

Publicity to the Rescue

How to Get More Attention for Your
Animal Shelter, Humane Society or
Rescue Group to Raise Awareness,
Increase Donations, Recruit
Volunteers, and Boost Adoptions

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Section 1

Publicity Basics

The Power of Publicity

Many rescue groups struggle to get the word out about what they do, but it's not as difficult as it may seem to get noticed. In fact, it can be easy.

Publicity is a powerful tool you can use for your rescue or humane group. In fact, publicity can be vastly more effective than paid advertising, because it works like a third-party endorsement. Whether the media is objective or not, people believe that when you appear on authoritative Web sites, blogs, newspapers, radio, or TV, it's "news." People believe the news; they don't believe advertising.

That's the power of publicity.

It's not as hard as you may think to get publicity. Here's why:

- Every day the media needs stories
- People love animals

If you can craft stories that people find interesting, you'll have no trouble getting "ink" (whether virtual or literal). Many people working for rescue and humane groups tend to think of publicity only in terms of getting people to fundraising events, but you can use publicity to go way beyond being included on basic community event calendars.

You can use publicity to:

- **Find volunteers and foster families.** If, like a lot of rescue groups, you have trouble finding new foster homes for your animals, you can use publicity to get the word out.
- **Educate the public.** As an example, outside of the animal shelter and rescue world, most people don't even know what fostering is; they've never heard the term. They don't know why spaying and neutering pets matters. Your job is to tell them!
- **Increase adoptions.** An old adage in business states that people prefer to buy from someone they know. In this case, substitute "buy" with "adopt." People need to know your group exists in order to adopt animals from you.

The bottom line is that people don't know you need foster families and volunteers unless you tell them. It doesn't have to be complicated or expensive to get the word out, either.

If you know how to get the attention of the media, the real winners are the animals. People will start to think of your group as the place to go when they need a pet.

No one wants to think about "competition," but the reality is that **most** people don't adopt their pets; they get them at pet stores or from breeders. Why? Because they know about those outlets and they are easy to remember.

Publicity can give your group the top-of-mind awareness that pet stores and breeders have now. In fact, think about the best-case scenario: people stop shopping at pet stores, and instead they come to you for their next pet. What could that mean for your rescue group and the community as a whole?

- Fewer animals die because more animals are adopted
- More space is available in shelters for homeless animals and euthanasia statistics drop.

It's amazing what can happen when you start getting the word out about who you are and what you do. A lot of people would do the right thing for their animals, if they only knew what to do.

Publicity can give potential adopters, donors, and volunteers the opportunity to know you and why the work you are doing matters. Advertising won't do that for you.

Probably the best news about publicity for cash-strapped rescue groups is that it's free! Okay, maybe sometimes it's only "almost free," but a publicity campaign doesn't have to cost a lot, and a local campaign can cost you exactly \$0.

In this book you'll find case studies from humane and rescue groups just like yours. In virtually every case, they used nothing more than creativity and a little "sweat equity" to raise awareness.

Although a few of the case studies include work by professional publicists, most of the case studies are from individuals or groups who simply wanted to make a difference for the animals and took action. You'll find that the case studies highlight a lot of the do-it-yourself, grass-roots techniques I describe in this book.

I've also included copies of real press releases I have written that were picked up by the media, so you can see examples of what works. You'll see that getting media attention isn't really as hard as it may seem, even if you're not an extroverted "sales or marketing type." (Heaven knows, I'm not!)

So what are you waiting for? Let's get started!

Get Ready for the Media

Before you start trying to get publicity, you need to have three key elements in place.

- 1. You need to know your story.** To be newsworthy, you have to set yourself apart from the sea of charities, services, and businesses that are competing for the attention of the media. The key to rising above the general noise level is to create a consistent, distinctive message that resonates with people. These people are your potential adopters and donors. Whatever you do needs to appeal to them.
- 2. You need to have a Web site.** Ideally, your Web site should have an online media kit with information about your mission and message. Your Web site needs to be findable by people doing a Google search. Some extremely “pretty” Web sites are completely useless because no one can find them. Even a simple site can be extremely effective if it loads quickly, clearly explains who you are and what you do, is easy to navigate, and looks professional.
- 3. You should have access to high-quality images.** A lot of public relations is visual. You have an amazing publicity advantage because you have adorable critters. People love animals. Find a photographer who loves taking pictures of