Helping Adopters Succeed
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Adopter Support is based on Chapter 16 of *Animal Behavior for Shelter Veterinarians and Staff*. It was developed during my tenure at the Michigan Humane Society. MHS is credited with many of the photos.
This Webinar Introduces How To:

• Create an adopter support program

• Use adopter support to evaluate animal adjustment and your adoption process

• Use what you learn to improve and grow!
Raise Your Hand

How many have an Adopter Support program that is working well?

How many have an Adopter Support program that is NOT working well?

How many don’t have an Adopter Support program yet, but want to set one up?
What Do Adopters Want?
Adopters Want:

- A healthy well-adjusted pet
- One who will fit into their family
- No hidden problems
- A pet who will meet their expectations for care and training
- Help with any problems that occur
People Want Adoption Success!
We Want Adoption Success Too!
Measuring Adoption Success

☐ PERMANENCY:
   Animal stays in the adoptive home long-term

☐ HUMAN-ANIMAL BOND:
   Adopters develop a good relationship with the animal

☐ QUALITY OF LIFE:
   Animal has physical and psychological needs met

☐ CUSTOMER SERVICE:
   Adopters enjoy the adoption experience
Goals for an Adoption Program:

Sufficient NUMBER of adoptions AND high level of adoption SUCCESS!
Opposite of Success = Failure

Are returns a failure?

Relinquishment to other sources:

• Friend, family, co-worker

• Another animal organization

• Stranger

Animal stays in the home but experiences an unacceptable quality of life, or even abuse

Adopters discourage others from adopting from your organization and do not come back
Adopter Support =

• Contacting adopters
• Finding out how things are going
• Providing guidance on problems
• Getting feedback on the adoption experience
Contacting Adopters Post-Adoption

- Periodic
- Proactive
- Can tell us how individual animals are doing
- Can tell us how we are doing as an adoption agency
- Can connect people with help they need
- Combines results so they may be analyzed
- Can help adopters become supporters
Adopter Support Must be Sustainable!

• If you can’t keep up or manage Adopter Support, it can become a burden.

• If you find out about problems adopters are having, you need to help people fix them.

• If the data is collected but never used, then what is the point?
Creating an Adopter Support Program
Program Components

1. Establishing the program
2. Developing a volunteer team
3. Contacting adopters
4. Developing the online survey(s)
5. Setting up ways for adopters to get help
6. Creating and using contact lists
7. Using adopter feedback
Pitching Adopter Support

- Staff champion, senior level buy-in
- Promote internally all levels
- Emphasize benefits
- Minimize staff stress/fear
- Provide updates
The Human Component
Who Do You Need?

LEADERS:
• Program Coordinator
• Technical lead

FOLLOWERS:
• Phone volunteers
Program Coordinator

- Good organizational skills are critical
- Consistency
- Management of volunteers
- Access to operations staff and senior management
- Best role for staff person
- Does not need to be their only “hat”
Technical Lead

• Able to use shelter software
• Reliable
• Data-driven
• Problem-solver
• Wise to have a back-up:
  – Split the work
  – Cross-train
  – Returns versus calling lists
Finding Phone Volunteers
Qualities to Seek

• Customer service background
• Like pets AND people
• Trust with adopter information
• Can commit to a weekly shift
• Basic computer and phone skills
• Efficient, compassionate, common sense
Volunteer Challenges

Volunteer Turnover
• Call. Survey. Repeat.

Customer Service
• Good Intentions, Bad Advice
How Many Volunteers?

Depends on:

• Annual adoptions

• How long each survey takes

• Timing of calls
  – Daytime: more messages on voicemail
  – Evening/weekend: more time talking with adopters
TIME FOR THE MATH!

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Large Adoption Agency

- 9,127 adoptons ÷ 52 weeks per year = 176 adoptions/week
- 80% electronically = 141 emails
- 20% by phone = 35 calls per week
- One volunteer can make 20 calls in 2 hours
- 35 calls ÷ 20 calls/shift = 1.75 volunteers per survey
- 1.75 volunteers X 3 surveys = \( \text{5.25 volunteer phone callers} \)
- May need a back-up for vacations, etc.
Small Adoption Agency

• 1,000 annual adoptions ÷ 52 weeks = 19/week
• Contact 70% electronically = 13 emails
• Contact 30% by phone = 6 calls
• One volunteer can make 6 calls in <30 min.
• In one 2-hour weekly shift, a single volunteer could:
  ✓ Create the week’s calling list
  ✓ Email adopters inviting them to take a survey
  ✓ Phone adopters without email addresses at 3 points post-adoption to take live survey responses
WOW! We Could Do This!
Start Them Off Right

• Volunteer manual
• Demonstrate
• Volunteer fills out survey while trainer handles call on speaker phone
• Switch
• Volunteer does both
• Turn them loose!
Contacting Adopters
Bye! Good Luck! Call Us!
Contact: Which Adopters?

• “Iffy” adopters?
• You cannot predict which adopters will have problems
• All Adopters!
Contact: How Should You Do It?
Letters? Expensive! Slow!
Data Entry Required!

10,000 adoptions X 3 contacts X 48¢ each = $14,400 in postage alone
Contact: Phone Calling?

• Takes time
• 2 minutes to leave a message
• 10-15 minutes to interview
• Personal attention
• Only way to contact some adopters (20%)
• Difficult to analyze results w/o survey
Contact: Email?

