



Maddie's Institute

***The Evolution of Adoption Programs:
Part Two: Marketing to Save Lives***

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Video Transcript

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[Beginning of Audio]

Caitlin Quinn:

You ready? Okay. I'm just going to start as everybody starts to trickle back in. So the purpose of this section of the presentation is really to – hopefully it's a little bit more fun than the one before that. The previous one was a little bit information heavy.

And this is really meant to take some of those concepts and turn them into action items. So ways that we can utilize some of that information in terms of our marketing. And some of the things that I'm going to talk about, you may question whether they are related to marketing or not, but really, what we're getting at is the relationship that your shelter has with the community and being a resource that people want to come to the next time that they want to adopt a pet. So really turning your shelter into the place to be *[computer chimes]* when someone wants to acquire their next pet. So I'm just going to get started.

I want to briefly, before we really get into the animal lover specific ideas in here, talk a little bit about a marketing framework that I think is really helpful for – really just taking some easy concepts and applying them to the marketing that we do. So, this book by Malcolm Gladwell is a really great one for kicking us off on this idea of messaging and creating a sticky message for the public to really absorb. So a quote from that book is, “The specific quality that a message needs to be successful is the quality of stickiness.” And what I'm going to recommend is that your stickiness quality for all of your shelters should be within your community. When you want a pet, you come to us because we're fun.

We're going to get you your next pet and this is going to be a good experience. So the question to ask is, is the message memorable? Is it so memorable in fact that it can create change, that it can spur someone to action? So the idea here is any piece of information that we are giving to the public typically should spur them to action, whether that is on the side

of public safety or whether that is on the side of adoption. So spurring someone to adopt is really the endgame with any message that we're sending out into the community. Another book, and this framework is taken directly from this book, *Made to Stick*, by the Heath brothers is one that I think is very easy to follow, but also very, very relevant to our cause.

So the first piece of this puzzle is having a message that is simple, so both core and compact. And the first two decisions that you have to make regarding any message that you're putting out into the community is: what is the one message you want the audience to take away; and, what is their one action item? And what typically happens in animal welfare is that we tend to overcomplicate our message a little bit or we don't fully explain what it is – that the action item that we want someone to take. So this is an example of putting a lot of meaning into a very little package.

This functions as both a logo and as a piece of information. This is from a campaign that we did a couple years ago and the action item obviously would be adoption. Unexpected is the next piece of the puzzle, so that has to do with grabbing someone's attention. And I think that in those scenarios we really can learn a lot from for-profit industries, as not-for-profits typically, because right now what we're doing is kind of looking to each other sometimes for information. So a lot of us are doing a little bit of the same thing.

If you want to be unexpected and grab people's attention, I think that we have to, you know, keep up with current information, and also borrow from other industries. Concrete has to do with our messaging and in order to connect to a varied and diverse audience, which our potential adopters are a very varied and diverse audience. The message has to be both clear and memorable, so it has to be something tangible, something for people to take action on. Credible has a lot to do with us not only being unexpected and clear, but also telling the truth. So not drifting so into the creative realm that we are no longer selling a credible, believable message.

The most important things to do are making it personal, relevant, and realistic, and we'll talk a little bit about where this photo came from. It was from our majority project and the emotional aspect of this framework I think is one of the more important for our field to pay attention to. Emotions elicit a response, which translates into action, so the emotional driver in your message is, in the end: what is going to cause someone to take action?

But we also have to be very aware of emotional hurdles and there's a few that as an industry we tend to fall into. One is not overusing emotional words, so being very conscious of semantics. Because we tend to borrow from each other in this field and not always look outside of it, we tend to

use a lot of the same terminology, especially in things like our adoption bios, and that language gets overused to the point where it becomes a little bit meaningless at a certain point. So keep that in mind and we'll have some examples of how to stay away from that.

Different people have different motivations. This is one that is so important for us to remember within this field and my favorite example of this, which sounds so silly, but I – it does elicit a very strong response in animal welfare is people who love to dress up their animals and people who hate to dress up their animals. And very few of us fall in between. Most of us feel strongly one way or another, but from a marketing perspective, if putting a tutu on a dog, even if it is against your core belief system, is going to help that dog get adopted, then we have to respect that our audience might have different motivations than us. And it's a very silly example, but we do know that we tend, as an industry, to sometimes be unaware of our audience. We're aware that they're different than us. We're not very aware of how to communicate with them. So we have to ask ourselves, “What does our target audience respond to?” Putting personal tastes aside has a lot to do with that idea of dressing up a dog.

So putting our personal tastes in terms of “I hate Facebook,” but that doesn't mean that you don't get to not use it. It doesn't mean that that's not a really good tool for you to use to adopt out animals. So putting those kind of tastes in our back pocket, if it's going to further our mission and further getting dogs adopted or cats.

We're hardwired to feel emotion for people, but not abstract ideas. So this relates a little bit to psychic numbing when we were speaking about that earlier. So helping people relate to an individual animal, which doesn't always mean marketing individual animals, and we'll sort of get into the difference there, but helping them – them relate to an individual feeling or animal over just this broad term of adoption can really spur people to action, especially some people who typically wouldn't take action or who are afraid to take action because they've never done it before. And we'll talk a little bit more about that.

And in the end, using an individual's stories to overcome those that are overwhelmed. And stories, the final part of this framework, it really is just taking all of these components and wrapping them up in a nice little package. It doesn't mean literally a story. It doesn't mean that we literally have to tell a story, but all of our marketing pieces in the end should leave people with more information than, again, just that abstract idea of adoption.

Oh, and I do want to mention in the book, one of my favorite parts is that they talk about our memory, as humans, being like Velcro. So the idea with this framework is that you want to catch just one hook of that Velcro

and have a message that sticks with someone, you know, beyond that moment when they see it. So if it's something that is going to spur them to action, it does need to stick with them. That's how we do that – is really catch a piece of Velcro in their brains. And this is just an overview the framework.

