure to bring a homeless dog along when you collect the donation so they can see first-hand whom their donation is benefiting. To encourage future donations, send thank-you cards (complete with photos of dogs who were adopted) after the event to participating businesses.

### **5. Publicize the event.**

Since the success of every event depends on lots of people showing up to participate, it is vital to get the word out in as many ways as you can. Here are some fairly inexpensive ways to promote your event:



- Advertise it on your website.
- Have a large banner created and put it up outside the shelter.
- Create flyers advertising the event and have volunteers ask local businesses to post them on their windows.
- Create a door hanger and have volunteers distribute them in neighborhoods.
- During the event, get volunteers to dress up in dog costumes and position them on nearby busy street corners. Have them wave large signs steering the public toward the event.

You'll also want to publicize the event through the media, such as newspapers, television and radio. Generating a news release and a PSA (public service announcement) for radio and TV will help attract media outlets. For tips on writing news releases and PSAs, read "Writing a News Release" and "Writing a Public Service Announcement" in the resources section.

## 6. Promote the event through social networking.

Go to Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and Craigslist and post notices and information about your event. Ask people to share your link and help promote the dogs who are available for adoption. You can also start your own blog (free via Blogger or Wordpress) or go to your local newspaper's blog or forum pages and leave a comment with details about your adoption event.

To further promote it, add an event page to your Facebook account and post flyers for the available adoptable dogs on your Facebook wall. Ask volunteers, friends, family, and fellow rescuers to share the post. Also,

go to the free website Eventful.com and promote your adoption event there.

## 7. Showcase the dogs as individuals at the event.

Use the tips and ideas given in Part 1 of this action kit to highlight the special qualities of each dog hoping for a new home.

### Resources

Example of Doggie Calling Card  
Example of Individual Adoption Flyer  
Perfecting Profiles  
Pitcademy Awards Poster  
Cage Card Template  
Writing a News Release  
Writing a Public Service Announcement

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For more information about adopting out homeless animals, check out the No More Homeless Pets resource library on Best Friends' website:

[www.bestfriends.org/nomorehomelesspets/resourcelibrary/adoptionsindex.cfm](http://www.bestfriends.org/nomorehomelesspets/resourcelibrary/adoptionsindex.cfm)

For more information about increasing adoptions for pit-bull-terrier-type dogs, watch Animal Farm Foundation's video:

[vimeo.com/27018082](http://vimeo.com/27018082)

Special thanks to PetSmart Charities® for providing grant funding for the programs from which these materials were derived.

I'm Adoptable!



**Ruby**  
2 yr old female  
ID #A1431875, Kennel #N009  
County of San Diego Animal Services  
2481 Palomar Airport Rd.  
Carlsbad, CA 92011  
Phone: 619.767.2575  
cordeliam@bestfriends.org

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# *Kiah*

**Meet the girl named Kiah — guaranteed to bring a smile-a!  
She's a PBA for Hillsborough County Animal Services (that's short for  
Pit Bull Ambassador) and is wearing her Sunday best. But you can  
arrange a visit any day you wish! Kiah's enrolled in obedience classes for  
the ADOPT Program (Awesome Dogs On Positive Training). She'll soon  
earn her official Canine Good Citizenship Certification, too!**

**Visit and flirt with Kiah in person at  
Hillsborough County Animal Services (440 Falkenburg Rd., N. Tampa)  
Ask for animal ID# 0921688. Bet you're smiling just thinking about her.**



**Like all of our Pit Bull Ambassadors, Kiah  
has been temperament and health tested. She  
passed with flying colors! To adopt Kiah, fill  
out an application and  
schedule a pre-adoption home visit. Learn  
more about this loyal breed and our  
Pit Bull Ambassador Program by visiting  
[www.badrap.org](http://www.badrap.org)**



# Perfecting Profiles 101: Words, Photos and Video to Increase Adoptions – Elizabeth Doyle, Frank Wisneski & Michael Hand

 **Best Friends** ANIMAL SOCIETY™

**Perfecting Profiles: The Words**

Elizabeth Doyle  
Best Friends Animal Society


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**Stop! Before you write anything ... YOU HAVE TO WANT IT!**

And bring your want to the keyboard.

No second thoughts (e.g., “I want him to find a home, except ...”).

If you don’t feel it, they won’t feel it!

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**Now, write a killer first sentence.**

**Not this one:** Joey is a 5 y.o. shep/lab/pittie mix, neutered, utd on shots.

That’s nice information. But NOT a killer opening sentence. (Plus, don’t use abbreviations — kills the writing voice.)

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**Try this instead:**

Look in his eyes.  
(If all you have is a photo, fine!)  
And tell me something about WHO he is. Not WHAT he is.


That’s how we grab people’s hearts. By the WHO not the WHAT.




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“You mean ... you’re thinking of adopting ME?”



 **Best Friends** ANIMAL SOCIETY™



“At your service!”  
Sherman is happy to be anything you want him to be ... except homeless.

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Sicily loves you already.  
And she hasn't even met you yet.



**Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™**

Next: Give us the details — positives strongest and first!



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**Does your info checklist look like this?**

<b>Negatives</b>	<b>Positives</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recovering from mange</li><li>• Cat-aggressive</li><li>• Mild arthritis</li><li>• Not good with other dominant dogs</li><li>• Afraid of thunder</li><li>• Some separation anxiety when left alone for long periods</li><li>• Able to leap tall fences and escape</li><li>• Left toe occasionally twitches</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sweet and loving</li></ul>

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**More specific positives!**

- Is he bad only with dominant dogs? That must mean he's GOOD with submissive dogs.
- No mention of bad with kids? Maybe that means he's GOOD with kids.
- Sweet and loving? Don't use adjectives: Show me, don't tell me about his good qualities.
- Ask more questions about his positives.

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**Specific about negatives, vague on positives:**

Andy unfortunately has leash reactivity, a behavior where although he can live peacefully with other dogs (so long as they're submissive — he may challenge alpha dogs for dominance), he does behave threateningly toward other dogs when he's on walks. With some training, you may be able to improve or even correct this behavior in time! But it will take a lot of patience. Andy is a loving boy, though, and so worth it!

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**Specific on positives, vague on negatives:**


Andy is so gentle that a toddler could climb on his back and hug him round the neck! We've seen it happen. When people speak, he cocks his head at them — thinking, pondering, deciding what they'd like him to do. And if he can, he does exactly what would please them most. (Well, except on walks. He'll be bad with other dogs no matter what you say when he's on walks.) But the rest of the time, he's a love-bug. You should see him when you turn on the TV! The way he races to get his favorite spot on the couch. But don't worry — all it takes is the gentlest nudge to scoot him.

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### Endings

- Remind them how much you WANT them to call, email, ring the bell, etc. (Some people do the exact opposite.)
- Mention adoption requirements WITHOUT dropping the ball on urging them to call.
- Take the opportunity to tug one more time on their heartstrings.

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### Final Sentences

<b>Not so good:</b> Qualified adopters only. Must have six-foot fence, pink linoleum in kitchen, green in both baths. MUST HAVE NO OTHER PETS. All adopters will submit to rigorous screening.	<b>Better:</b> Please call. Eva is longing for an only-pet home with a six- foot fence. And if you can give her that, then you can give her a miracle.
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### Other Bits and Tips

- Don't try writing the whole thing in the first person unless you're feeling REALLY confident. Just one sentence, at most, in the first person is usually better.
- Don't abbreviate — wrecks the writing voice. Makes you a less effective narrator.
- If you have a photo, keep an eye on it as you write, and remember that it's what the reader's looking at, too. Use the photo, remark on her expression, etc. You can even make the photo more effective by commenting on it.

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- Remember that not every negative is a negative! Separate your true points-against-the-pet from personal preferences (e.g., "hyper" is not a true negative).
- Don't say, "She's happy here and would be fine staying here forever if she doesn't find a home."
- Don't be too cute. You don't want them to adopt you, the writer. You don't want them to compliment your cleverness (e.g., puns with the pet's name). Keep the focus on the animal.

