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# Marketing Ideas that Could Improve Adoptions and Reduce Return Rates of Dogs in Shelters in the State of Michigan

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WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

# Marketing Ideas That Could Improve Adoption and Reduce Return Rates of Dogs at Shelters in the State of Michigan

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**Bryan Klemett**  
11/23/2016

Nonprofit organizations such as shelters look for ways to improve the overall well-being of society. In order to be successful in any business, that organization must be able to market their products. Marketing can help shelters become successful through branding by community involvement. This thesis is aimed at how marketing can help shelters increase their adoption rates and decrease the amount of returns of dogs.

## **I. Introduction**

Dogs have always been something that attracts people's attention. It is hard to decide whether it is their fur, their cuteness, or their personality that makes them lovable. The area I chose to conduct my research is in marketing. Since dogs are man's best friend, what other better way is there to do a thesis than on something so lovable? This research entails marketing ideas that could increase adoption rates while reducing return rates of animals at shelters in the State of Michigan.

I chose this topic because as it is stated earlier, I am a dog lover. I have always had a dog growing up and I plan on having a dog in the future once my life starts to settle down. Part of the reason why this research was conducted is because people love seeing a dog happy. A smiling, tail-wagging dog brings a smile to ones' face and brings about a pleasant feeling. There will always be a person who will go up to a stranger walking their dog with the intentions of petting it. With regards to marketing, it is an area that is interesting to many due to all of the creativity that goes into it. It forces people to think outside of the box to come up with ideas that have not been thought of or tweak ideas that already exist. This creative side of marketing brings a feeling of excitement, whereas the other areas of business, for example: accounting, or supply chain, or production does not.

The analyzes of this paper deals with marketing: specifically defining marketing and the purposes of it, nonprofit organizations and some reasons for them, statistics regarding dogs and shelters, a personal plan of marketing ideas that could help with adoptions and the returns of dogs. The ideas are: pup-of-the-game (a spin-off), a home like atmosphere for the shelter with basic training (an original idea), and using certain dogs from the shelters to travel to hospitals to

visit patients (an original idea). These ideas were created after researching issues related to reasons for why people adopt and return animals as well as figuring out ways to target those reasons. Following this, the methodology of the study will be discussed with the results analyzed and then give my recommendations. I will also discuss what I have learned and what could have been done better.

## **II. Marketing**

### Defining:

Marketing, as defined by the American Marketing Association, is “an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders.” (Marketing News, September 15, 2004). Or a simpler definition from John J. Burnett states “marketing is often simply described as ‘finding, attracting, satisfying, and keeping customers’” (Nonprofit Marketing Best Practices pg. 14). This paper will use John Burnett’s definition more since marketing is how organizations get their product and brand out there. Getting the brand out there is designed to intrigue and attract consumers, which is done through advertisements, promotions (specials or deals) and sales.

### Purposes:

Marketing is a very useful tool in business. It can help build a customer base and develop brand name recognition. The end goal with building the brand name and customer base is leading to more adoptions and fewer returns through the use of these ideas.

One purpose of marketing is to make selling easier. According to Barry McLeish, “the ease of selling is directly proportional to the internal make-up of the constituent, his or her needs, wants, and values. To get to such a point, however, requires innovation and a willingness to change.” (Successful Marketing Strategies pg. 9). An interpretation of this definition is that the better a company markets itself and puts its products and brands out there, the easier it will be to sell their products. The “willingness to change” refers to the marketing department of any business. There does not always have to be change but when it comes down to it, changing from an idea or concept that everyone else is already using to one that is considered “out of the box” can go a long way in building a brand.

The goal of marketing, according to Peter Drucker, who is known as the father of management, states that “the aim of marketing is to make selling unnecessary” (Nonprofit Marketing Best Practices pg. 21). When discussing nonprofit organizations, Drucker stated that: “to run a nonprofit organization effectively, marketing must be built into the total design” (Nonprofit Marketing Best Practices pg. 48). This is why these ideas include creativity; to help dogs in shelters become adopted through branding. The more creativity there is, the more selling will become unnecessary. With creativity, creativity becomes a competitive edge. To do this, it will require a company to have a strategic plan that “helps an organization to go where it has decided it wants to go.” Without a conscious plan in place, competitive direction ultimately becomes a series of reactions rather than action...” (Successful Marketing Strategies pg. 32).

Another purpose of marketing is to “provide assistance in identifying, satisfying, and retaining customers” (Nonprofit Marketing Best Practices pg. 23). This can help a shelter because there are people who own or want to own multiple dogs. During the Stryker family picnic with Animal Rescue Project, I went on a walk with a woman who had already adopted one

dog from the shelter. The walk we went on was a test to see how her dog handled being around another dog that the woman was interested in. The walk went well and she ended up adopting the dog after the event. This shows marketing's ability to satisfy and retain customers through previous events. The dog they had already adopted from the shelter was acquired at an adoption event held by Animal Rescue Project. Their community involvement with these events brought back a previous customer.

John Burnett suggests that “marketing should meet a specific need or want for a particular customer. It is not about producing irrelevant goods and services.” (Nonprofit Marketing Best Practices pg. 24). This is relevant for a shelter because from my interviews with the participants in the study; the one thing that people always mentioned they wanted in a dog was: one that has a social personality, good with children, other dogs, and well-behaved. Having a dog with all three characteristics is not likely. But with the ideas I have combined with marketing; can demonstrate the need and or want of a well behaved dog for potential adopters.