Now we're going to talk specifically about our industry a little bit more. So one of the things that I think becomes very important for us to address, which probably doesn't seem like marketing, but asking ourselves this question of who wants to adopt, and especially when we're discussing pit bull dogs, I think it's very important. It sort of goes along with that discussion we started to have about assuming that everyone who wants to own a pit bull is somehow irresponsible or somehow other. I – it's important that we recognize that times have changed and we're going to get into how popular the dogs are.

It's perfectly reasonable to acknowledge that there have been challenges in performing pit bull adoptions over time, but it's also important that we realize that it's – there are so many families and individuals who do want the dogs now. So when folks come into our shelter and our immediate reaction, if they say they want to adopt a pit bull, is like, "Whoa. What's wrong with you? Why do you want to adopt a pit bull dog?" We're still sending sort of dual – dueling message – messages out of our shelter if we are simultaneously asking for people to come adopt and questioning them, you know, when they do.

So these are some of the numbers that get at the dogs being incredibly popular. This is from Vetstreet in 2012. They – these are owner reported dogs, so the owners calling them American Pit Bull Terriers and the top ten most popular breeds in 46 states. And this is the Banfield Pet Hospital, stats that have pit bull at number five and I think their more recent study had them at number three.

They've also seen an increase in popularity of dogs that are being labeled and called pit bulls. 47 percent over the past ten years. So this is something that I don't even know that we've seen it level off yet. This is something that's trending still. So, a project that we did and we're going to show you a video in one second that is related to this idea of who wants to adopt a pit bull dog came to us because we were seeing so many more shelters be open to adopting out pit bull dogs and not necessarily being afraid of the dogs in the same way that they were five or ten years ago, which really speaks to the progress that we're making in this field in so many areas.

But what we do hear more often than I think we used to is, that we're not afraid of the dogs anymore, but we are a little bit afraid of the people that want them. And we're afraid to release them from our care because we

sort of feel an overt sense of responsibility for what happens to those dogs, because we feel like if something bad happens, not only does – is that a bad scenario for our shelter, but it's also bad for all of the dogs that look like that. That's the way that we tend to think. So I want to show you a video of the Majority Project, and then I'll talk a little bit about it.

[Video plays]

So that video, sort of came about because of a social media callout that we did with those signs. We asked folks to *[computer chimes]* lead with their value, so that's why you saw sort of a variety of answers, including the cat *[laughs]*. And the idea here was really to get at the issue that responsible, every day, average dog owners are the majority, whether the dog is a pit bull or a different kind of dog. We tend to, at this point, similar to how we're still thinking about the dogs a little bit differently – we tend to think about the people who own them as sort of slightly different than the general dog owning public.

And that's – it's just not true, but the problem with that, because we still have those beliefs in sheltering, that belief system also ekes its way into legislation. So there's a whole lot of areas that are still regulating the dogs, although breed-specific legislation is not on the rise. We're seeing a whole lot more repeals and things like that, but the areas that do still have it or are still pursuing it tend to be doing so more often, as sort of a backdoor way of discriminating against the people in their area, the people who they think are owning pit bull dogs. And that's not everywhere, but that is some places. So this was sort of in response to this idea both in sheltering and in legislation that pit bull dog owners are different than everyday dog owners.

And we actually have a new resource that just arrived last week that is a pamphlet that really is based on this information. And it has a lot of facts and talking points regarding specifically breed-specific legislation, how to help lawmakers get the best information to make their decisions. Oops. Oh. There we go.

Did I skip a slide? No. Okay, sorry about that. So some of this information is also driven, or directed, I'm sorry, at our policies that we still have at our shelters. So I wanted to tell you a little bit of a story just to circle back to some of what we were talking about in the previous presentation. And this is one of my favorite dogs that we've ever had at Animal Farm Foundation and his name is Bubba.

And he came to us from a shelter where they were afraid of him. They were afraid of what his intentions were – that's how they described it – because he had a very hard stare. Those are their words. And he seemed

to be they thought, both dog and human aggressive. And they – it really was all based on this idea that he was constantly staring and it made them uncomfortable. Yes.

[Laughs] So he came into our program and the first thing that we do with dogs in our shelter is put them in the play yard and he was just a big lunk. Like, he played beautifully with most of the dogs that we had in our care. And so what we realized was in about 24 to 48 hours of having this dog is that Bubba did stare, just like he does in that picture, but it's because Bubba's not real bright *[laughter]*. So Bubba's about two clicks behind everybody else all the time. , and around the same time we got in this really beautiful, nice couple.

They were – had just turned 21. Had just moved in together. And they were renting and they had been denied adoption by a couple of our area shelters and rescues because of their age and because they were renting. And they had gone to another pit bull rescue that had said, "You're first time dog owners. There's no way that you should get a pit bull as your first dog."

So they came to us and we had Bubba at the time and we were like, "Meet your new dog, Bubba," because Bubba is perfect. He's your perfect apartment dog, because he's really low key and he – he'll try to figure it out for a couple extra seconds *[laughs]* and you will enjoy that because it's very entertaining. And we got this beautiful note from them and the – the idea here being that we didn't make any decisions based on speculation about Justin and Emily or about Bubba. We waited until we got to know who Bubba was, which didn't take very long *[laughs]* and we took Emily and Justin at their word, you know?

We didn't question their intentions and we didn't question, you know, their landlord or their living situation. We just gave them a dog. This is another one of – this is actually a confession. This is my first foster dog, so he – that is the reason he remains in this presentation always, I think. , and his name is Fridge and he was the kind of dog that you couldn't get him to go outside when it was time to pee. Like, you had to pick him up off the couch because he was like, "No, I'm good. I'm going to stay right here."

He had no desire to do anything but lay on the couch. So he actually ended up staying with us for a longer period of time than we really could understand and he was a really nice dog. He played with other dogs, was really nice with people, but just wasn't getting a whole lot of interest. He was a big dog. He was about 80 pounds, and was brindle, which sometimes we find that those dogs stick around a little bit longer.