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<b>Not so good:</b> Jacques – 8 y.o. pit/lab/goldie/shep. X, neutered, brown w/black, red, white markings. This dog is very sweet, but needs to go to a VERY special home because of EXTREME dog aggression. He also had some extreme dental problems when he first arrived at our shelter, but after several tooth extractions, he is feeling better and ready for the right home. MUST SUBMIT TO HOME SCREENING.	<b>Better:</b> Jacques loves you just the way you are. You can see it in his eyes. And you can feel it on his breath when he puts his head on your lap. He knows that it can be hard for an older dog to find a home, especially when he's the sort of fellow who just can't live with other dogs. But he can't stop hoping. What else can he do? If you could love Jack — just the way he is — please call. He needs to hear from you.
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### The (very important) last step!

- Read what you wrote. Is it going to work? Would it make you adopt the animal?
- If the answer is "Well ...," then that's not good enough! You can feel it when you write one that's gonna work.
- Go back over it with your heart.

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 **Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™**

**Perfecting Profiles: The Photos**  
Frank Wisneski

 **Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™**



It's all about focusing on the animal.

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**Draw in the Adopter**

At United Hope for Animals, we use a three-point system to great effect:

1. A compelling photograph grabs the potential adopter's attention.  
*Eye contact with the camera draws in adopters.*
2. The photograph links to a video showing the animal interacting on camera with a person.
3. A bio gives relevant info and plays up the positives.

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**Remove Distractions**

1. Remove the animal from the crate, cage or pen.
2. Use a plain, simple backdrop or wall, with no pattern or design.
3. Pick up items/trash on the floor that might be a distraction in the image.
4. Try to avoid showing dirt, asphalt or concrete if at all possible.
5. Avoid hot spots from the sun. Shoot in shade.

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**Remove the animal from the cage.**

**In the cage**  


**Outside of the cage**  


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**Our Typical Setup**

EZ-Up for shade eliminates harsh sunlight and shadows, and a plain piece of fabric is used for a backdrop.



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**Remove background distractions.**

Animal control      No animal control



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**It's All About the Animal**

1. The animal must make eye contact with the camera.
2. The animal should appear alert — ears up.
3. Some animals are shut down at the shelter and require more effort.
  - Our volunteers spend time with each dog, walking, talking and petting him/her.
  - To get the dog's attention, we use squeaky toys, snacks, whistling, clapping, another dog — whatever it takes.

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**Get eye contact with the camera.**



**Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™**

**Ears up!**



**Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™**

**The dog should appear alert.**



**Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™**

**Try to avoid a scared-looking animal.**





# Perfecting Profiles 101: Words, Photos and Video to Increase Adoptions – Elizabeth Doyle, Frank Wisneski & Michael Hand

## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

Use treats and toys to get their attention.



## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

Clean them up.

1. Groom and brush the animal.
2. Bathe the animal if necessary.
3. Trim hair away from the eyes:  
Eye contact is key because the eyes draw in a potential adopter.

## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™



## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

Brush, bathe, trim.



## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

Very adoptable!



## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

Clean up the eyes.



# Perfecting Profiles 101: Words, Photos and Video to Increase Adoptions – Elizabeth Doyle, Frank Wisneski & Michael Hand

## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

### Basic Concepts

1. Shoot in open shade to avoid harsh light.  
*Shoot under a porch or EZ-UP, or in a garage with the door open.*
2. Avoid flash: It creates an alien look with the eyes.
3. Only small files are necessary. These photos are generally for web use (adoptapet.com, Petfinder, Facebook, your own site), so a basic point-and-shoot digital camera is more than enough.
4. Get down to the dog's level: big dogs on the ground, small dogs on a table.  
*Avoid shooting down on dogs. It's not appealing, and they can look scared or aggressive.*

## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

### Get down to the dog's level.



## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

### Put little dogs on a table.



## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

### Don't shoot down.



## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

### More Pointers

Not comfortable taking pictures? Ask around for local photographers who might help.

- Post a request on Facebook, Meet-Up, Craig's List, etc.
- The photographer may have a studio. If you're allowed to transport animals, the shoot could be held there.
- If you run your own rescue, can you convert a small space into a studio?

## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

### Spend time with the animal.

- Get to know her personality.
- Get a feel for her level of training. Good on a leash? Does she know sit? Down?
- Is she good with other animals?
- Play with her. Have fun!



# Perfecting Profiles 101: Words, Photos and Video to Increase Adoptions – Elizabeth Doyle, Frank Wisneski & Michael Hand

**Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™**

Get to know the animal.



**Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™**

Don't forget to have fun! It shows in the pictures.



**Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™**

When You're Done Taking Pictures

1. Boost the contrast to make the dog "pop" off the background.
2. Crop out any unnecessary parts of the image.
3. Size the file properly for ease of emailing, uploading and page loading, or for a particular site's requirements.
  - 640 x 480 is a great default image size
  - Quick turnaround means the animals get networked faster

**Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™**

Images can also be used to:

1. Raise awareness about your cause.
2. Bring in more volunteers.
3. Raise money and increase donations.
4. Solicit sponsors.
5. Change conditions in a bad environment.
6. Change the world!

**Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™**

If you only remember one thing, remember this:



**Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™**



# Perfecting Profiles 101: Words, Photos and Video to Increase Adoptions – Elizabeth Doyle, Frank Wisneski & Michael Hand

 **Best Friends** ANIMAL SOCIETY™

It's all about the eyes.



 **Best Friends** ANIMAL SOCIETY™

... And sometimes the ears and tongue!



 **Best Friends** ANIMAL SOCIETY™

**Perfecting Profiles: Making Videos**

Michael Hand  
Best Friends Animal Society

 **Best Friends** ANIMAL SOCIETY™

I have no idea what I'm doing!



 **Best Friends** ANIMAL SOCIETY™

**The Basics**

- It's about showing people what you see.
- Don't try to be Ingmar Bergman.
- Keep it SIMPLE, SIMPLE, SIMPLE.
- Show something cute.
- Talk about the animal as you are filming.
- Get down on their level.
- PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

 **Best Friends** ANIMAL SOCIETY™

**Things that you should always do.**

- Get down on the animal's level.
- Film the animal where he is most comfortable OR doing an activity or adventure that helps sell him, his personality and his quirks.
- SHOW ME THE FUNNY.
- For dogs especially, it's best if we don't see a lot of chain-link fencing in the shot.

# Perfecting Profiles 101: Words, Photos and Video to Increase Adoptions – Elizabeth Doyle, Frank Wisneski & Michael Hand

## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

### MORE things you should always do.

- Everything Elizabeth and Frank said. It applies to video as well. You are trying to get them a home.
- Talk up the animal, but don't lie.
- If having a coworker help film isn't possible, give a brief statement about the animal from behind the camera — while you are filming, so the viewer will hear your voice.
- PRACTICE!

## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

### Things that you should never do.

- Never be tempted to turn your video camera on its end. Every time you do this, I cry. (It's not your fault, though.)
- Don't shoot inside of a shelter run. Get them out!
- Don't shoot more than you should.
- Don't use the zoom.
- Don't talk about other things while filming.

## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

### Equipment

#### Cisco Flip Cams

- The only thing you'll need
- Easy to use
- Footage looks great
- Work with Mac and PC
- Software included
- CHEAP: \$80



## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

### Edit? Not just for blockbusters anymore.

- Free editors: Microsoft Movie Maker, Wax, and Blender
- YouTube: Offers basic editing
- iMovie: Not free (\$15) but worth it if you are on Mac
- Easy to learn if you take one day to do it
- Can help you save lives AND promote your group

## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

### A word about music.

- Go to Jewelbeat.com
- BE CAREFUL: Legal issues
- A Sarah- and Bette-free zone

## Best Friends ANIMAL SOCIETY™

### What do I do now?

- YouTube: Second most visited website after Google.
- You can embed into your page.
- Easily shared on social networking sites.
- It's easy! Get out there and promote!