### **III. Nonprofits Organizations**

#### Background on Nonprofit Organizations:

Nonprofit organizations are defined as “organizations, that is, institutionalized to some extent, private, that is, institutionally separate from the government, non-profit distributing, that is, not returning profits generated to their owners or directors, self-governing, that is, able to control their own activities, and voluntary that is, non-compulsory and involving some meaningful degree of voluntary participation.” (www.idealists.org). These organizations are referred to as “agencies, organizations or groups, not businesses or firms” (www.idealists.org). They are not referred to as a business, even though technically they are, because the

organizations do not distribute profits to members within the organization. However, the profits are distributed throughout the organization to address the business needs for the nonprofit, and are intended to benefit the organization by helping reach its mission to make a difference in and to fulfill their cause.

### Nonprofit and Taxes:

Nonprofit organizations receive exemption from certain sections of the Internal Revenue Code. The most well-known exemption is the 501(c)(3). “The IRS grants recognition of exemption under this section to entities that are "organized and operated exclusively for charitable purposes." In general, it is only to this sort of exempt organization that tax deductible gifts can be made by individuals, and it is only to this sort of organization that charitable foundations can make grants.” (www.idealists.org). While researching, one distinction separated itself from the rest, and the distinction included two terms: nonprofit and not-for-profit. What really sets these apart is the IRS; otherwise to the rest of the world, there isn't really a difference. But in the eyes of IRS, the difference between the two is: Not-for-profit refers to an activity, such as a hobby like fishing. Nonprofit according to the IRS refers to an organization that is established without making profits in mind (www.idealists.org). There are benefits from starting a nonprofit. According to John Burnett, the benefits are: “first, all organizations can receive tax-deductible contributions from businesses and individuals. Second, most organizations are exempt from income tax and property tax, and some are exempt from sales tax.” (Nonprofit Marketing Best Practices pg. 7). Nonprofit status affects a shelter through adoptions and donations (sales & income tax exemption), and being exempt from property tax.

### Nonprofit Terms:

Although nonprofit organizations do not pay taxes on the income they make, the organizations can be subject to certain taxes. A tax that a nonprofit organization may be subject to is the unrelated business income tax (UBIT). “Organizations that are exempt from paying United States corporate tax on income related to their exempt purposes must, nevertheless, pay tax at the standard corporate tax rates for any unrelated business income over \$1,000 per year. Earning UBI does not in itself call into question an organization's tax-exempt status.” (www.idealists.org). This tax is something that all nonprofit organizations, including shelters, need to be aware of. For income to be considered UBI, it can't be “income from a regular trade or business transaction and used to support the organization's exempt”. (www.idealists.org). For a shelter, this would not include the fees for adopting a dog or cat; selling items such as t-shirts would be.

Some other terms that go along with nonprofits are donor, volunteer, board member, client, constituent, resource attraction, relationship marketing and internal marketing. Terms such as: donors and volunteers are used to describe the people who work with a shelter. Donors are people who contribute resources, such as supplies (e.g. money, dog food, toys) to the organization while volunteers are the people who lend their time and effort for no pay. The less common terms: resource attraction, relationship marketing, and internal marketing are all very simple. Resource attraction is how the nonprofit draws in resources like money or supplies to the organization (Successful Marketing Strategies pg. 17). Relationship marketing deals with how the business involves everyone, including donors, volunteers, customers, and constituents (Successful Marketing Strategies pg. 34). Internal marketing uses current employees and volunteers, as well as former personnel to become ambassadors for the nonprofit (Nonprofit Marketing Best Practices pg. 29). Internal marketing is critical for nonprofits because word of



mouth is the most effective way to get the brand and product to sell. This is supported by Forbes magazine which states that word of mouth is the “most valuable form of marketing”. They also suggest that “according to Nielsen, 92% of consumers believe recommendations from friends and family over all forms of advertising” (www.forbes.com). Any positive things being said about the business is good. Free positive word of mouth is the best form of marketing since you don’t have to pay for it. Relationship and internal marketing tie into the ideas offered because they will get people talking. The ideas will give people a reason to talk positively about the shelter. Another term that is associated with a nonprofit is called Exchange.

#### Exchanges from doing business with Nonprofits:

There are exchanges for every person involved in a nonprofit. Anytime a person conducts business with or helps in any way, it is considered an exchange. For donors, the exchange received is because they “most likely feel the product they are donating is both helping men and women overcome a serious problem, as well as contributing positively to a local or societal problem” (Successful Marketing Strategies pg. 22). In return for a donation, the exchanges that the nonprofit receives are the resources the person was willing to give up. Those resources can vary from free service through volunteers, the possibility of growing due to an increase in money or supplies (Successful Marketing Strategies pg. 15). In a shelter for instance, a donor can either donate money which allows for the shelter to buy supplies such as food for the animals, products like toys or bags used to clean up after the animals. Both parties benefit in some way from donations. For people volunteering, the exchanges they receive are hours for community service or the good feeling of contributing to the health and well-being of society. For nonprofits, the exchanges they receive are cheap labor and lowering of their overall costs (Successful Marketing Strategies pg. 15). For a shelter, volunteers can spend time with the animals where they take

them out for a walk; which helps the actual staff by allowing them to focus on more important responsibilities and allows employing fewer personnel. As for the clients, the exchanges they seek are personal benefits, services, and friendships. Nonprofits, during the exchange with clients receive: fulfillment of their mission, success and contribution (Successful Marketing Strategies pg. 15). For a shelter, the exchange is friendship with the animal, or the good feeling of adopting an animal in need of a home. Shelters succeed because an adoption brings in money for them to buy other supplies and it helps them in fulfilling their mission of putting animals in a good home.