And at that time, we had a man named Paul come to us, who was an over the road truck driver. And he said, "I'm home one week out of every eight weeks," and he was like, "But please let me tell you about what I want to do, because every other shelter and rescue I've gone to has said I can't have a dog because I'm never home. But the idea is I want to bring a dog with me on the road."

So we were like, "We have a dog for you," and Fridge thought that his truck was like, a couch on 18 wheels. He thought this is the coolest thing that ever happened to him. And they were on the road for four or five years together. Paul's retired now, so Fridge lives at home, but my – on a side note, because he was my foster dog and I was like, a very overanxious 20-year-old at the time, I brought him, like, a big box of stuff when he adopted Fridge. And I was like, "This is his favorite blanket and his favorite toy and I'm going to miss this dog so much."

So Paul sent me cell phone pictures all the time of Fridge, I think just to be like, "Are you okay?" Like, "It's okay." Um *[laughs]*, and every single photo was, like, exactly like this photo. So that he would text, "I'm in Kansas," and it would be this photo. And then it would be, "I'm in Nebraska," and it would still be this photo. Like, it would look exactly like this photo.

But needless to say that it was a match made in heaven. Those two love each other. And so this all sort of circles back to this idea of who wants to adopt a pit bull and should we be looking at people under a microscope just because they want to adopt a pit bull dog? And a lot of it has to do with us letting go of some of our fear. And as we sort of touched on, in the questions in the last section, we're only human, all of us, no matter how hard we try. And we're in a field where we deal with a lot of emotional stuff.

And so that negative stuff really does stick with us longer and harder than this – than all of the good stuff that happens every single day. So a lot of the issues surrounding our fear about adopting out these dogs, we have to take a hard look at where that's coming from. Is it coming from a place that we had one bad experience and that's sort of made us really cautious? Is it coming from a place of speculation? And really just helping ourselves to let go of fear and realize that most people are good, even the ones that want to adopt your pit bull dogs.

So now, I want to touch very briefly on marketing that occurs inside the shelter. So interactions with other people and some of the signage and decisions that we make within the shelter. And all of this, as I sort of alluded to at the beginning, is getting at this idea that in order to be the best marketing machine that you possibly can, the main idea here is to

become the first place your community thinks of when they think of getting their next pet. And there's a few deceptively easy ways that we can do this. One is to really make your environment a welcoming environment, and that doesn't mean that you need a brand-new lobby. It doesn't mean that you need a new, shiny shelter.

It means that the interactions that occur between people, between customers, and the folks that work at your shelter need to be the best possible interactions. And I'm going to use a total cliché, but you never get a second chance to make a first impression. And we have to consider that some of the folks that are coming to adopt may have gone through a really long, lengthy process of even considering coming to the shelter, because there's still a lot of people that don't choose to adopt. They choose to acquire their animals in other ways. And we also have to consider that how often do people get an animal?

Most people probably every 7 to 12 years. So they are walking in the shelter for maybe the first time and you will never see them again for seven years. And even though it may be the 50th person that you've talked to that day, you have to consider that from their point of view, this is the first time that they're going through this, this process. So really welcoming them and having a very customer service friendly environment becomes important. And just thinking about this in the big picture, that we really can't attain our goals without the public.

And, because of sort of what we talked a little bit about, because we have some bad experiences and we tend to see the worst of what people can do to animals or in the presence of animals, I think that sometimes it becomes very difficult for us to step back from that and get some distance from that and realize that we can't attain our goals without the public. We all typically have enough animals, right? We – we're not going to be our own audience all the time. So really reaching out and broadening our audience is important and really considering that they do have a lot of options when they decide to get an animal. So when they walk through the doors of your shelter or your rescue, that's a – that's a choice that they've made.

And we should be trying to reward them for that. And that – this just is a short list of very simple things that I promise you are – have a big effect. So being welcoming and respectful in terms of adoption counseling. You're going to get a whole lot more information if you ask open ended questions. So sometimes we tend to ask very specific, short answer questions, so do you rent?

What are you – where is the dog going to sleep? That kind of stuff. If we ask more open-ended questions you're going to get information that you never would have gotten from those questions. Actively listening, so not

taking the first words out of someone's mouth and judging them on what that initial answer was, but waiting till you get all of the information and really being an active listener. Looking for ways to make adoptions work instead of reasons that they won't work, and giving adopters the tools to succeed.

And I really think that this is an exciting place that our industry is going, is really helping people to keep their animals, if they already have them, or helping to broaden our pool of adopters by looking at tools to help people succeed. So, this slide has to do with placement of our animals in the shelter. And I have a very extreme example of segregating the dogs, but we visited a shelter in the Midwest that had not adopted out pit bulls historically, but had made some changes to their policies and really wanted to adopt out the dogs. And they called us about two months after they instituted these policy changes and said, "You know, we're really not sure what's going on, but no one is coming to adopt the dogs, so we're having a real problem. Like, we really just don't think this is working."

So we had the occasion to go to their shelter and we went on a shelter tour, and we didn't see any dogs labeled "pit bull." So my first thought is, "Well, they're invisible. That might be your first problem." The second problem was that at the end of the shelter tour they said, "Okay, now we're going to show you the pit bull wing. I have to go get the keys."

And they had the dogs on a different floor in a hallway that was locked and not open to the public. And so clearly that is a very extreme example, but what we see on a less extreme scale is shelters that tend to maybe not put pit bulls on the adoption floor. They have a whole lot of back stock of their pit bulls, or shelters that tend to keep their – their dogs that they're labeling pit bull all in one section of the shelter because they are assuming that the public doesn't want them. And so it becomes cyclical that the public really doesn't want them because the shelter is sending this sort of subversive message that you don't want those dogs and we know that you don't, so we're going to put them somewhere else. So be really careful about simple, simple choices like that.

That the other sign there is something that was meant to be communicated to volunteers. And it's obviously a policy that we wouldn't agree with even for volunteers, but be extra careful about your signage that is public facing because if your kennel is open to the public, they are consuming all of that information. They can read everything that's on the kennels or in – you know, for public display, so be really careful about all of the language and things that are being said in that regard. This is obviously in regards to enrichment and play groups. We are big fans of all different kinds of enrichment, and doing those things at specific hours, that might be more successful for some of the dogs.