The Rancho Cucamonga Animal Center Presents

# The Pitcademy Awards



ACURA



MORNING DEW



JADEN



IVANA



GILLIGAN



SWEET E



KERMIT



SKYE



NATASHA KAI



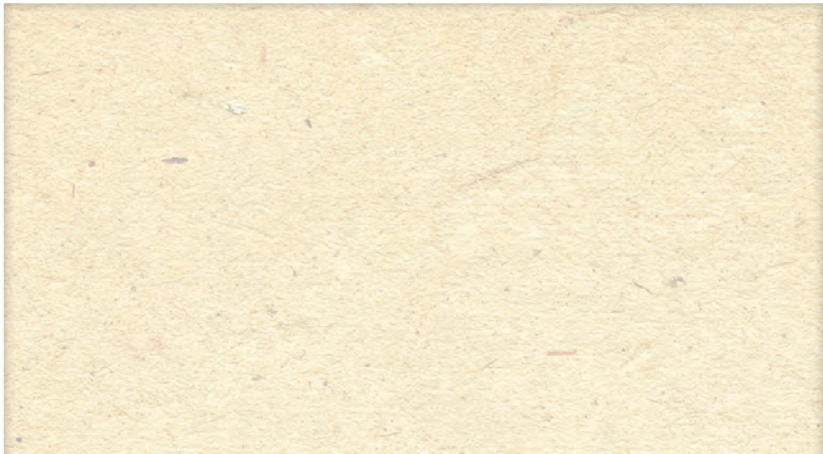
ANGELINA

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WHO WILL WIN  
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decide the winner and  
you could win a prize  
fit for a star!





Hi, my name is

Sex:  Male  Female  Spayed/Neutered

ID#: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

About Me: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Good with:  Kids  All Dogs  Some Dogs  Cats  Unknown

Friendly

Affectionate

Independent

Confident

Shy

Athletic

Active

Easy Going

Lap Dog

Mellow

Housetrained

Loves food

Loves toys

Loves affection

Currently in School:  Basic Obedience Class  CGC Intermediate Class

## Writing a News Release

A news or press release is a short announcement of a newsworthy event. You send press releases to newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations, and Internet sites to interest them in doing a story. Editors and news directors receive many releases every day; to grab their attention, your news release must look professional and present the facts in a concise and compelling way.

First, develop a template for your news release. Using a template lets you produce releases efficiently, since the basic format is already set up.

Here are some tips for formatting a news release:

- Include your logo at the top of the page, but keep it simple and don't let it take up too much of the page. Editors and news directors are interested in knowing quickly who you are and then getting to the lead sentence.
- Put contact information at the top of the page and make sure the media contact is available at the phone number and e-mail address provided.
- Type your release using a basic font: Times Roman, 12 point size, and regular font (instead of bold or italic) is a good choice.
- Use single-spaced text and indent five spaces to begin new paragraphs.
- Use the standard order (time, date, place) when giving the details about an event. For example: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday, June 4, at the Radisson Building. Don't use zeros for times (use 11 a.m., not 11:00 a.m.) and don't use letters after numbered dates (August 22, not August 22nd).
- Keep it to one page if at all possible.

Here are some tips for writing a news release:

- Write a concise, catchy headline that summarizes the story. It should be written in the style of a newspaper headline, using active verbs – for example, "Art that speaks for homeless pets."
- Your lead sentence should describe the event, and why it's newsworthy.
- The body of the release should contain the all-important facts: who, what, when, where and why.
- Information on sponsors should be at the end.
- The final paragraph should describe your group and clearly summarize your organization's mission.
- Proofread the release carefully for grammar and spelling, and always make certain that all the information in the release is accurate before you send it.



## Writing a Public Service Announcement

Public service announcements (PSAs) are short notices, lasting anywhere from 10 to 60 seconds, that are aired on radio and TV stations prepared to provide information to the public. PSAs are used by organizations to publicize community events, to assist in fundraising efforts, and to inform and influence public opinion.

Most radio and TV stations look for local causes to promote in the PSAs that they air. PSAs must contain information that is beneficial to the community and should not include controversial or self-serving material. Check with the program directors at your local radio and TV stations for their guidelines about content and formatting. You should submit your announcement at least 10 days in advance of the time you would like it aired.

The standard lengths for PSAs are: 10 seconds (25 to 30 words), 20 seconds (45 to 50 words), 30 seconds (60 to 75 words), 60 seconds (120 to 150 words).

Here are some tips for formatting a PSA:

- Use your organization's letterhead and put in a contact name and telephone number.
- Triple space the entire PSA so that it can be read easily. Use Times Roman, 14 or 16 point size, regular font. Indent all paragraphs.
- As with news releases, use the standard order (time, date, place) when giving the details about an event. For example: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday, May 15, at the PetSmart at 1234 Main Street.
- Keep the PSA to one sheet.

Here are some tips for writing a PSA:

- Include all the facts: who, what, when, where and why. Be sure to give specific starting and ending dates.
- Stick to the facts. Avoid superlatives, overly enthusiastic text, and acronyms or nicknames the general public may not be familiar with.

After sending a news release or a PSA, call the news desk after a few days to ask if they received the release and to remind them that you are planning a newsworthy event. Say something like this: "Hello, I'm calling to remind you that People for Animals will be holding an adoption event on May 15 at the PetSmart parking lot at 1234 Main Street. Our contact number is 123-4567 if you need more information. We sent a release to your organization a few days ago."

If the release was sent to an individual reporter, call afterwards to see if the reporter received it. If not, send it again. If you talk to the reporter, let him/her know you are available to answer questions. Be persistent, but not bothersome. If you leave a message and the reporter doesn't call back, do not keep calling. Assume your message was received, but other stories are taking priority.

If you can, try to establish personal contacts at your local media outlets. This gets your organization's name and you out there as an animal welfare resource, available to provide future expertise or comment on animal issues that arise in your community.



ANIMAL FARM  
FOUNDATION, INC.

SINCE 1985

*Promoting shelter pets*

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# BEST PRACTICES: MARKETING AND ADVERTISING

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ANIMAL FARM FOUNDATION

We believe that all dogs are individuals  
and every dog deserves a chance to shine.

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## CONTENTS

Marketing 101

Writing Bios

Photography

Videos

Marketing in the Shelter

Connecting with the Community

Social Media Skills

Business Cards for Shelter Pets

To increase adoptions and connect with the community, organizations need to kick up their marketing and advertising efforts. Learn how to help your organization and shelter pets stand out and grab the attention of potential adopters through a variety of advertising methods. Shine a positive spotlight on your shelter pets and you'll save more lives!

For more information, please visit our website:

[www.animalfarmfoundation.org](http://www.animalfarmfoundation.org)

or contact us at: [info@animalfarmfoundation.org](mailto:info@animalfarmfoundation.org)



[www.animalfarmfoundation.org](http://www.animalfarmfoundation.org)

# • MARKETING

# MARKETING 101

Getting the word out about the dogs in your shelter has never been easier! From traditional flyers posted in your community to nationwide social media campaigns, there are many easy, inexpensive advertising options. But advertising is just one part of the marketing puzzle. Marketing combines



advertising with public relations, media, customer support, and community involvement. To increase adoptions and connect with your community, make marketing a priority.

## THE BASICS: ADVERTISING METHODS

- **Traditional:** hanging flyers and posters, placing ads in the local newspaper and Penny Saver, direct mailings, hard copy newsletters, and television and radio spots.
- **Web-based:** your organization's website, online adoption databases, and electronic newsletters.
- **Media Promotion:** press releases, news alerts, Public Service Announcements, editorials in your local paper, press kits for media inquiries, interviews through television, radio, and podcasts.
- **Social Media:** Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube, Vimeo, Pinterest, and blogs.
- **Promotional Activities and Events:** community events, educational presentations, special offers and promotions on adoption fees.