#### **IV. Animal Adoption Statistics**

According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) website, "it's estimated that 70-80 million dogs are owned in approximately 37-47% of all households in the United States". In the country, there is an estimated 13,600 animal shelters total nationwide ([www.asPCA.org](http://www.asPCA.org)). In Michigan, the Michigan Department of Agriculture has as of 2010, 197 shelters registered with them ([www.michiganradio.org](http://www.michiganradio.org)). Some of these shelters have physical locations and others are foster homes. Some use both a physical location and foster homes. Even with all of these shelters in existence and working relentlessly to save the animals they have, there are a couple of statistics that were surprising. There are several ways that a person can obtain an animal for a pet. The first way is through breeders. The ASPCA website states that only 28% of dogs are purchased from breeders. The next way an animal can be obtained is through shelters, which is at 29% for cats and dogs. The last way, which is the main way animals are obtained, is through friends and family ([www.asPCA.org](http://www.asPCA.org)). The Bissell Pet Foundation backs this up with "only 20 to 30 percent of cats and dogs are adopted from shelters and rescues." ([www.bissellfoundation.org](http://www.bissellfoundation.org)). To put these percentages into numbers, the ASPCA site states that 7.6 million animals enter shelters each year while only about 2.7 million are

adopted and another 2.7 million are euthanized (www.asPCA.org). The rest are left at the shelters until they are adopted. Before these numbers were discovered, I thought that the percentage for adoptions was not very high, but I did not think it would be that low. I thought it would be at least 40-50%, which is still low, but higher than what it actually is. The statistic that was really surprising is that “five out of ten dogs in shelters and seven out of ten cats in shelters are destroyed simply because there is no one to adopt them” (www.bissellpetfoundation.org). The fact that half of the dogs are killed because the shelters could not find a home is alarming. This is where the marketing can help by building a positive brand image. The statistics above highlight the potential for the adoption percentage to increase while the killing of animals and the dogs left in the shelters decrease. I also see potential to decrease the returns of adopted pets. What will be hard to compete against for a shelter is that most pets are obtained from a family member or friend.

#### Adoptions and Returns:

People adopt and return animals for various reasons. When volunteering with Animal Rescue Project (ARP) of the course of multiple events, people had different kinds of reasons for choosing to adopt. Most of the time, the people that were asked came to the event looking for a pet as a companion animal for their current one. Another reason was because they wanted a pet. This was typically when they had a young child and recently started a family. The dog was intended to become the newest addition to their family.

Returning animals on the other hand, also happen for various reasons. The article titled, *Returning a Recently Adopted Companion Animal: Adopters' Reasons for and Reactions to the Failed Adoption Experience* unsurprisingly explores the reasons why people return the pets that

they adopt. The results of the study include reasons such as: not getting along with other pets, issues with children, other behavior problems, human allergies/illness, elimination problems, escaping, animal illness, size issues, moving, aggression, too busy for a pet, and other. The study indicates that the majority of returns occurs within 24 hours which is at 50.6% (Shore, Elsie, 2010). Almost all of these problems and challenges with failed adoptions can either be treated or worked on by the shelter. The few exceptions to this would be moving, human allergies, and people who realize they do not have the time to take proper care of the pets. But the return issues that some of the ideas target are aggression and behavior problems. These have been isolated through the collection of qualitative data.

## **V. Methodology**

In this study, I collected multiple sources of qualitative data. It was conducted by interviewing the participants (five total) either over the phone or in person. Data was also collected through participation-observation. The shelters that participated in the study who agreed to over the phone interviews include Adopt-A-Pet in Fenton, Wishbone Pet Rescue located in Allegan County, and Elk County Animal Shelter based out of Alpena. The two shelters that agreed to in person interviews were Animal Rescue Project (ARP), which is in Portage and is the shelter I volunteer for and Mackenzie's Animal Sanctuary, which is based in Lake Odessa, Michigan. Most of these shelters were chosen at random. The plan was to have a wide range of shelters from all over the state of Michigan. Not every shelter that was contacted was willing to participate.

During the interviews, the participants answered a list of 13 questions for the participants to answer. All of the questions asked were designed to give a basic idea of what goes into a shelter,

and to gain a better understanding of the business. Here is the interview guide that was completed by the participating shelters:

### **Shelter Name**

1. How often does your organization bring in dogs a year and how many (if possible)? How many become adopted (per month, estimation)? How many of those adopted are returned?
  - Adopted:
  - Intake:
  - returned:
2. How long do the animals typically stay until adoption (estimation of avg)?
3. What is your facility like? How are the living conditions for the animals currently being held there?
4. What type of dogs does your organization bring in? (young, old, big or small dog, which kind)
5. How do you promote the dogs for adoption marketing wise?
6. Tell me about the treatment for the dogs when your organization is putting them up for adoption.
7. How do you deal with a dog with a chronic illness?
8. Tell me about your adoption process.
9. Tell me about any training you provide and whether it is mandatory or not if there is.
10. Does your organization do any kind of pet therapy with your dogs? (at hospitals or colleges)
11. How does your organization get the employees: volunteer or staff?