So I think the little quote on there that busy mouths make for quiet kennels. Obviously you saw in the videos that play groups can lead to quieter kennels. So, you know, doing enrichment and then considering the time that you're doing it. And then this is from a study that was actually about cats, but the addition of toys in animal shelters or animal kennels – I'm sorry – was seen to have changed the way that adopters, potential adopters, perceive the animal.

And it didn't matter whether or not the animal was engaging with the toy. It was the mere presence of the toy and the idea there is that it helps adopters connect with home and connect with having a pet. Because our shelter environments are typically pretty sterile, and so it's hard for them to imagine the dog in their home based on that context and that environment. And so now this is the really fun stuff, I think. But what do you guys think of when – and just – please just call out.

The picture on the top there, the dog that is behind bars. What do you typically think of when you think that? Jail? Yeah, absolutely. Did someone say, "Sarah McLachlan?" Yes. That has been the number one answer to this slide, for like, 14 shelters in a row. And what we have to realize there is that, those kinds of commercials that typically show animals, in a pretty sad, sometimes sort of pathetic light, are driven at donations.

So the idea there is that you will see that commercial as a member of the general public. You'll feel pretty helpless and so the only thing that you can do to help that animal is to donate \$5.00. Those aren't even – those commercials aren't even driven towards major donors. It's really about acquiring small amounts of money in the big picture. But in terms of the marketing that we do as shelters, it's really, really important that we are marketing adoption and that we realize that. And donations will typically come as a secondary, pretty happy byproduct of doing some really good adoption marketing.

But I think the second picture underneath that, the one with the song lyrics on it, was really interesting for me because I've done this presentation all over the country and one of the shelters, sent this to me and they said, "You know, I didn't quite believe you that people wouldn't respond to a sadder message, so I decided to do a couple sadder messages and on Facebook, this picture got two likes," and this is a shelter that typically gets, like, hundreds of likes and shares and things like that. So she said, "I definitely – I definitely get it now." And the idea is that that doesn't give people the emotional drive to take action the way that a happy message does. So in contrast, the one next to it, this anatomy of Miracle, I think gives us lots of really good feelings.

I think that the point here is to conjure up images of pet dog qualities, have people smile. Have a really nice, positive association with the way that that dog looks and some of the comments that are sort of pointing at her. And this is a really good example, and I'm going to point out several more of these, of an item that functions on a much bigger level than just that dog. So this says about Miracle, but really, if Miracle gets adopted today, I can just slap the anatomy of a dog on there and this becomes a piece of marketing for the shelter in general. And it's a nice, happy peace that helps people associate good, positive things with your shelter and again, it – I think it's really important that we figure out ways to reuse some of the items that we're using to market individual dogs, because otherwise it becomes a waste of resources.

And for a lot of our shelters, we can't do something for each individual dog. So let's find a way to reuse some of this product. , and this is very similar obviously to the photo before. But having photos that not only tell a story, but also hit on those happy moments. We have to, in terms of considering our audience, we have to consider that there are a lot of folks who don't come to shelters because they're afraid, because they think that it's going to make them sad or they've never been inside a shelter. Or they have a preconceived notion of what going to a shelter is going to be like.

So photos like the black and white one only serve to, sort of, confirm that for them. Putting a photo in black and white just gets read differently. It reads sadder to most people. And it's also – when you take a picture of a dog from above like that, usually the dog's looking up, so their ears go back, and they just tend to look sadder and a little bit more pathetic. So the other photo tells us a lot more information. Besides being more happy it busts a couple of myths.

Those are two pit bulls that are hanging out together. I know that one – the red and white one makes a really hilarious face, so I'm sort of drawn to that. He looks kind of like a dork in that picture. And then the other dog just looks happy. And they're – we know that they're hanging out together, so this isn't even really an action photo.

And the other important piece there is that it looks more like a home setting. This is actually at our shelter, just on one of the porches that goes into one of the buildings, but it appears more like home because there's not necessarily that kennel environment around there. I will tell you the one way that I've seen a kennel environment be represented very, very well and very successfully is with shelters who have decided to do a really quick tour through the shelter. So taking just a cell phone video or just a really – you know, like a flip camera video, just walking through, even

just pick one, row of your kennels and walking through and showing some of the dogs that are available for adoption.

Especially if you do this after a play group and everybody's not going, you know, crazy in their kennels or jumping up. That helps the folks who maybe have reservations about stepping into a shelter for the first time see what it's really going to be like and dissuades them from really having a lot of the fears that people tend to have. So that's a place – that's an area where it's fine if the dogs are between a barrier because there's something different about live action and then being able to see the dogs moving around than there is with these sort of still, black and white photos that tend to conjure up a lot of sadness. And we're also, you know, a little bit conditioned from some of those commercials to feel a certain way when we see photos like that. The other thing that I think becomes very important, especially with our photos, is occasionally we do have dogs who we want to put a little bit of extra resource into them.

We want to market them specifically, because maybe they've had a longer length of stay, or maybe we're just having a tough time getting them out of the shelter. And this dog is from Fairfax County Animal Shelter, and he had a longer length of stay, and this is actually when they had a whole lot of adoption restrictions on their pit bull dogs. So, a year ago I met some folks from that shelter, and they had the longest list of restrictions at their shelter that I had ever seen. And by January of this year, they had done away with all of them just through some hard work and working with their county commissioners and really just taking to heart a lot of information that has recently come out. And this dog at the time was – his name is Bam Bam and was in their shelter while there were still restrictions.

So those restrictions really slowed down their adoptions of any sort of pit bull dogs. And Bam Bam was one of the ones that stayed for a very long time. And they do something very cool there, which is do short, little foster, like overnight fosters and weekend fosters. And this dog had gone to three homes in a row that had younger boys in the home. And he – this dog just seemed to think that that was the coolest place to be, is just, like, hanging out with eight, nine, ten-year-old boys who were, you know, roughhousing and running around.