Your organization doesn't need to take on all of these at once. The trick is to choose just a couple, then commit to doing them well. No matter what approach you choose, you'll want to focus on two things as you develop your marketing plan:

- **Use clear, concise messaging with appropriate language**
- **Invest in creating engaging images that relate to the message**

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Before you get started, it's important to understand why keeping things positive is crucial to your marketing:

### SELLING JOY VS. SELLING SADNESS

There is evidence to support that positive ads are more successful in promoting adoptions and raising funds for local animal welfare organizations than ads that focus on sadness and despair. Why?

- Animal Shelters are in the business of making happy, long lasting matches between pets and families. Your audiences, the animal-loving public and potential adopters, are looking for companion animals that will enrich their lives.



We all aspire to be happy. Show the public how happy they'll be once they make the choice to welcome a shelter pet into their home or support your organization. When the public sees **happy people**, interacting with shelter pets, they'll want to do the same.

- Be aware that certain sectors of the public think that all shelter animals are damaged goods. If you focus on promoting stories of abused, neglected, and injured animals, this misconception is perpetuated and keeps some people from adopting. Instead, show them the positive side of shelter pets they don't know about!

### WHEN SAD WORKS:

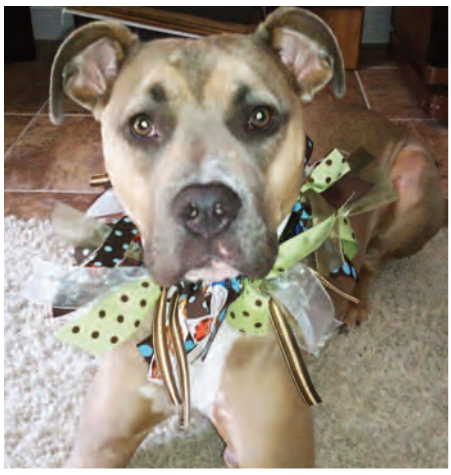
Larger, more well-known and well-resourced organizations do run campaigns that use sadness to gain support and donations, but that is not a strategy designed to work for smaller groups. These larger groups use strategic campaigns that are designed to raise funds, not sell the idea of adopting pets in homes and communities. They exist for a very specific purpose.

As smaller, community-based organizations, we need to design marketing tools with multi-prong approaches and purposes that encourage adoption, fundraising, and education.



# BIOS AND WRITE-UPS

Throughout your writing, from bios to social media posts, use clear, concise messaging with appropriate language.



The online bio is the primary way the public will get to know your dogs, prior to visiting your shelter. Bios need to convey important points of information about each individual dog and grab the public's hearts and imaginations.

To increase success, assign this task to one employee with a flair for writing or use a small team of volunteers that can focus their time on meeting the dogs and writing them up.

## FORMULAS FOR BIOS

To create consistent and quick bios, consider using a formula. When a dog debuts on your website, rely on formulas to help produce professional and compelling write-ups:

### From the SLC Pit Crew:

SLC Pit Crew gets to know each dog individually and presents that information in a unique way, using the following format:

I LOVE \_\_\_\_\_ (ex: some dogs, walks, people)

I HAVE \_\_\_\_\_ (ex: a gentle disposition, a snoring problem)

I GET ALONG WITH \_\_\_\_\_ (ex: people but am selective about my dog friends)

I WOULD RATHER NOT \_\_\_\_\_ (ex: ever be in the shelter again, as I am struggling here)

I NEED \_\_\_\_\_ (ex: attention, some basic obedience training, a warm bed to sleep in)

(continued on next page)



**Example:**

*I'm Ducky. I love people; especially ones that give me massages, peanut butter, and let me snooze in the sun. I have a favorite spot, right behind my ears, that I like to get rubbed. When that happens, I make a funny sound, because it feels so good! I get along with the dogs and people I have met here, including respectful children of all ages. I would rather not spend my time jogging or wrestling with energetic dogs since I'm a really mellow guy. I need a house full of soft beds, people who like snuggles, and yummy treats!*

**Here's one more option:**

MEET \_\_\_\_\_ (name).  
 HE/SHE IS \_\_\_\_\_ (what are the best things about this dog? ex: a friend to everyone, an amazing athlete)  
 A PERFECT DAY FOR (NAME) INCLUDES \_\_\_\_\_  
 (ex: playing ball with you, learning a new trick, sleeping at your feet)  
 (NAME) PREFERS NOT TO \_\_\_\_\_ (ex: be left home alone all day, share his home with other pets)  
 IF YOUR FAMILY \_\_\_\_\_ (ex: loves the outdoors, enjoys quiet time, wants a travel buddy)  
 THEN YOU MIGHT BE THE PERFECT MATCH FOR \_\_\_\_\_.

**Example:**

*Meet Cindy Lou! She is a ball-catching superstar who loves sports and spending time with friends of all ages, especially if they like to teach her new games. A perfect day for smart Cindy Lou includes going for a jog or playing ball, stopping by a training class, then snuggling up for a nap on your lap. Cindy Lou prefers not share her home with other dogs, but has lived with cats in the past. If your family loves going on adventures and wants a best friend to join in on the fun, from hiking to drive-in movies to Frisbee tournaments, you might be the perfect match for sweet, silly Cindy Lou!*

Formulas are helpful, but not necessary as long as you remember to include important information AND help potential adopters envision the dog as part of their families.

**Here's an example of a freestyle bio:****PEACHES AND CREAM:**

*This 2 year old spunky, good time girl is looking for a family that loves to have fun! Peaches is intelligent, focused, and enjoys her training sessions here because she learns new tricks quickly. She's quite the smarty pants and loves to show off her new skills for an audience of friends! Plus, her fun-loving play style has made Peaches popular in the play yard with other dogs. She may love other dogs, but this sweetheart really enjoys the company of people too! Her favorite activities include car rides and long walks (she's already mastered loose-leash walking). But at the end of the day, Peaches loves nothing more than cuddling with the people that love her. Want to make Peaches a part of your family? Fill out an application!*

**TIPS FOR WRITING BIOS:**

- Spend a little time with each dog, before you write their bios. If staff doesn't have time for this, create a volunteer crew for the job. When you get to know each dog as an individual, you'll be able to write adoption descriptions that make them stand out. Instead of saying "Scooter is a nice boy who loves people," say "Scooter knows how to work a crowd! At a recent adoption event, he showed off his training by sitting and giving high-fives to everyone he met!"
- Searching for a new pet is often a family project. Craft write-ups that parents will feel comfortable showing their children. Avoid language that might scare kids, such as: time is running out or death row. Avoid graphic details of abuse.

(continued on next page)

- Choosing a pet is a happy time. Create write ups that get readers excited and motivated to visit your shelter and adopt. Focus less on the sad or upsetting things that led to a dog's arrival at your shelter.
- Stay focused on the positive. A dog's bio is a chance to pique the interest of potential adopters and helps them imagine that dog as a part of their family. Use your write ups to create a sense of possibility about your available dogs.
- Looking for a fresh batch of positive words to use in your bios? Check out this resource from Pet Listings:  
<http://petlistings.wordpress.com/a-list-of-positive-words/>
- Being positive doesn't mean you have to hide the truth. If a dog needs special care it should be included, but leave this to the end of their bio. Stick with general information about their needs, not gory details of abuse, neglect, or medical issues. At this early stage of communication, let your readers know the basics. Include that this dog will benefit from a special person's love and care. You'll have plenty of time to address their specific issues during adoption counseling. (see link to adoption counseling tips)
- Describe each dog as an individual, not according to stereotypes and generalizations based on how they look or how they are labeled.
- Stick to what you know about the dog, rather than using generalizations that could turn away potential adopters. For example, avoid including age limits for children in a dog's bio, such as "good with kids 8 and up" or "great with all kids!" Instead of guessing, describe the dogs as you have observed them, then let the adopters decide for themselves if the dog is a good match for their family.