12. What advice would you give a person who is starting in the business?

13. Tell me about your experience with this organization.

The volunteer experience was where the participant observation data was collected. I love dogs and during the volunteer experience at the events, one of the perks was being able to play with the dogs. I would get to play with and spend time with dogs. The events ARP needed volunteers for were the West Michigan Pet Expo at the Delta Complex in Grand Rapids, the Richland Horse Show in Richland, Michigan and the Stryker Family Picnic. All of these events were great experiences. The next section will discuss the observations that were made at these events.

## **VI. Findings**

### Volunteer Experience (findings):

The first event with Animal Rescue Project was at the West Michigan Pet Expo. This event was specifically focused on helping animals to get adopted. At this event, I helped transport, feed, take the dogs on bathroom breaks, and play with them for nine hours. Early on in the event, the dogs stayed in their cages, unless they were on a bathroom break. When they were in their cages, the first observation that I made was the foot traffic at the shelter's booth, which was low. The biggest source of attraction at that time was the puppies that had their own play pen. Outside of the puppies, the other dogs were not getting much attention or consideration. Around then, the other booths were receiving heavier foot-traffic. This was when I decided to start taking one dog out at a time. Taking the dogs out allowed them to have some freedom and show off their personality, which not only gave the dog more exposure to potential adopters, but it also brought in more foot traffic. The increased flow of traffic was a direct result of my actions because it

allowed people to interact with the animals. This tactic worked well specifically when all of the puppies were out of the pen. Another tactic that was brilliant in increasing foot traffic was a kissing booth. Animal Rescue Project did not do the kissing booth but a shelter at a neighboring booth did. All people had to do was donate \$1 to the shelter so they were allowed to give a dog or puppy a kiss. This tactic played into the consumer-product interaction technique, which was what the puppies were for. The end result of this event was that all the dogs that were in the shelter got adopted, which includes the dogs that were not able to travel to the event.

The next event with Animal Rescue Project was the Richland Horse Show. This event was less about the adoptions and more focused on the time trials since it was the equestrian time trials for the U.S. Olympic horse riding team. At this event, I took dogs on walks and bathroom breaks. I was only at this event for a few hours but some observations that I made were again that having the dogs out of the crates drove foot traffic. Another observation I made was walking the dogs around at this event gave the dogs and shelter better exposure. When the dogs are going out on a walk, they wear a bandanna that says “adopt me” with the shelter logo and name on it. Walking the dogs around got people more interested in the tent that was reserved for the shelter. The end result of this event was not as successful as the Pet Expo but some families went home with new companions.

The last event with Animal Rescue Project was the Stryker Family Picnic. This event was put on by the Stryker family for the employees of their company. Stryker allowed the shelter to come out for an adoption event during their picnic. This was a great way to gain exposure in the community. I made a few observations during this event. These observations were not new, but they backed up what was observed at the previous events. The first observation made was that the puppies being the main source of attraction. At these events, a good way for people to get

involved with the puppies was for the shelter to let people, especially children, hold them. When this happened, the foot traffic for the booth went up. Another observation that was made was walking the dogs around allowed people to interact with them. When this happened, people became more interested in the dogs and wanted more information on them. The end result of this event was that some families took home a new pet.

### Interviews at Shelters

There were only two shelters that I visited for the interviews. This was due to the fact that majority of the participants were all over the state. Those shelters that participated in on-site interviews were Animal Rescue Project and Mackenzie's Animal Sanctuary. Both are considered no-kill shelters, and I found that they both have a kennel-like structure to them.

At Animal Rescue Project, they take great pride in having a clean shelter. People have always commented on the cleanliness of their facility. A dog's daily routine consists of bathroom breaks and playing in their outdoor pen. Some additional activities a dog can experience on a typical day are going on walks, car rides, or even traveling to a volunteer's home for a short period of time. These activities give the dogs a break from the shelter. It also gives more exposure to the dogs to any person interested in them outside of the shelter who may ask for information. The shelter does have isolation rooms for dogs that may have aggressive tendencies. These isolation rooms are not used as punishment but they are used for personnel to gain an understanding of the dog's personality.

The other shelter I had the chance to visit was Mackenzie's Animal Sanctuary. At Mackenzie's, a dog's day consists of eating and playing outside. Mackenzie's is a unique shelter; it is called a sanctuary. A sanctuary is a special kind of a shelter where no matter what the dog's



health is or the reason why the dog is there (aggression, illness, etc.); the dog has a chance to live its life. All dogs go through some sort of training whether it is targeting either aggression or shyness. There are multiple buildings that the dogs can live. The main building where the office is located is for any dog that has little to no aggression issues. If a dog is really aggressive, there is another building on the other side of their facility that is specifically for them. They also have a separate building specifically for the older dogs.

