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

By: Bryan Klemett
Agenda

1. Marketing
2. Nonprofits
3. Purpose of project
4. Methodology
5. My volunteer experience
6. Findings
7. My Recommendations
8. Conclusion
Marketing

• “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)

• ‘finding, attracting, satisfying, and keeping customers’”. (Nonprofit Marketing Best Practices pg. 14)
Purposes of Marketing

- Build customer base
- Develop brand name
- Make selling easier
- Satisfy and retain customers
- Meet a specific customer want or need
Nonprofits

• 501(c)(3).
• “The IRS grants recognition of exemption under this section to entities that are organized and operated exclusively for charitable purposes.” (www.idealist.org)
Why Nonprofits?

• “… donors 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).
Purpose of This Project

• Find out what the shelters are currently doing marketing-wise

• Look for ways to:
  – Improve adoption rates
  – Reduce return rates
Methodology

• Conducted interviews with five shelters
  – Three shelters participated over the phone
  – Two shelters participated in person
• Participation observation
  – Volunteered at adoption events
  – Volunteered at shelter
The shelters in my study

- Elk County Animal Shelter
- Animal Rescue Project*
- Wishbone Pet Rescue Alliance
- Adopt-a-Pet
- Mackenzie’s Animal Sanctuary
My volunteer experience

• Play with the dogs
  – Walks, car rides, etc.

• Assist in events
  – West Michigan Pet Expo
  – Richland Horse Show
  – Stryker Family Picnic
Insight from the events

- Dogs out of crates creates traffic
- Kissing booth increased traffic
- Puppies = gold
Where people obtain their dogs

- Animal welfare organization – 20%
- Breeders – 80%  (American Pet Products Association)
Why people adopt from a shelter?

- Appearance of the animal
- Social behavior with the adopter
- Personality

What I found at events:
- Looking for buddy for current pet
- Just want a dog
Key reasons for keeping pet

- Behavior
- Personality
- compatibility
% of dogs returned

• Within 24 hrs.
  – 50.6%

• After 1 year
  – 20%
Reasons for the return

- Doesn’t play well with other pets
- Not good w/ children
- Human allergies/illness
- Size issues
- Moving
- Aggression
- Not enough time
## Results

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

• Pup of the Game (spin-off)

• Design the shelter to have a “home” type of feel to it & obedience training (spin-off)

• Pet Therapy (spin-off)
Pup-of-the game (spin-off)
Why this?

- Community Involvement
- Word-of-mouth marketing

- “40% of pet owners learned about their pet through word of mouth” (aspca.org).

- Forbes magazine states that word of mouth is the “most valuable form of marketing and 92% of consumers believe recommendations from friends and family over all forms of advertising” (www.forbes.com).
Home-Like Environment W/ Basic Training
How this would be marketed
Why this?

• A dog can arrive at a shelter without any issues and leave with one due to prolonged isolation and separation. (Animal Shelters: Problems, Suggestions, and Needed Expertise)

• A study done in Louisiana concluded
  – 2% of the dogs that stayed in foster homes (AA group) then became adopted were returned and 13% of the dogs staying at the shelter (IS group) were returned.
Pet therapy (spin-off)
Why this?

• Word-Mouth-Mouth

• Community involvement
Relation to Purposes of Marketing

• All of the recommendations tie into at least one purpose

• These ideas are designed to increase:
  – Foot traffic
  – Word of mouth
  – Building a customer base

• Also designed to attract, satisfy, and retain customers
Conclusion

• Puppies = gold

• Volunteers are important!

• Shelters are picky!
  – Potential no adoptions for college students
  – Selective of dogs brought in