- Speculating about the history of your animals, then promoting those stories as fact can damage a dog's chance for adoption. Do not assume that dogs with unknown histories who are underweight, scarred, or have cropped ears have been abused, fought, used as bait, or neglected. Don't write a bio based on guesses. Instead, focus on what you know about the dog, now that he is in your care.
- Don't spend too much time on the physical description of the dog. Their photos will show readers what they look like.
- Leave impersonal, factual details for the end. Knowing a dog has had its vaccinations, is neutered, or has had flea treatments is important, but it should never be the focus of a bio.
- Always end each bio with action steps, so that interested adopters know exactly what to do next to meet the dogs or how they can donate.

#### **A NOTE ON BREED LABELS IN BIOS:**

Most shelter software requires that you assign a breed from a dropdown list, even if you don't know the genetic makeup of your dogs. You can choose to tell your adopters that the breed label is just a guess.

We don't label the dogs of unknown origin on our website. When we do have to choose a breed label, for online adoption databases, we put this on all of our posts: **“Visual breed identification in dogs is unreliable so for most of the dogs we are only guessing at predominant breed or breed mix. We get to know each dog as an individual and will do our best to describe each of our dogs based on personality, not by breed label.”**

Please feel free to use these words on your listings too! For more on Labels see our FAQs about Labels and Language.



# PHOTOS

Spend time to create engaging images that draw in potential adopters and relate to the message. Poorly staged photos can give the public a false sense of a dog's personality and reinforce negative stereotypes. Great images pay off by increasing adoptions and changing public perceptions.



## HOW TO TAKE EFFECTIVE AND ENTICING PHOTOS IN A SHELTER ENVIRONMENT

Here are some tips from an article for [Petfinder.com](#) by Melissa McDaniel, photographer and founder of **Photo Book Projects**.

- **Don't Use Flash.** The flash on a camera is what causes dogs' eyes to glow blue or white. Instead, photograph your dog outside or in a room with a large window and lots of natural light. Make sure the source of light (sun or window) is behind you and is shining on the dog.
- **Be Aware of the Background.** You want the potential adopters to focus on the dog, so before you photograph him, look around at the surroundings. Is the background full of clutter (chairs, desk, boxes, cars in the parking lot)? If it is, move your dog to a location where the background is less busy, such as grass, bushes or a solid-colored wall. Brightly colored doors or walls make nice backdrops!
- **Get the Dog to Look at the Camera.** A dog's eyes are what tug at potential adopter's heart-strings! Call the dog's name, have someone stand behind you and squeak a toy, or get the dog to notice a treat in your hand.
- **Get Down to their Level.** Don't stand up and look down at the dog to shoot the picture. Instead, kneel, sit or even lie down to be at the dog's level.
- **Fill the Frame with the Dog.** Taking a photo from far away will cause the dog to get lost in the image rather than be the focus. Get close!



- **Get a Range of Shots – Show off the Dog’s Personality!** The potential adopters is going to want to see a close-up and a full body shot; try to also get a shot or two showing off the dog’s personality. Is he athletic, couch potato, snuggle bug? Try to get the image that captures these qualities. Include a toy in the image or show the dog doing tricks, using agility or other sport equipment, cuddling with people, or getting a belly rub.
- **Show People.** Having people in a shot enhances the image in so many ways. They show how well the dog interacts with humans and make him seem more like a family pet, they provide scale so the potential adopter can gauge the size of the dog, and they help show off what the dog loves to do (cuddle, get belly rubs, go for walks, play fetch, etc.)! It can be as simple as a hand on his head or a partial image of a person, but it goes a long way!
- **Show Dog Friends.** If a dog plays with other shelter dogs or gets along with a shelter cat, show that in the photo! This will go a long way in helping potential adopters imagine him as their own family pet.

### SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS:

#### Salt Lake County Animal Services Pit Crew

SLCo Pit Crew has become a model for shelter initiatives. Salt Lake County Animal Services shelter adopted 263 “pit bull” dogs in 2010, twice as many as it adopted in 2009. Since the program launched in July 2009 the save rate for “pit bull” dogs at the shelter has gone from approximately 57 percent to over 71 percent.

Part of what makes the SLCo Pit Crew so successful is their marketing. They’ve discovered that “happiness sells, sadness repels.” They focus on capturing each dog’s unique personality by staging and photographing

them outside of their kennels with other dogs, people, or props such as toys, jackets, ties, tutus, and even butterfly wings and Hawaiian leis! Such props work as conversation starters, make people smile, and soften the dogs in photos.



In addition to using the photos in their online bios, the photos are also turned into laminated kennel cards. The cards show the dogs in a positive light, making it easy for potential adopters to envision them as part of their families. The Pit Crew reports that the kennel cards really grab the attention of potential adopters walking through the kennels, function as perfect handouts at adoption events, and even get sent home with the new families when dogs get adopted.

SLCo Pit Crew also participates in adoption campaigns, off-site adoption events, and they keep an active Facebook page.

### THE PHOTO OPPORTUNITY YOU DON’T WANT TO MISS:

The next time you send a dog home, snap a photo of your adopters leaving the shelter with their newest family member! Capturing this happy moment is the perfect way to celebrate your organization’s success, acknowledge the adoptive family’s big day, and share the good news with fans, donors, and volunteers. Post the photo on social media sites, hang them on bulleting boards in your lobby, or share them in a newsletter.

# VIDEOS

Photos and write ups are just the beginning! **SHOW** your dogs in action through short, meaningful videos. Getting to see dogs in motion, interacting with others, showing off their skills or their endearing quirks, will help potential adopters imagine what life with your available dogs will be like.



For the dogs in foster care who are not available to meet potential adopters at the shelter, videos will be more effective than just sharing a photo of them. Show foster dogs interacting with others in the home to grab the attention of potential adopters.

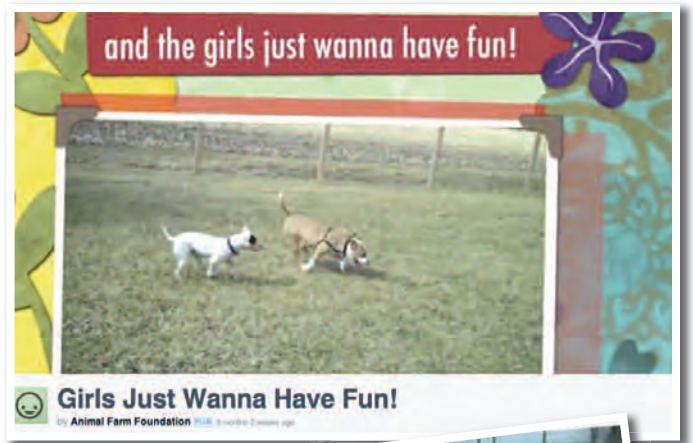
## TIPS FOR VIDEOS

### How to make a quick and effective video:

- Short is best! Keep videos to 2 or 2 ½ minutes or less.
- Know your audience. The purpose of the video is to attract adopters, so the video should be positive and upbeat. Focus on the best qualities of the dog you are filming. You'll have plenty of time to discuss specific needs and issues once adopters contact you for more information.
- Film the dogs with people, walking nicely on leash (it can be just a few steps!), sitting or lying down on command, looking directly into the camera, with other animals, or offering up a high five or trick, etc.
- Add music to build emotion. Pick tunes that provoke positive emotions in a wide variety of people.
- Pull double duty! If you can fight stereotypes while simultaneously promoting adoption all of the dogs in your care will benefit. Bust myths about "pit bull" dogs by showing them with other kinds of dogs, in playgroups, snuggling and having quiet time.
- If you don't have time to make individual movies, incorporate video clips and photos of many different dogs to create an adoption video that will benefit multiple dogs.



- Be sure to add titles to the beginning and end of each video, telling viewers the organization's name and how they can meet the dogs (website, email, etc). If you don't know how to add titles, make a poster with your shelter's information and hold it up at the end of the video. Tell viewers how to adopt the dogs in the video. Tell viewers how to adopt the dogs in the video.
- Share the videos on the dog's individual Petfinder or Petango page, on your website and upload them to Vimeo and You Tube. When using sites like Vimeo and YouTube, give each video a title and add appropriate keywords to attract potential adopters. Your "channel" will show all the videos you upload, giving viewers a chance to look at more than the original video that drew them to your page.
- Most Windows operating systems come with or can download a free version of Windows Movie Maker. Mac systems usually come loaded with iMovie. Both are intuitive and easy to use!