He just seemed to thrive off of that environment, so what they did was they went to one of the little boy's kiwi football events, took all these great photos. They put them on Facebook. The dog got adopted within 24 hours and now they have these great photos which functioned initially, specifically for Bam Bam, but now can function as general advertising for the shelter. But that point being there is that they realized that he really liked a specific adopter, and so why not shoot for that specific family for him? This is a big thing, and it's something that I think even with the

advent of having a lot of volunteer photographers and doing a lot of fun stuff with photography in shelters that we sometimes take for granted, because some of those really nice photos are of dogs just on blank backgrounds.

And there's still a lot to be said for including people in your photos. It sends a pretty strong message to the public because they get to see that dog interacting with another person. So it – they feel like it tells them more about the dog. And the middle photo on the bottom is actually one of my favorites and I think it speaks to the fact that you don't always need a whole person sort of posing with a dog. Sometimes it's good enough to have somebody's feet, or arm, or some sort of connection with a human in the photo without having, you know, a portrait taken, because that dog – in that instance, I have no idea what that woman looks like, but I do know that that dog seems to be having a really nice connection with her.

He looks like he has eye contact and I want to feel like that. I want that dog to look at me that way. And that's what's really important about these kind of photos. And one of the reasons – one of the things to take advantage of is this idea of mirror neurons. So we are sort of hardwired to feel similarly when we see someone having that emotional attachment, emotional reaction. And it's not something that we're aware of.

We're not aware that this is happening, but we're feeling it. So when we see a picture of this young woman with the dog, I don't even actually know what that dog looks like, but I know what her reaction is to that dog and that is in some cases more powerful than seeing the actual dog. And these are the kinds of photos that really function well for advertising the general feeling of coming to your shelter. And I think it's important to note that all of the photos on the previous page and this one – they're all taken with cell phones. These aren't fancy. This is something that every single person can do.

Also including other animals, when possible, you know, if you have dogs in foster, sometimes when we send animals into foster we forget to sort of continue to advertise them. Some – you know, some shelters, animals go into foster and we sort of – everything slows down in the process for that animal. But if we continue to gather photos and really keep in touch with the foster home, then we can get some really great pictures out of it that also, you know, similarly tell a story about who the dog is. That one is just insane, the one with the cats and the feeding station. I – the middle dog is the foster dog in that home. , and then I wanted to talk really quickly about videos. I just read an article that said that our collective attention span as humans has gone down to 12 seconds – is how long we can pay attention to something, largely due to social media and sort of the increase of very short bursts of social media.

So I think that the best videos are some of the shortest videos in terms of keeping people's attention, especially on something like Facebook, where people tend to only pay attention to it for so long and then they keep scrolling. So one thing that's really important is to always add action items and include contact info, but in this case, I would say put that up front. Put that at the beginning of the video so if someone never makes it to the end of the video, they still get all of that information. It's also really important to show real-life pet qualities and skills. And that doesn't always mean working the dog.

So we had a problem at one point with our shelter – we have a very small shelter and a lot of staff who was really psyched on training the dog, you know, like just basic behavior, stuff. And so every time I asked for a video, I was getting videos of the dogs, like, sitting and waiting and laying down and doing – like, you know, going through their repertoire of what they know, but I think that we have to consider that that, that doesn't always resonate emotionally with people. So sometimes – some people are going to respond because it's nice to know that a dog is capable of these things, but there's a whole lot more people that just – it's just not going to connect with them because there's no emotional pull with a dog who's just performing for the camera. So the next video I think is a really good example of capturing very simple moments, and taking advantage of them *[video plays]*.

So there are some really cool things that happen there. First of all, it's a cell phone video. She didn't have to have any fancy equipment. She didn't put it through an editing program. She didn't do anything to this video other than shoot it on her cell phone.

And she gives us some really valuable information not only about the dog, but about the shelter and the relationship that the shelter has with the community because she says, "This dog was an owner surrender and his owner was sad to see him go and gave us this really valuable information, that he likes ice cream." And so we knew this is something that could, you know, make this dog's day in the shelter environment. And she didn't say, you know, "People really suck, and they bring dogs in here, and they're nice dogs. And I hate when people, you know – people surrender their dogs to the shelter. What's wrong with people?"

And that's something that we have to get a little bit better at, especially because those messages, sometimes we think we're speaking internally when we say things like that, but inevitably those are messages that eke out into the community. And if we're not seen as friendly in the way that we provide services, we're certainly not going to be seen as friendly in terms of adoptions. So it's really important that the message coming out

of the shelter is really consistent. And she also just did something so simple with that.

All that was, was feeding a dog ice cream, making some yummy noises, and it made everyone in this room smile because it's a simple moment with a dog that really resonates with us and it works because this guy saw this video on Facebook and drove from New Hampshire to Manhattan and adopted this dog the day after he saw the video on Facebook. And then they matched forever after. You noticed that they matched in the photo *[laughter]*. That always makes me really happy, that they, like, wore matching outfits. So the idea with videos there being that, I think sometimes we overthink it and it really can be that simple.

As long as it's conveying a message of caring for the animals and happiness and fun the public is going to absorb that message and associate your shelter with that message. And bios are similarly important. That's our space to tell information to the public about the dog. And I know for us, we're actually not open to the public. Our shelter is closed to the public, so bios are the only way for us to sort of reach out into the community and try to pull someone in, pull them into our shelter.

And it's similar for really large shelters who are open to the public. Sometimes that's the way that someone decides to get more information about the dog is before they walk in the door. That's how they connect and make that decision to come adopt. So here are just some really short and sweet pieces of advice from – for bios. Getting to know each dog as an individual.

Obviously that's sort of the mantra of today. Staying happy and positive and focusing on pet dog qualities. Using formula for structure and to save time. This is really important and helpful, especially if you have to write hundreds of bios, you know? It becomes really hard to be creative every single time that opportunity comes up and to not overuse emotional words. Sticking to what you know about the dog and not speculating is also really important.

