

Additional Q&A from the May 22, 2013 ASPCApro webinar
[Marketing to Dramatically Increase and Sustain Adoptions](#)

Presented by Bonney Brown, Executive Director, Nevada Humane Society

Q: Do you find that offering so many discounts means that people wait for a "sale" rather than adopting at other times?

Bonney: That may be the case, but we do nearly back-to-back promotions so they would not have to wait long. Our goal is to do as many adoptions as possible and to do that you need to keep the animals and the idea of pet adoption as a fun and rewarding experience out there in front of the public all the time. I often compare it to selling cars or mattresses – these are big purchases that people make, at most, only every several years. At the same time these are the two things you see constantly promoted. There is never a Sunday newspaper where the mattress retailers and car dealers are not running big ads, often with a sale or discount. Pet adoption is the same way. Most people will only adopt a pet a few times in their lifetime, but when they are ready, you want your adoption center or shelter to be top-of-mind. If running nearly constant promotions and discounts is what it takes, that's what we do. We are not looking at adoption fees as a way to cover adoption costs. In fact, I think you could argue that if adoption fees could cover the expenses associated with pet adoption that the federal government would not allow us to be non-profits – instead we would be required to function as for-profit businesses. Instead we focus on our charitable mission of saving lives and finding good homes and rely upon donations, upon our ability to fundraise, to cover the expenses. And the more lives you are saving the better story you have to tell donors to encourage them to support you work with generous gifts.

Q: Does anyone find that with the decreased adoption prices with promotions that the quality of potential adopters also decreases?

Bonney: We occasionally feel this way with dog adoptions, but it is not really a big issue for us. We find that many good people realize that when they adopt a pet they are making an ongoing financial commitment. The free or discounted adoption helps them make the commitment by saving them some money up front. If people do not qualify for the adoption, we talk with them about our concerns. If we cannot get to a place where we feel that it will be a good home, we would decline the adoption. We try our best to explain why and occasionally someone gets upset, but generally when you treat people with respect they accept your decision. The second webinar in this series, [Creating Adoption Processes that Truly Support Saving Lives](#), may be of interest to you, as it talks about our screening process.

Q: The ads are very nice - does Bonney do this herself or hire outside help? Are the ads share-able on ASPCApro?

Bonney: I did a very few of the earliest ones myself back when I started here at NHS in 2007, but most are done by staff members or volunteers. Many are done on simple templates; others are donated by talented volunteer graphic designers. A [PDF of the slides](#) is available through ASPCApro and if you want a specific few, contact us at info@humanenetwork.org and we will try to get an editable file to you so you can use them.

Q: Can anyone share the best and creative ways to get adoption deals out to the public in a cost effective way?

Bonney: One way is to ask for remnant or remainder ad space for free. Failing that, ask for non-profit discounts. Social media, like Facebook, can be effective if you ask all of your fans to share posts with their friends. We email supporters and ask them to spread the word by printing and posting posters, and by emailing friends and family members. Submit PSAs to radio and TV stations which run for free; we put banners on our building, post them on our website, and send e-blasts to supporters. We also use conventional media to get the word out. Lastly, we also have a modest advertising budget. This expense is part of our efforts to save lives and I see it as money well spent.

Q: How long does it take to plan each of these events? Do you have specific staff members who work on ideas?

Bonney: We brainstorm ideas in manager's meeting and sometimes with all staff we look at what other shelters are doing and borrow ideas. We have one full time events staff person. She also helps plan and execute fundraising events. We enlist volunteer help as needed. The amount of time required differs based on the complexity of the event. We maintain an events calendar where we try to plan in advance. Some events we use a second or even third time; they get easier each time. But if the event gets stale, we change it up to keep it fresh and interesting. It hard to say exactly how much time and planning goes into an event as it varies so much based on the complexity. Many are not overly complex or time consuming.

Q: How early do you start promoting the specials? And how do you avoid lulls in adoption numbers before the special starts?

Bonney: We promote most events very close to the start date, but as I mentioned above, we run very frequent promotions with little time in between. Exceptions are bigger events like the Cat Convention, Doggy Palooza, or big community wide Super Adoption events. These larger events would be promoted earlier, but rarely more than 3 weeks out. We can e-mail you news releases if there is a specific event or two that you are considering – contact us at info@humanenetwork.org. They show the release date on them, as well as the event date.