Shelter Results Summary:

	Animal Rescue Project	Mackenzie's Animal Sanctuary	Wishbone Pet Rescue	Elk County Animal Shelter	Adopt-A-Pet
Adoptions (per month)	30-45	No average*	50	10	97
Returns (per month)	1-2	Less than one per month	18	1-2	1
Average length of stay	42 days	Until a fit for the dog is found*	30-60 days	2 months	3 weeks to 6 months
Current marketing efforts	Petfinder, Facebook, Rent-A-Pup, Pup of the Game	Word of mouth, Petfinder, Facebook,	Petfinder, Petango.com, Facebook, website	Website, Petfinder, Fundraisers	Facebook, Instagram, Petfinder, newspaper ads
Training provided?	None	2 programs. 1 for aggressive and 1 for shy dogs	None	None	Enrichment programs, positive reinforcement programs
Pet therapy?	No	No	No	No	No

### Shelter Comparison:

The table above shows the results from all the shelters that participated in the study. This table is used to cross reference the numbers for adoptions and returns with the ideas that were created to target. Some similarities they have are: the use of social media, double digit adoptions with less than double digit returns a month, and they use both staff and volunteers. The social media outlets the shelters all had in common were Facebook and Petfinder.

The differences are what make these shelters special in their own way. All of the shelters use social media, but they all do different events. All of the shelters have a physical facility, but not all of them have a similar design. The next few sections outline what made them different.

### Animal Rescue Project

ARP focuses mostly, but not always, on dogs that have a chance to live. From an event standpoint, they do offsite events such as Rent-A-Pup, Pup of the Game and other community events. Rent a pup is done on Western Michigan University's campus as well as the campus of K-College. Students are allowed to rent a dog out by the hour. In this hour, they are allowed to walk the dog, pet it, and play with it. In the past, they used to allow people to rent the dogs for the weekend or a day but that ended up changing when one dog came back injured. Pup of the game is an event where the shelter takes the dogs to the K-Wings game and the dogs are put on the jumbo Tron for the fans to see. The fans then vote on their favorite dog. They have a booth set up for people to come check out which dogs are available for adoption.

### Mackenzie's Animal Sanctuary

Mackenzie's Animal Sanctuary is unique. Adopting an animal from Mackenzie's is very tough. The lady I interviewed, Tommie, who is the Lead Adoption Coordinator at Mackenzie's, told me she only accepts 20% of applications in a year, and that seemed to be the main statistic she could give during the interview. She could not give a number of adoptions because she will only let the dogs become adopted by a person if she felt that it was the right fit for the dogs. This is interesting and smart because it prevents, for example, a more laid back family from adopting a dog that is considered active and needs more exercise than other dogs. To no surprise, this shelter has had one return this year. Mackenzie's markets their shelter mainly through word of mouth. At the shelter, the dogs have two training programs they can go through if needed. One program focuses on aggression and the other on shy dogs by increasing human interaction. They do not do any kind of pet therapy.

### Elk County Animal Shelter

Elk County facility is a warehouse that serves as a kennel located in Alpena, Michigan. The one unique aspect about this shelter is that they have a puppy room, which the other shelters did not have. Since this is a county shelter, they have to take in every dog given to them, which includes strays. Outside of social media, they do fundraisers such as: garage sales, dinners, and fairs. They will provide treatment for the dogs with a chronic illness if possible. If the dog doesn't have a good quality of life after the treatment, they will put the dog down. There is no obedience training and they do not do pet therapy.

## Adopt-A-Pet

Adopt-A-Pet is a fairly new shelter. It used to be an old fraternity house in Fenton, Michigan. This shelter has a home feeling to it with the house structure. They have rooms with (wooden) furniture, as well as a kennel for the dogs to sleep in. The dog room has tiled flooring and is heated during the winter and cooled during the summer. This is the only shelter that specifically chooses the dogs they want. This means they do not bring in just any dog possible. What they do is they look at the personality of a dog, and then see how they can place it, and they decide from there. Most of their dogs are owner-surrendered. They treat the dogs if the treatment is needed. Their adoption process involves matching the applicants' home life to a dog in the shelter. They also provide enrichment training for the dogs they have. This includes activities that make dogs work for what they want. One enrichment activity they have is a can of food that has a hole in it. This hole in the can allows the dog to work at obtaining its food from the can. They also condition the dogs to a home environment by using scents, music, and different toys each day. They do not offer pet therapy, but they do travel to nearby schools for visits.

## Wishbone Pet Rescue Alliance

Wishbone Pet Rescue Alliance is an open admission shelter. It is a kennel that has outside pens for the dogs. They bring in all kinds of dogs and promote themselves through Petfinder, Petango, and Facebook. For treatment, the decision for it is based on the quality of life of the dog after the treatment is provided. The shelter does not provide obedience training and does not do any pet therapy.

## **VII. My recommendations**

The ideas created target branding, community involvement, as well as address some of the issues to why dogs are returned. The marketing suggestions include having an add-on to the pup of the game, creating a home like environment combined with basic obedience training, and something like pet therapy.