# MARKETING INSIDE YOUR SHELTER

## Make Your Shelter a Welcoming Place for the Community

You've worked hard to bring adopters to your doors by creating excellent write ups, photos, and videos. Are you ready for them, now that they've walked through your lobby? Create an inviting



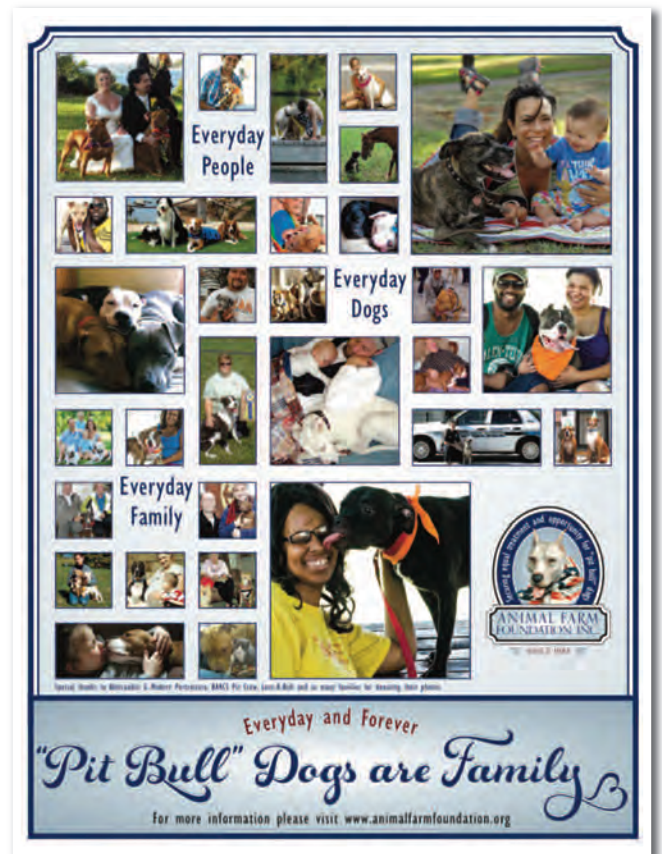
atmosphere that communicates your shelter's mission to the public. If you would like the community to view your organization as an Adoption Center, rather than the "pound", take a look at the first impression your organization makes. Is it chaotic and unfriendly? Or are there volunteers or staff members that treat visitors as valued guests? Find ways to focus on providing respectful, caring customer service, so that the public will look forward to visiting, adopting, and donating!

### TIPS FOR CREATING A POSITIVE EXPERIENCE:

- Make a great first impression! On busy days, when the staff may be overwhelmed, recruit volunteers to work as greeters in the lobby. Choose outgoing, positive people who aren't shy around strangers and enjoy being helpful. Greeters can answer basic questions, hand out adoption applications, take material donations, direct visitors to different areas of the shelter, and connect them with staff, if need be.
- Animals benefit when the public has good experiences at shelters. Find out how to provide great customer service from Maddies' Fund: [www.maddiesfund.org](http://www.maddiesfund.org)
- Create bulletin boards or posters that highlight the animals in your care, show happy letters from past adopters, photos from recent events, and information about local resources, such as spay/neuter and vaccination clinics.

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- Decorate with our free posters and help visitors see “pit bull” dogs in a new light.
- Help the dogs make better first impressions on adopters! Please visit our Best Practices on Adoptions for ideas on how to increase adoptions through better kennel presentation.
- When visitors have a good experience, they’ll tell their friends. Word of mouth is a powerful marketing tool. Why not give visitors something to take home as a reminder of their visit or to give to their friends? Think: fun handouts, magnets, bookmarks, coloring books, and business cards.



# ENGAGE YOUR COMMUNITY

Connecting with the community is part of any effective marketing plan. Host or participate in community events. Build partnerships with local businesses and other non-profit organizations.



[www.animalfarmfoundation.org](http://www.animalfarmfoundation.org)

Your organization will benefit from working with others. There is strength in numbers!

## EVENTS

Planning events takes time and resources. Instead of hosting an event, take your dogs to local events such as parades, farmer's markets, and community festivals. Dress your dogs up, put them in "Adopt Me" vests, and take some **business cards** with you. Use these events as a way to show off your dogs to loads of potential adopters in your community.

Consider setting up a "satellite" adoption center at a local business. Bring dogs to a popular fitness club or market (with permission, of course) every week at the same time, so that potential adopters know when to expect you. This gives the public a chance to meet shelter dogs in a new and comfortable environment.

## CONNECT TO THE COMMUNITY

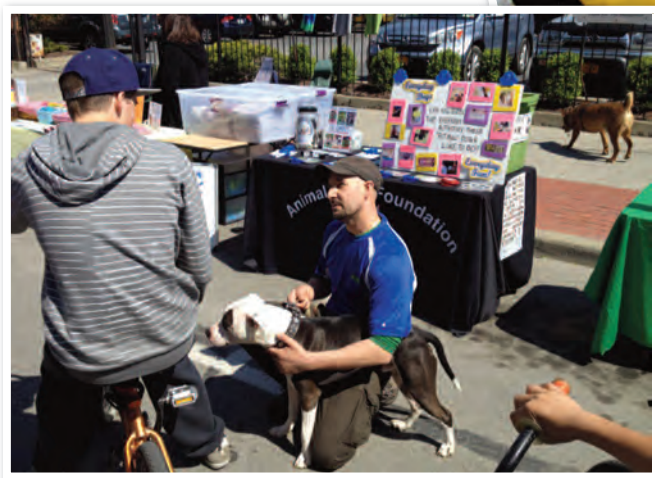
Compassionate, humane communities include everyone. Incorporate all aspects of the community in your events and outreach. Don't underestimate the value of partnering with non-animal organizations to benefit your own mission.

### Partner with community groups, such as:

- Schools, camps and clubs, including scouting troops, are great audiences for humane education, but they're also valuable support for your shelter. Young animal lovers can assist animals through: toy and leash drives, penny drives, pet food drives, etc.

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- Social service organizations are the perfect resource for making your organization's services accessible to more people in the community. Let social service know you're there as a resource for their clients. Provide them with information about your owner support services, such as pet food pantries, low cost vet care, or training classes.
- Schools with service learning programs helps students partner with community groups on various projects. Through service-learning, students use what they learn in the classroom to solve real-life problems and become active community members. Find out if the schools in your area require service learning projects and make sure they know you have projects for their students!
- Churches are the hubs of many communities and provide a unique opportunity to reach new supporters. From hosting adoption events and donation drives to connecting their parishioners to your owner support services, churches can be excellent partners in creating humane communities.