And this is something, you know, related to our work at Animal Farm with pit bull dogs that we see happen quite a lot is that because it's a pit bull, sometimes we think that if we make people feel bad for it, they'll be more likely to come in. So if it comes in with cropped ears or scars, we sort of make up this elaborate history of what happened to the dog. And if we don't know for sure, it's really hard to say that that's helping the dog move forward. You know, it's a completely different story if you have a dog's history and you really know what happened to it. Obviously you're going to disclose that and – and how you choose to disclose it in a bio is your choice, but if we're fabricating a history because we think it will elicit a

certain response from the public, we have to really, you know, hit the brakes and reconsider that.

And end each bio with action steps so that the adopter knows what to do next. And even if you're on Petfinder and you know that they can just go back and look at your sort of overall page on Petfinder, it's still really important to include action items right on that dog's bio so that they don't have to search around. So this is a very simple formula, from Salt Lake County Animal Services and it's just under the guise of I love, I have, I get along with, I would rather not, and I need. And I'm going to read you this very quickly.

It's, "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 really just a mellow guy. I need a house full of soft beds, people who like snuggles, and yummy treats."

So I do not have a picture of Ducky. I don't even know what Ducky looks like, but I kind of want Ducky because that language was so illustrative, right? It gives me a lot of information about him without necessarily needing to have, you know, star quality photos. And it also, I think, is a good example of being really creative within a bio structure, but if you're using a formula, then maybe you have creative days and maybe you have less creative days, but at least you're still hitting all those high points of information that you know people are looking for. And this goes back again to not necessarily speculating about the dog.

So not allowing a dog's past, real or assumed, to define them and get in the way of seeing who they really are. And that not only has to do with bios, but it has to do with the way that we function with the dogs while they're in our care. It has to do with the way that we see them, into the lens that we see them through. And if we're letting them – that get sort of fogged by our perceptions or our assumptions, then we're certainly not seeing the real dog in front of us and it can cloud our judgment. This photo is funny to some people and makes other people cringe and really, I just like the text on this photo.

So this is just my way of circling back and saying that in all of this, we can't lose sight of how important it is to use appropriate language though, and really use the most accurate language available to us. So if we're constantly saying, even just anecdotally – this is in writing, but if we're saying this to people, you know, "Are you prepared for life with a Husky?"

Are you – he acts that way because he is a Beagle mix," and I'm talking when we're speculating about breed. I'm not talking about purebred dogs. And that's the pit bull in him that makes him act that way.

When we say those kinds of things, we are sending a really strong message about – we're basically saying that when we breed label a dog, we know exactly what we're talking about, which we all know isn't true based on what we learned this morning. But we're also sending a really strong message to the community of that sort of "batteries included." I am telling you what to expect from this dog when I say things like that, and I can't really make that promise. How many of you, just by a show of hands, use some sort of social media for your organization to advertise dogs? Oh, good.

So as much as maybe our personal feelings are that social media is annoying or we – you know, we really can't get the hang of it; it's very important at this point in time. Facebook is still the number one search engine. People spend a lot of their time on social media, so we have to take advantage of that. I think it's very important, especially if your shelter doesn't have someone who is – you know, that your paid communications person or someone who is doing social media as their job, to pick one or two social media platforms and do them very, very well. I think it's tempting sometimes, because there's new social media platforms every day, to sort of jump on all of it and want to do everything all at once, but if you can do two of them effectively, that's much better than doing all of them ineffectively. And I think we have to realize that it's okay to reuse content.

So if you put something on Facebook and then you want to tweet about it, it can be the same subject. You don't need unique content for every platform because you'll have different followers on different platforms. In terms of pit bull dogs, there's a lot of opportunity to use photos, and the language that you use to bust myths and really send a strong message to the community, but that goes for all of the animals in your care. Celebrate your adopters. That's a really great way to continue to cultivate this idea that your shelter is the place to go when you want to get a pet, is by showing them the people that already did that and how happy they are.

So take those going home photos or solicit photos from people who have already adopted. Ask them to send you photos so that you can use that as part of your content. Keep your community in the loop with at least one post per day. You have to do this consistently, especially with a lot of the changes that Facebook has made to pages. There's a lot of trickiness that goes on there in terms of getting your stuff seen and one of the keys is to be consistent in the way that you post.

Another thing to do at this moment in time, sort of the formula that Facebook uses to get posts seen by the public, has to do with how much engagement the post is getting. So ask all of your staff and volunteers to at least like your post on Facebook every single day so that you're generating some organic interaction that then will help other people see your posts. And photos, photos, photos. It used to be when Facebook first started that you know, if you put videos on there or links to, you know, external links to websites and things like that people clicked on them constantly. It used to be that videos were one of the most watched things on Facebook, but because of sort of our decreased attention span and the way that we use Facebook at this point photos are the real way to catch people's attention at this point.

And one of the ways to do that is through memes. So how many, by a show of hands, know what a meme is? Okay, so really it's a photo with some text overlay, and they're typically humorous. And the idea here is also to sort of cultivate that level of fun with your shelter by using a little bit of humor and using something that's very popular right now, memes. So these are some of some examples. These again are from Fairfax County Animal Shelter.

I'm a big fan of their social media, if you haven't noticed. So the one is need is hope. Need help bringing home the bacon? And they drew a little squiggly piggy tail on that dog. And he's just a cute dog. Might actually be smarter than your fifth grader, so there, you can see they're kind of humorous, but they're sort of geared at getting interested in that particular dog, but not necessarily.

It can also be about just, like, having a fun interaction with their community. Prefers his kibble shaken, not stirred. I'm sure you can guess the name of that dog is James Bond. And then just doing that sort of fun photoshopped version of the bat eared dog. And making it about a fun event, a family Halloween adopt-a-thon. The great thing about memes, which it says right there, is that they have a long shelf life.