The first idea adding on to the pup of the game event done by Animal Rescue Project includes having a dog on the sidelines for a college football game. In East Lansing, Michigan State has a dog named Zeke that runs on the field during stoppages of play and chases a Frisbee that his owner throws in one of the end zones. A shelter might have to use a personal dog of an employee due to the training needed for the dog to play fetch. The dog will also have to get used to an environment with thousands of people as well. Regardless of where the dog is from, the way the fans would be able to tell where it is from is by having a bandanna or some kind of vest with the shelter logo and name on it. When the dog is on the field, the jumbo tron will advertise the shelter by displaying the name and logo of it. This could help build a brand because people will see the shelter being involved with the community and in return, drive more people to their facility.

The next idea is to create a home like environment in the shelter combined with basic obedience training for the dogs. Adopt-A-Pet has a start on this idea with the house that contains a room with furniture in it. Adding on to this would involve couches with coverings for it. Dogs would be allowed to jump on and lay down on the couch. The more furniture a dog can be around, the more it will give a home like experience. As for the obedience training, the shelter would have a professional come in once a month for a few months to train the staff. From there,

the employees can train the animals and volunteers what they learned. I believe this will work because the home like feeling and training addresses the behavior issues that are reasons for return. The article *Evaluation of a Novel Dog Adoption Program in Two US Communities* is about a strategy that research claims was more effective than others. The shelters in this study put some of the dogs in foster homes while the others stayed at the shelter. This puts the dogs in a home environment and in the pathway of potential adopters. The duration of hospitality in the foster homes was longer, but the return rates of the foster dogs were lower. The pilot study was conducted at the Louisiana Society for Prevention and Cruelty to Animals. All the dogs they sheltered had survey forms for adopters to fill out. It was discovered that 2% of the dogs that stayed in foster homes (AA group) then became adopted were returned while 13% of the dogs staying at the shelter (IS group) were returned. The primary study was conducted at Charleston Animal Society (CAS). The return for CAS was 7% for the AA group and 17% for the IS group (Gibbons, Weiss, Garrison, Allison, 2014). Human interaction with the dogs is crucial as well. In the article *Dogs in Animal Shelters: Problems, Suggestions, and Needed Expertise*; the authors researched and suggest that “human interaction with the application of basic conditioning procedures can reduce the impact of the shelter environment, which results into an easier transition from a shelter to a home”. The article also stated that a dog can arrive at a shelter without any issues and end up leaving with one due to prolonged isolation and separation. They suggest that human interaction and conditioning is a great way to combat this (Tuber, Miller, Linden, Halter, Caris, 1999). This would be promoted and marketed through the use social media. All of the shelters use Facebook and PetFinder, which is great. This idea entails that the shelter would film or take pictures of the dogs in the rooms designated for the “home-like-feeling” and the obedience training. They then would post it on Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram,

and one app that weren't mention, Periscope. Periscope is a newer media app that allows people to film from their phones and post videos of what they're doing onto their site. This would catch potential adopters' attention and intrigue them to find out more about the shelter and animals.

The last marketing idea is an augmentation of a pet therapy program. This idea requires an agreement with a local hospital. This would allow the shelter once a month or so to visit that hospital with puppies from the shelter to visit the patients that are staying there. The dogs would be wearing bandannas with the shelter logo and name on it. This would not only be good for the dogs since it gives them a break from the shelter but the patients as well who may not be able to leave their beds. The idea of bringing dogs to a hospital shows the shelter giving back to the community by bringing happiness to patients who may need a reason to smile. This event would definitely cause stir in the community and interest in the shelter through positive word of mouth. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association; "approximately 40% of pet owners learned about their pet through word of mouth" (aspca.org). While 40% may not be the best, it is good enough to help increase adoptions for the shelter.

## **VIII. Discussion**

Overall, the findings suggest that the shelters can improve their numbers and marketing schemes, as long as it remains in their interests. The odds of Mackenzie's adoption process changing is unlikely anytime soon. This is because their adoption process having success with such few returns. Some of these ideas can be costly and may prevent shelters from attempting them. These ideas are not guaranteed to work, but based on my research; the ideas target areas that are crucial to building a brand and addressing issues for why the dogs are adopted and returned.



## **IX. Conclusion**

I chose this topic because I love dogs. The thought that there are dogs out there in shelters without good homes is saddening; which was my motivation for writing on this topic and I have learned a great deal from this experience. I learned that not every shelter accepts every dog and that volunteers are extremely important to the shelters because they offer free labor. Also it was discovered that not all shelters are willing to let college students or households without a physical fence adopt. I also learned that a puppy at an event is the main source of attraction for a shelter. When I was at the West Michigan Pet Expo, every few minutes there were multiple people inquiring about that puppy and wanted to know if it was up for adoption. Finally, after conducting this research I recognize that my study has limitation, as I could have improved the project in several areas. If I were to try this project again, I would include more shelters in my study to get a larger and more representative sample. I also would have put less time into digging into nonprofits and spend more time on the reasons for adoptions and returns. In conclusion, I learned a great deal and gained a better understanding of what it takes to make a shelter successful.

## **X. Appendices**

### **a. Elk County Animal Shelter**

14. How many dogs does your organization bring in a year and how often? How many become adopted (per month)? How many of those adopted are returned (estimation)?
- 10 dogs adopted in a month
  - 1-2 returns per month
15. How long do the animals typically stay until adoption (estimation)?