# SOCIAL MEDIA

## Tips for Social Media Marketing



[www.animalfarmfoundation.org](http://www.animalfarmfoundation.org)

- There are many social media platforms to choose from: Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Flickr, Blogger, Tumblr, Wordpress and more! There's no need to spend time on all of them. Pick one and do it well. Connect your accounts, so that when you post on one platform the posts are fed to each account.
- Your organization's page should be professional and focused on customer service. Answer questions, provide information to potential adopters and donors, and facilitate respectful conversations between your followers. This isn't a personal platform. Don't write in first person or use your organization's page for your own social or personal discussions.
- Post regularly and diversify your topics. Here are some general topics: your available dogs, tips on pet care, fundraising ideas and donation wish lists, upcoming events, etc. Post photos from happy adopters, recent events, animals you've helped, and your staff hard at work. A good practice is to post 1-2 times per day. Post less and your page falls off the map, post more and you'll overwhelm your fans.
- For your "pit bull" dogs, use this platform to subtly break down stereotypes. This will also help increase adoptions. Adopted dogs and their new families are especially good myth busters.
- Post photos or videos of adopted "pit bull" dogs with their new families
- Post photos or videos of "pit bull" dogs with other dogs, cats, or with children or elders
- Post any image that shows "pit bull" dogs as family pets

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- Feature your cutest, most eye-catching “pit bull” dogs on your website’s homepage and then share on social media. Only one lucky person will adopt that dog, but he’s likely to catch the attention of many other people. Refer them to other available dogs. Try to reel in as many adopters as possible with the “Featured Pet” and other dogs, including long term residents, will benefit from the increased interest.
- Consider a blog. WordPress and Blogger support longer format posts or try a shorter “micro-blog”, on sites like Tumblr. This is a good tool if you have a staff member or volunteer with excellent communication or photography skills.
- Positive messages and images that relate to your mission will go farther than sad ones. Create posts your fans will feel comfortable re-posting and sharing with their friends and family.
- Consider social media as a way to communicate internally. Use Facebook and other social media sites to communicate as a group. Create a members-only, private group and invite volunteers to join. For example, create a Volunteer Dog Walkers page as place for your volunteers to compare notes, give feedback, and get updates from staff.



## TAKE A CUE FROM SMALL BUSINESS AND FOR-PROFIT WORLD

Read up on blogs and newsletters marketed towards small business and the for-profit world, as well as non-profits. You’ll find tips and tricks that can easily be

applied to animal welfare organizations. Does your local chamber of commerce offer classes or seminars geared toward local businesses? If so, participate! Does your local community college offer continuing education classes on marketing, advertising, photography, design, or social media? Talk to them about a non-profit rate for a staff member or two!



# HOW TO:

## Dog Business Cards

### MEET REBA MAC!



Reba Mac is available for adoption from Animal Farm Foundation [www.animalfarmfoundation.org](http://www.animalfarmfoundation.org)

If you're looking for a dog to run around with outside and snuggle with at the end of the day, Reba Mac is your gal!

**Contact:**

[info@animalfarmfoundation.org](mailto:info@animalfarmfoundation.org)

Business cards are an easy way of advertising your organization and your adoptions. They can be used for dogs who are available for adoption, dogs in foster homes, and dogs who have been adopted and are out and about in the community with their new families.

Business Card sheets (2.5 x 3, any brand) Avery® Wizard templates FREE download for Microsoft Word Printer (laser or inkjet)

### IDEAS FOR FORMATTING AND TEXT:

- 1) Once you download the FREE Avery® Wizard templates for Microsoft Word, you will be able to choose the specific business card template you want to format (any of the 2.5 x 3 business card templates will work)
- 2) Business cards are small, so space is valuable. Your text will be limited but choose a good photo that will speak for the dog. The photo will be the best reminder of meeting the dog!
- 3) All your dog business cards should look similar, so always follow the same format (*For Example: Dog's NAME on top, available for adoption from YOUR ORG beneath that, PHOTO on the left, DESCRIPTION on the right, EMAIL at the bottom*)
- 4) Choose text wisely. You need to include: Dog's name, Organization name, website, and contact info along with the photo. Limit descriptions as they can take up a lot of space.

### SAMPLE:

<b>FUN PHOTO HERE</b>	<b>MEET _____ !</b>
	_____ is available for adoption from "Our Org"
	_____ is a champion snuggler and is now a Certified Therapy Dog, visiting schools and nursing homes.
	Interested in a dog like _____ ?
<b>Contact Information Here: Phone, Email and/or Website</b>	



## **A Guide To Create A Successful Adoption Experience**

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Adoption counseling is about making life long matches between people and pets. Your goal will be to use appropriate communication techniques to gather information and use that information to educate and assist the public in choosing a pet.

**Do not judge a book by its cover. You never know who you are dealing with or what their background is no matter how they look.**

Communication is the cornerstone to any placement program. Giving the potential adopter your undivided attention during the conversation process will enable you to make the proper educated and caring placement. Remember a life is in your hands. That loving, caring soul deserves your undivided attention.

Open ended questioning, active listening and discussion will help you build a positive rapport with the adopter and will help with the education process. The old saying do not judge a book by its cover is true, you never know who you are dealing with or what their background is no matter how they look. Judgmental attitudes, spouting facts only, accusations or accusatory tones and verbally attacking a potential adopter will only result in a mutually uncomfortable situation. Be aware of your own behavior, attitude, tones and body language. As always if you are not comfortable with a situation, or do not know the answer to a question – ask a fellow adoption counselor for help or your supervisor. There are no scripts, each situation is different – empower yourself to make the right decision.

**Make Eye Contact and Smile!**

**Greet and Welcome Each and Every Customer**

- Extend the appropriate greeting to every Customer with whom you come into contact with.
- Make Customers feel welcome by providing a special, differentiated greeting.
- After initial greeting go and check on Customer in the kennels or cat rooms to see if they need assistance. They should not have to come looking for you.

**Seek Out Customer Contact**

- It is the responsibility of every counselor to seek out Customers who need help or assistance.
  - Listen to Customers' needs
  - Answer Questions
  - Offer Assistance

**Display Appropriate Body Language at All Times**

- It is the responsibility of every Adoption Counselor to display approachable body language when on duty.
  - Attentive appearance
  - Good posture
  - Appropriate facial expression
  - Clean, neat, appropriate attire

**Preserve or Enhance the Exceptional Customer Service Experience**

- Always focus on the positive, rather than the rules and regulations.
- Talking about personal or job-related problems in front of customers is unacceptable.

**Provide Immediate Service Recovery**

- It is the responsibility of the Adoption Counselor to attempt, to the best of their abilities, to immediately resolve a Customer service issue before it becomes a Customer service problem.
- Always find the answer for the Customer and/or find another staff member who can help the Customer.

**Thank Each and Every Customer**

**Do**

Have a positive attitude

Remember to thank people

Give people the benefit of the doubt

Admit and apologize for errors/delays

Get your facts straight

React to ideas not the person

Control your emotions

Project genuine, active attention

Hear others out

Limit your own talking

Think like the customer

Encourage the customer to talk

Be truly interested

Identify yourself

Keep things out of your mouth

Be enthusiastic, yet sincere

Smile, speak clearly

Set expectations in a positive manner

**Don't**

You must

You have to

Do you understand?

The policy is...

Vague words-very, later,

It's not my fault

Argue mentally

Jump to conclusions

Interrupt

Rush the customer

Be inconsiderate

Mumble

Talk too much

Interrogate

**Listening attentively**

Agreeing with customers

Finding ways to praise customers

Frame any comments, reservations or advice as to not sound like a put down

**When things get contentious, go get help**

Have a cheerful approach

Get involved in the conversation

Know the animals in the shelter to help make good placements

**Have Canned Answers to basic questions**

Treat others the way you would like to be treated

Treat each customer like they were the first customer of the day

Do not allow your day to affect the way you treat a customer

Every interaction with a person is an educational opportunity

**Do not use animal shelter/behavior jargon or codes when giving answers**

Be flexible-Strive for a positive solution

Be responsive to criticism and be willing to change based on feedback

Be truthful and know your facts

**Be friendly and inviting**

Establish rapport immediately

Tone of voice and body language helps set the tone for the conversation

**Fact:** When two people interact, the potential for conflict is inevitable

**Conflict Resolution Tips**

1. Treat the other person with respect
2. An irate person wants to know that
  - Someone is listening
  - They are understood
  - They are important and appreciated
  - They are going to be helped
  - They are talking to the right person
3. You cannot win by being irate also. The one that stays calm has control.
4. Don't take things personally
5. State your point of view briefly
6. Say what you mean and mean what you say
7. Do not withhold important information
8. Use personal experiences
9. Collaborate problem solving
  - Define the problem in terms of needs not solutions
  - Make a distinction between means and ends by determining what the ultimate goal of the resolution is.
  - Brainstorm possible solutions
10. If you must say no; give an explanation, express your feelings, provide an alternative.
11. Focus on what you CAN do rather than on what you CAN'T do.