So it can be about the individual dog, certainly, but it can also just be about the shelter, about being a fun place to go. Here's a couple more examples and this also gets into the area of adoption – like reduced fee adoption events. So still a distinguished gentleman still available for adoption. The spa package, so these were two dogs that were experiencing, again, a longer length of stay at the point where they still had breed-specific restrictions. So what they decided to do is put together – volunteers donated items to go into their little gift basket.

So if you adopted one of these dogs, you got a spa package with it that was really for the dog, not for people. And then I'm all packed up and

ready to go home. And this one is one of my favorite, in terms of reduced fee events, is warm up with a little hot cocoa. They did a free hot cocoa, with cocoa colored pets, and you got half off your adoption fee. And in terms of social media, don't be afraid to experiment, but again, you know, a cautionary word is to not go too crazy, you know? Do a couple things really well.

These are items that I just think are of interest. Most people don't know on BuzzFeed that you can create your own BuzzFeed page and then you can put together your own page. And then when you share that on Facebook, everybody thinks that, you know, it looks very professional and shiny and for those of you that don't know, BuzzFeed typically has, like, those quizzes, or it has things like 25 things you didn't know about peanut butter, or something like that. So creating list type items. So this was 19 shelter pets who will melt your heart. Vines is a nice way to catch very short video.

And that's something that there's been some numbers recently in the last couple years that our younger, demographics aren't as interested in adoption as we would like them to be, because they're sort of the future of our shelters in terms of adoptive homes. so Vines is something that's very popular right now with the younger audience, and even if it's not necessarily someone who can adopt from you right now, maybe they're too young, getting them sort of used to the idea of adoption is really, really smart and really, a good thing to sort of plan for the future. Hashtags. How many people use hashtags in your social media posts? So very few.

And here's the thing about hashtags. This sort of goes into that area of, not letting your personal preference bleed into the way that you do your marketing because I totally didn't get it when – I thought hashtags were really stupid and I didn't understand why you would use that. But I did a little bit of reading and realized that the importance of hashtags is that you're essentially branding every single item that you put onto social media with your hashtag. So if the name of our shelter is Animal Farm Foundation, if we hashtag everything #animalfarmfoundation, then that becomes searchable.

So if someone searches #animalfarmfoundation, they're going to come up with every single item that I hashtagged. And it's actually much more important than I initially gave it credit for. I thought it – I was like, "I don't get this. I think it's stupid and I don't want to do it." But the truth is that I have to play along if it's going to be the best thing for our social media and for our shelter in terms of getting dogs adopted. And infographics.

We showed you our one on genetics and I think that there's a lot of room to do fun infographics, but also really educational ones. So if you're at a shelter that provides a community service, there's a great opportunity to turn some of maybe your more dry material on licensing or something like that into an infographic that really catches people's attention. But don't underestimate the value of free stuff. So fliers on bulletin boards is still a really great way to catch people's attention. There's also much bigger free stuff in terms of billboards.

So I have a lot of shelters that I've worked with that sort of just approached their local billboard company, whoever owned the billboards, whether they were paper or digital, and said, "Do you have space to donate?" Maybe it's one that gets seen a little less often or someone hasn't bought it in a while so they're willing to give it up for free or for a very, very reduced price to a not-for-profit to advertise some of their services. It's really easy to do with digital bulletin boards because that's something – it's not all the labor intensiveness of, you know, gluing up the paper ones. You can typically just send them a file. They'll tell you what they need and it'll rotate through with some of their other digital bulletin boards.

The other thing that I wanted to point out about this flier in particular is that all of those dogs, that's their going home photo. So those dogs aren't available for adoption at this moment in time. The idea behind this flier is we want to reflect how happy our adopters are and solicit that feeling in more people. So they might not be able to come to the shelter and get that black and white puppy, but if they like the way that that dog looks and they like the way that that family feels in the photo, then they can come to us and get a different dog. So again, just selling the idea of coming to your shelter.

And Craigslist, for us, and for a couple of other shelters that I work with, is actually one of the biggest drivers of a new pool of adopters to their shelter, and I know that Craigslist has a – it makes a lot of people nervous because we know of some high profile, really bad things that happen to animals through Craigslist, but we have to consider a few things. One, that posting, you know, just information about your shelter or an animal on Craigslist doesn't mean that they can download the dog through the computer. They still have to go through your process. It's exactly like putting a flier on a bulletin board in the public. The other thing is that if a lot of people in your community are getting pets from, you know, backyard breeders or from folks who have accidental litters through Craigslist, then you really do have to find a way to compete with them where they're at.

So even if you don't want to use Craigslist, you need to find out where people are getting a lot of other animals and start to, you know, compete for advertising with those other sources. And the other thing that I think is undervalued in our field is events that aren't necessarily super, hyper organized adoption events. There's so much success that organizations have with mega-adoption events and I think, you know, everybody should be doing them when they can. but the other thing to consider is just taking a couple of dogs out, whether it's volunteers or staff with some fliers or some business cards and just going to farmer's market, or a food truck event, or someplace where you're not necessarily competing with other adoption organizations and that you're also perhaps hitting a new pool of adopters. So if you're constantly just going to you know, your local PetSmart or your Petco and having adoption events there, you have to realize that the potential adopter pool is limited to people who typically already have animals, right?

So they're coming into Petco or PetSmart because they already have a pet. So if you are trying to widen your adoption pool, you have to go out and find those people because they're not necessarily going to come to you. You have to let them know that you're there. So consider just some of these really simple ways. You don't even have to have a table at one of these events. You can just walk around and hand out fliers.

Oops. Sorry. And here's just some of some items that I think are worth, you know, imitating or getting some ideas based on these. So I have, oops. The first one on there I just have because it is just a photo with some really easy text overlay. That was not done by a professional.

That's just done in, like, paintbrush *[laughs]*. It's something very, very easy. The other, I think, is from ACCT Philly, and I think it's a – they have some really, really good examples of reduced adoption fee events. They have to constantly make space in their shelter. So they're really good at trying their best to get animals flowing through the system very quickly.