- 2 months on avg

16. What is your facility like? How are the living conditions for the animals currently being held there?

- Building
- Meet and greet room
- Dog kennels in there
- Have a warehouse with kennels, isolation and grooming room
- Puppy room

17. What type of dogs does your organization bring in? (young, old, big or small dog, which kind)

- Strays from the county, so everything

18. How do you market the shelter and pets?

- Website with available pets
- Pet finder
- Fundraisers
  - Garage sales, Italian dinner, fall turkey dinner, booth at fair
  - Bottle drives, recycle ink cartridges, Spartan brand label program, get points for receipts and they collect those

19. Tell me about the treatment for the dogs when your organization is putting them up for adoption.

- Spay, neutered, vaccinated, ear infections, microchip,

20. How do you deal with a dog with a chronic illness?

- They do treat them if possible

21. Tell me about your adoption process.

- Fill out application,
  - Look for fence
  - Director has to ok app
  - Vet is used for reference

22. Tell me about any training you provide and whether it is mandatory or not if there is.

- No obedience training

23. Does your organization do any kind of pet therapy with your dogs? (at hospitals or colleges)

- No they do not
- Every now and then they take dogs into preschool

24. How does your organization get the employees: volunteer or staff?

- Volunteers and employees

25. What advice would you give a person who is starting in the business?

Look up all rules and regulations, do everything by the book.

26. Tell me about your experience with this organization.

She thinks it's great and rewarding profession to get into, "seeing all the happy faces on not only the animals but the people as well"

**b. Mackenzie's**

27. How many dogs does your organization bring in a year and how often? How many become adopted per month? How many of those adopted are returned (estimation)?

- Adoption: adoptions are based on if there is a fit for you. They will not let students adopt, and they will deny an adoption if the dog isn't the right fit. So this number could vary.

- Return: 1 this year

28. How long do the animals typically stay until adoption (estimation)?

- Depends on the adoption process, as long as they need to be to find the right home and fit

29. What is your facility like? How are the living conditions for the animals currently being held there?

- Huge,
- Has multiple facilities based on dogs readiness
- Basically a kennel design
- Has a meet and greet room that is furnished
- 

30. What type of dogs does your organization bring in? (young, old, big or small dog, which kind)

- All, no kill sanctuary

31. How do you market the shelter and pets?

- Word of mouth
- Pet finder, adopt-a-pet
- Facebook
- Do parades, community events
- Schools come to the shelter

32. Tell me about the treatment for the dogs when your organization is putting them up for adoption.

- Has own medical building on site

- Has own vet come in twice a week

33. How do you deal with a dog with a chronic illness?

- Treat it to its cured or it passes

34. Tell me about your adoption process.

- Have to go online and fill out an application
- Have an interview for additional questions,
- Try to fit you to the dog

35. Tell me about any training you provide and whether it is mandatory or not if there is.

- Two training programs, has agility equipment
- Come-back-canine for aggressive dogs
- And shy dog groups for dogs who aren't human social

36. Does your organization do any kind of pet therapy with your dogs? (at hospitals or colleges)

- No they do not, schools come to the shelter

37. How does your organization get the employees: volunteer or staff?

- Both

38. What advice would you give a person who is starting in the business?

Make sure you can afford it, need the funding on a regular basis.

39. Tell me about your experience with this organization.

It is rewarding and exciting.

**c. Animal Rescue Project**

40. How many dogs does your organization bring in a year and how often? How many become adopted (per month)? How many of those adopted are returned (estimation)?

- 1-2 returns per month
- 256 on the year, 30-45 a month for dogs and cats

41. How long do the animals typically stay until adoption (estimation)?

- 42 day avg, due to medical tests and figuring out the dogs

42. What is your facility like? How are the living conditions for the animals currently being held there?

- Facility is clean. Has kennels for all the dogs. Has multiple rooms for the animals
- Foster homes are an option

43. What type of dogs does your organization bring in? (young, old, big or small dog, which kind)

- Bring in all kinds of dogs
  - Focuses on dogs that have a chance to live but all dogs
  - Do work on a budget
- No kill shelter

44. How do you market the shelter and pets?

- Off-site events,
  - Rent a put\*
  - Pup of the game
  - Petfinder
  - facebook

45. Tell me about the treatment for the dogs when your organization is putting them up for adoption.

- Spay, neuter,
- Will wait for dogs to be healthy before adoptions

46. How do you deal with a dog with a chronic illness?

- Treat it if it has a chance to live

47. Tell me about your adoption process.

- People fill out an application, and has to fit what they're looking for
  - Prefer house with a fence
  - Longtime ownership
  - Income/jobs

48. Tell me about any training you provide and whether it is mandatory or not if there is.

- No obedience training provided

49. Does your organization do any kind of pet therapy with your dogs? (at hospitals or colleges)

- No pet therapy

50. How does your organization get the employees: volunteer or staff?

- Volunteer and employees

51. What advice would you give a person who is starting in the business?

52. Tell me about your experience with this organization.

It is going in a lot of directions, and they are good. Ranging from spay/neutering awareness and medication awareness.

#### **d. Adopt-A-Pet**

53. How many dogs does your organization bring in a year? How many become adopted (per month)? How many of those adopted are returned (estimation)?

- 7,000 adoptions (cats and dogs) since 2010. That averages to 97.22 adoptions per month, 1,166.66 per year. 603 adoptions this year
- Returns: about 10-15 returns.