Interfacing with the public is not always an easy pursuit. Sometimes you are pressured for time and the customer may be particularly abrasive. Here are some suggestions and tools for effective communication to help you through the rough times.

### Reflective Listening

Reflective listening or mirroring is a tool to help in communicating with customers. It is a way of responding that indicates you have heard what the person has said, and promotes further dialogue in a non-judgmental way.

Customer: *I am upset that I can't take the puppy home before it is neutered.*

Counselor: *What I hear is that you are upset that you can't take the puppy home before it is neutered.*

### Paraphrasing

To paraphrase is simply to repeat back in your own words the content of what the customer is saying:

Customer: *My cat, fluffy, is pretty territorial. I wonder what he'll do if I bring a new kitten home?*

Counselor: *You're concerned that Fluffy may have a hard time adjusting to a new cat in the household?*

Customer: *I have two small children at home. I don't want a dog that bites.*

Counselor: *So you're looking for a dog that will be a good companion for your kids.*

### Open Ended Questions

Open ended questions are designed to elicit more than a yes or no. They often begin with how or what. Questions beginning with why also elicit more than yes or no, but can put person in the defensive.

**Open ended:** What will you do with the puppy while you are at work?

**Closed-ended:** Is this puppy going to be home alone while you are at work?

**Defensive:** Why do you want a puppy that is not housebroken when you work full time?

## Three Levels of Responses to a Conversation

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1. Denial of the message, or criticism, or abusive response. With all of these the customer will feel put down, on the defensive, and closed to further communication.
2. Accurate, non-judgmental response that answers the question but does not necessarily encourage further dialogue.
3. Good summary of content, that also touches on underlying feelings (paraphrasing), spoken or unspoken (empathy), and stimulating good rapport (open-ended questions).

### Examples would include:

Counselor: *What kind of pets do you have at home?*

Customer: *I have a 10 month old lab mix and she's going to have puppies soon*

**Level I, Inappropriate response:** Why weren't you responsible enough to have her spayed?

**Level II:** When an animal isn't spayed it's almost impossible to keep her from getting pregnant, even when you take precautions.

**Level III:** It's probably going to be hard to find good homes for those pups. Have you thought about having your dog spayed, so she won't become pregnant again?

Counselor: *What kind of dog are you interested in?*

Customer: *I am looking for a guard dog.*

**Level I, Inappropriate response:** We don't adopt out guard dogs here

**Level II:** So you want a dog that will be protective of you and your property.

**Level III:** People think of guard dogs in a lot of different ways. Could you help me to understand what you mean by guard dog?

Counselor: *Is there anyone in your household who may be allergic to cats?*

Customer: *My husband says he sneezes around animals, but he's hypochondriac, so I have not told him I'm getting a cat.*

**Level I, Inappropriate response** That's a pretty inconsiderate thing to do to your husband not to mention the cat.

**Level II:** So you have not spoken to your husband yet?

**Level III:** It sounds like you really want a cat even though you are not sure what your husband will say.

Remember, we do not discriminate or turn people down for an adoption due to race, sex, age, language, or the way the person looks or dresses. Also remember to assess the situation and gather all the facts fully before making rash judgments. It is always helpful to consult with another adoption counselor or supervisor before making these decisions.

**It is unrealistic to think that the shelter failed when the adoption didn't work out. Don't beat yourself up; animals and people behave differently at home than in our shelter.**

### The Adoption Process

- Is respectful of the adopter's experience and knowledge and assume both of you come from a place of commonality wanting to help animals
- Takes a conversational approach with open-ended questions such as "What are you looking for", "What's your lifestyle", etc.
- Is a discussion, rather than a series of barriers that applicants must overcome in order to get an animal
- Focuses on success, and creating a relationship with the customer
- **Looks for a way to approve an adoption, not turn one down**
- **Treats each potential adopter and animal as individuals**
- Uses guidelines to encourage discussion and education, not as inflexible mandates
- Emphasizes the resources the shelter can provide to help solve any problems that arise
- Emphasizes that post-adoption contact from the adopter is welcomed and returns are acceptable

**Remember – if the adopter can provide a safe atmosphere for the pet then allow the adopter to decide if they can handle the behavior by setting expectations.**

### What is A Successful Adoption?

1. The match is suited to the individual animal and family
2. The pet is afforded appropriate veterinary care
3. The pet's social, behavioral, and companionship needs are met
4. The pet has a livable environment (including appropriate food, water, shelter, etc)
5. The pet is respected and valued

### **Adoption Counselor's intuitive judgment**

While a counselor's intuitive judgment of a potential adopter should be given weight, it must not be allowed to sink into the realm of prejudice. Automatically rejecting a certain type or group of people from consideration as adopters is discriminatory and reduces the number of homes available to animals without taking the time to even evaluate the individual. We must be conscious of our personal bias and filters.

### **Chaining**

We oppose the idea of chaining a dog outside 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. However, if the dog is only outside for a short period of time and is retrained by a cable run or tie out because they do not have a fence, this is not by itself a reason to decline an adoption. You should work with the adopter to come up with a plan that meets his needs and the needs of the pet. Please understand and know the risks of chaining a dog outside before trying to educate someone on other possible alternatives.

### **Guard Dog/Mouser**

You should first determine whether you and the potential adopter are speaking the same language. By "guard dog", you may be thinking of an underfed, neglected dog guarding a salvage yard. The adopter may mean a dog who barks when anyone comes to the door. "Mousing" could be more of a hoped-for behavior from the family cat than the primary reason for seeking a new pet.

### **Outside Dog**

The question is not simply whether or not the dog will live solely or primarily outside, but rather how the dog's social and companionship needs will be met. Mitigating factors may be the presence of other animals (dog, horse, etc) the dog can play with, and how much time the dog will spend with his adopter (i.e., how much time does the adopter spend outdoors; how do they plan to spend time with the dog during the cold or really hot months?) Also, we might consider that many a dog meant to sleep outside has wagged and wiggled his way indoors – often right into the adopter's bed.

### **Landlord Permission**

It is the Adopters responsibility to know and understand their landlord policies. Rather than acting as a detective in this case, you can counsel them and trust the adopter to make a good decision. The adopter is the one taking the risk.

### **Pet History**

While a past failed human/pet relationship may raise red flags it should not by itself prevent an adoption. Ask simple open ended questions such as “What has changed in your circumstances”, “What if anything would you have done differently”, by keeping an open mind and allowing people to explain you might learn they have already thought about the problem and found solutions. As far as checking with their Veterinarian, it is not required and should only be used as a tool for you to find out more about the person’s pet history if you have concerns. If a potential adopter has no history of pet ownership, a discussion on expectations may help start the relationship off well. In addition, more follow-up support may be needed after the adoption.

### **Outside Cat or Inside/Outside Cat**

This is a good example of a requirement that leads applicants to lie to the adoption counselor. Ultimately, we can not control this situation. A reasonable expectation may be that the adopter understands all the dangers of letting a cat outside, the importance of always having ID on the pet, and the shelter’s strong preference that cats be kept indoors or let outdoors under supervision only. If the adopter wants a cat for a pet, and plans on letting her go outside unsupervised, at least the cat will be spayed or neutered. The same may not be true if the adopter acquires a cat from another source.

### **Declawing**

Declawing is just one solution that people can use as a means to stop destructive scratching by their cat. This by itself is no reason to decline someone from adopting a pet. It is however an ideal opportunity to educate them on other means of controlling the problem. Some people just don’t know they have other options that work or understand why declawing may not be the best choice.

**We should recognize that every interaction with the public is an opportunity to educate AND to learn. We can learn while we are teaching. If we don’t educate and build relationships with our potential adopters, we aren’t achieving what we could for the animals.**

Thank you to Maricopa County Animal Care and Control and to Petsmart Charities for their Report on Adoption Forum II. A lot of the information in this manual was gathered from these two organizations.