So this is on National Teacher Appreciation Day. Free adoptions for all teachers with valid school ID's. I have these on here again, the National Peanut Butter Lover's Day I think is a great example of using some funky holiday to promote adoption. So we're used to doing things like reduced fees for Christmas maybe, or Thanksgiving. You know, all those major holidays, but we don't always consider just sort of the wacky, everyday things.

This says, "To celebrate National Peanut Butter Lover's Day all brown dogs are half off their adoption fee and all adopters who donate a new or unopened jar of peanut butter to the shelter get half off an adoption fee."

So if you fell in love with a dog who wasn't brown, you could still get a reduced fee if you brought them a jar of peanut butter, which they then used for their enrichment program. So see, they're sort of connecting all of their programs there and giving people an action item to come in and adopt and also maybe bring them a donation. I really liked the top one just because I think that that is a good use of maybe not an overused format. So having a checklist. Help Greta complete her list. and then the bottom photo there, I put in there for two reasons.

One, it's just an Instagram photo. It's a very simple photo that someone took with their cell phone, so not anything fancy, and then they overlaid some text that says, "Adopt a welcoming committee." And that is a really sort of fresh way of saying some of the things that are pretty overused, right? We're used to saying, "Adopt," but I don't hear "adopt a welcoming committee," all that often and it goes really nicely with this photo. So just a simple idea.

This one from KC Pet Project is one of my favorites because, a question that I get pretty often is how can we move some of our longer term dogs without necessarily promoting, you know, just pit bulls or just older dogs, because that seems like limiting the pool too much. And I think a nice way of doing that, they wanted to move some larger dogs, and so they did all dogs 30 pounds or more or \$30.00 for three days. So they just opened it up to this broad idea of a larger dog, but it's also just – it's a cute photo. It's a cute message. It's not something that I've seen a lot before and I think that that resonates with the community. Especially if you did something like that around New Year's, you know, when all the people are trying to lose weight, you can sort of resonate with that message. The other thing that's really great about the next photo, again, super simple photo. It's a cell phone photo. They put their logo on it and the word – like, this is the perfect example of packaging a simple message into a very meaningful piece. So foster. It's about love, and the number. That could easily also function as an adoption promotion.

So I'm actually ahead of schedule, I think. I wanted to wrap up with just some of the ways that Animal Farm can continue to support you and help you in the work that you do. So I wanted to go over some of the resources that we have and one is free resources on our website. and we can also send you hard copies. You go to our website, to free stuff for shelters.

We have all of our eBooks, all of our posters, things that you are welcome to utilize in your shelter. We don't care if you put up our posters. and all you do is fill out the form. Check off what you want and we'll send you stuff for free. No shipping or handling or anything like that.

The next thing is that we have an app. and the feedback that I've gotten about this, it's a nice way to digitally get all of our work, you know, in the palm of your hand, but we have a couple of sections that are called talking points that really have some of the information that we discussed today in more bite sized chunks that I think can help you in conversations with the public or conversations with adopters. And we also have grants. So we have an adoption marketing award. And what I want to preface all of this with is although we are an organization that is currently sort of dedicating our time and resources to pit bull dogs, all of these grants are geared towards your shelter in general.

So I don't want you to take an adoption marketing award and only advertise your pit bull dogs. This is for all – this is for use generally for your shelter. So that makes \$3,000.00 available to your shelter, in two installments. You present us with a marketing plan, we give you the first installment and then you show us some results. You know, show us what you did with the money and we'll send you the second half of the money.

Kennel enrichment – if you have an existing kennel enrichment program or if you've never had a kennel enrichment program and you're interested in starting, that also makes \$3,000.00 available in two chunks. So you've got \$2,000.00 upfront. Show us what you did. , try to measure your results. That's really the goal with all of this and, then we make the other half of the money available to you. We also have the individual award, which really is for shelters. It's a onetime award for shelters who maybe had a lot of restrictions at one point, but have moved and sort of evolved to a place where they are treating all dogs as individuals. So they've dropped all their restrictions. And that's just a onetime, \$2,000.00 award. and then your programs, your ideas, is really just everything else.

We have some folks who apply to have Amy come and do the playing for life program through your programs, your ideas. But we – it's not necessary to apply for a grant for a sponsorship like that. We can– you can email me and we can talk about it that way. We have folks that – I'm in play group mind right now – so we have folks that applied for funding to repair their fencing or to put up a play yard if they have nothing. We just gave a grant to Alachua County, to redo their fencing.

And then there's a variety of other programs that folks are starting to apply for, like doing community pet days and doing outreach in the community to try to impact their intake. And so we're providing funding towards those kinds of initiatives. Retention programs where they're starting to provide training or other resources to folks that either have adopted from them or maybe who would otherwise surrender their dogs to the shelter. so that's all stuff that we're very interested in funding and not pit bull-specific. I feel like that's worth saying twice. And that's all I have.

This is my direct contact information. Feel free to email me, especially if you want to talk more about any of this information and if you're interested in some of the resources. And I also wanted to mention that Amy's actually doing the playing for life program at a couple of Florida shelters at the end of this month. So she – and we would like to invite you all, if you're available, to go to any one of these. It's really important to note that you need to attend the first day, the seminar. You have to see the presentation if you want to come and see the playgroups. So we'll be at Alachua County on Friday, May 23rd until the 25th. then she'll be at Pinellas. Is that SPCA? SPCA Pinellas Monday, May 26th and the 27th. And then she'll be at the SPCA of Florida on Wednesday the 28th, May 28th, and the 29th.

So if you want to – if you need more information, if you want to email me, and I'm sure I can hook you up with the right person if you need to know, you know, like which day you need to be there and all that good stuff, but we wanted to sort of – since you got some of that information and I know that some of you are really curious about seeing more of it, and we do have a number of folks from Florida. I think that that would be a nice opportunity, if you're available. so we can take questions and if you have any questions about this section or you sort of marinated in some of that information from the last session and you have more questions about that. Is anybody just really tired *[laughs]*?

[End of Audio]