54. How long do the animals typically stay until adoption (estimation)?

- Cats can last up to a couple years
- Dogs can go from 3 weeks to 6 months to a year

55. What is your facility like? How are the living conditions for the animals currently being held there?

- Located in Fenton, MI.
- It is a small house with no yard or parking.
- Dogs have spacious rooms, dog beds which are 4 inches off the floor, and toys.
- Is a kennel
- Dogs have tile floors, heated in winter, cooled in summer.
- Cats or kittens are free roam area
- Has agility penn
- Has food dishes that make dogs work to get their food, positive reinforcement

56. What type of dogs does your organization bring in? (young, old, big or small dog, which kind)

- Limited intake shelter. Look at personalities to see how they can place them.
- Most are owner surrendered pets

57. How do you market the shelter and pets?

- Facebook page, Instagram, and petfinder
- Local paper ads couple times a week



- Bottle drives

58. Tell me about the treatment for the dogs when your organization is putting them up for adoption.

- They get a medical check, neutered/spayed, checked for heartworm, etc.
- Carry through with treatment before adoption

59. How do you deal with a dog with a chronic illness?

- Treat them through the adoption process.

60. Tell me about your adoption process.

- 1 on 1. Require all are spayed/neutered, like to have own a home. Otherwise have to talk to landlord.
- Everyone in family has to be on board for adoption.
- Try to match their home life with the dog

61. Tell me about any training you provide and whether it is mandatory or not if there is.

- Do k-9 enrichment program. Just gives the dog in and out of kennel experiences.
- Do dog to dog play time for dogs with no behavior issues
- Have staff or trained volunteer conduct positive reinforcement training for dogs that are behaviorally at risk.
- Do this by scents, music, and different toys each day. Along with other things.
- Furniture has to be bleachable, wooden and plastic furniture is ok. Michigan department of Agriculture rules.

62. Does your organization do any kind of pet therapy with your dogs? (at hospitals or colleges)

- Does lots with schools, not with older folk's homes.

63. How does your organization get the employees: volunteer or staff?

- Both staff and volunteer
- Having school kids volunteer

64. What advice would you give a person who is starting in the business?

Check all codes and cover all basis from planning.

65. Tell me about your experience with this organization.

It's been awesome, started out volunteering, and got a job from it. made the person a better person. The good stories make up for the bad.

**e. Wishbone Pet Rescue Alliance**

66. How often does your organization bring in dogs a year and how many (if possible)? How many become adopted (per month, estimation)? How many of those adopted are returned?

- Adopted: 605
- Intake is 1100 annually
- returned: 215
- Transferred to another shelter/rescue: 165

67. How long do the animals typically stay until adoption (estimation of avg)?

- 30-60 days

68. What is your facility like? How are the living conditions for the animals currently being held there?

- Open admission shelter
  - Can't refuse any animal that comes through their doors – housing is either cement kennels or new stainless steel guillotine door kennels. Cleaned

throughout the day by trustees from the County Jail. Dogs are outside at least once a day either being walked or in outside pen.

69. What type of dogs does your organization bring in? (young, old, big or small dog, which kind)

- All kinds. Biggest percentage are Pit Bulls

70. How do you promote the dogs for adoption marketing wise?

- Petfinder.com / Petango.com / Facebook / Our website

71. Tell me about the treatment for the dogs when your organization is putting them up for adoption. All dogs and cats are fully vaccinated appropriate for their age, spay or neutered, microchipped, flea treatment and worming.

72. How do you deal with a dog with a chronic illness? We diagnose the disease and determine the overall quality of its life and chances at adoption. Determine the estimated medical care needed per month, so the adopter is fully aware.

73. Tell me about your adoption process.

- It's a 6 page application that asks for 2 personal references, veterinary reference for current or previous vet care. Specific questions are asked about the plans for care. If it's a puppy, we require prepaid puppy classes at time of adoption from the source of their choosing.

74. Tell me about any training you provide and whether it is mandatory or not if there is.

We do not offer training of dogs to the public. We do have a dog behaviorist who comes and temperament assesses the dogs. If there are things we can provide via the shelter and limited staff and volunteers we will work on thing like leash training. Possible food aggression.

75. Does your organization do any kind of pet therapy with your dogs? (at hospitals or colleges)

- No

76. How does your organization get the employees: volunteer or staff?

- Promotion through our website and social media as well as adoption events.

77. What advice would you give a person who is starting in the business? Do a lot of research the type of shelter you want to be. How will you fund it, research grants.

Shadow at a couple different shelters to see how operations are handled. Attend animal conferences to learn about health and sanitation for the care of animals in shelters.

78. Tell me about your experience with this organization. I am a co-founder of Wishbone Pet Rescue Alliance. We started out as a traditional pet rescue taking animals from the county shelter and rehoming. We decided to start volunteering at the county facility because it was such high kill and had no volunteers. When the county needed to consider how to improve conditions and staff the shelter, Wishbone was approached to manage the shelter under a contract. Had we known how poorly the shelter would be supported financially by the county, we probably would not have considered the contract. But in our ignorance and love for wanting to help the animals, we jumped in with both feet, and hoped that donations will carry us through the rest of the financial way.

As a result, changes are slow at the shelter, due to funding always being a factor.

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