- Affordable
- Less personal
- Not quite universal
- 85% of adults online*
- 18% haven’t checked their email in 30 days
- Younger and more affluent people more likely to be online

What do you want to know?
When should you reach out?
Post-Adoption Experience

• “Honeymoon phase”
• Problems arise, bond develops
• Advice from vet, friends, neighbors, online—everyone except you!
• Depending on the advice, their actions, & the animal: problems either diminish or don’t
• Unresolved problems = RELINQUISHMENT
• Bonding can delay/prevent relinquishment
Which Problems When?

• Minor problems: Easily fixed, somewhat expected

• More serious problems: Need outside help

All problems are serious to an adopter!
Contact: When and Why?

Depends on what you want to find out:

• Initial adjustment: (1 week)
• Customer service: (1 week)
• Health issues: (1 week, 1 month, 3-6 months, 1 year)
• Behavior changes over time: (1 month, 3-6 months, 1 year)
• Adoption permanency & quality of life: (1 year)
Start Simple!

• Contact adopter ONCE

• One week post-adoption

• Contact adopters TWICE

• One week and one month post-adoption
Online Surveys
Online Surveys Offer:

- Ease of use
- Ability to ask detailed questions
- Affordable
- Same survey to all adopters
- Analysis is done for you
- Can export or print results
Choosing Your Online Survey

• Many different online surveys!

• Selection factors: referrals, cost, ease of use & features

• Ask for a non-profit discount

• Expect to pay a few hundred dollars per year

• Many other uses
Creating Your Survey: Introduction

- Your logo at the top
- Introduction
- Thank them for adopting
- How to get help
- Reward at end
Using Skip Logic

- No longer has pet?
- Tool in some surveys to create different paths
- Ask where pet is now
- Why pet given up
- Skip to end of survey
- Those who still have their pets will never see these questions
- Dog questions, cat questions, etc.
Demographics

- Species
- Age of pet (at time of adoption)
- Location adopted
- New name? Fun questions?
- Still have pet? (Where is pet now?)
Health Questions

• Initially & change over time
• Which problems?
• Appointment at vet (which one?)
• How to get help:
  – Please contact me!
  – Phone number or email
  – Refer to webpage
Behavior Questions

• Initially & change over time
• Which problems?
• How to get help:
  – Please contact me!
  – Phone number or email
  – Refer to webpage
Behavior Questions

• Dog training
• Crating?
• Discipline?
• Separate question paths for different species
• Dogs: Can take things away easily? Gentle play? Likes other dogs? How about people?
• Cats: Gets along with other pets? Likes petting?
Customer Service Questions

- Hours of operation
- Cleanliness of facility
- Treatment of the animals
- Friendliness of staff & volunteers
- Efficiency/promptness
- Staff/volunteer knowledge

- Overall value for amount paid
- Telephone assistance
- Overall adoption experience
- 1-5 rating scale, Very Satisfied to Very Dissatisfied, Not Appl.
- Comments
Other Questions

• How do adopters learn about you?
• Animal identification
• Evaluation of other services
• Evaluation of Adopter Support program
Testing Your Survey

• Get input on how you’ve worded the questions

• Time how long it takes to respond: 10–12 minutes

• Use a test survey for 2–4 weeks

• Adjust questions based on responses
Using Incentives & Reminders

• Allay their fears: no fundraising and no sharing of their email address

• Give them a treat: something of value
  – Emailable coupon
  – Drawing for free vet care

• Send one or two reminders
$10 off
any vet visit

Veterinary Centers

7401 Chrysler Drive,
Detroit, MI 48211
(313) 872-0004

3400 W. Auburn Road,
Rochester Hills, MI 48309
(248) 852-7424

37255 Marquette
Westland, MI 48185
(734) 721-4195

Full paying clients only. Limit of one coupon per visit.
Coupon expiration date 12/31/2007
If you build it, they will come: BE READY!
Problem Solving: Helping Adopters

Set up more than one way for adopters to get the help they need:

• Phone for “urgent” issues (>75%)

• Email for less urgent issues (<25%)

• Website when personal assistance is not needed
Phone Assistance

• Stress on overburdened phone operators

• Automated sorting: health, behavior, all other questions

• Toll-free is cheap, encourages contact from out-of-area adopters

• Assign to staff; link to behavior hotline; partner with behavior advisors
Email Assistance

- AdopterSupport@xyzspca.org
- Who will receive this email?
- Route health, behavior, customer service emails
- Standardized responses
- Know when to refer to a specialist (aggression)
Prompt Response!
Adopter Support Web Page

- Contact info
- Directions
- Behavior & health info downloads
- Dog licenses and dog parks, emergency vet clinics, lost or found pet info, etc.
- Adopter chat lists & e-lists, sharing adoption stories
- Adoptable animals (Petfinder)
- Links, merchandise
- May be password-protected
Creating Contact Lists
# Weekly Call Sheet

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Weekly Call Sheets

• Technical Lead Volunteer creates weekly call sheets on Monday mornings
• Run report of returned animals
• Run weekly report (Sat-Fri) of adopted animals
• Delete returns (cross off older sheets)
• Print out and put in binder for callers to use
Send out the Emails

- Thank them for adopting
- Invite to take survey
- Mention reward
- Include opt-out
- “Imaginary” return address: AdoptionTeam@xyzspca.org gets bounced mail
Make the Calls

• Volunteer calls each adopter with no email address
• Thanks for adopting
• How are things going?
• Asks for email
• Online survey
• Takes down problems for call-back resolution
• Mails coupon reward in a thank you note
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<td>12353</td>
<td>Cpurchase</td>
<td>Bach</td>
<td>Johann</td>
<td>Baron</td>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>Pitbull</td>
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<td>Rortmann</td>
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<td>Sirius</td>
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<td>Lreider</td>
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<td>Poodle</td>
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<td>Stevenson</td>
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<td>Peke</td>
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<td>Kwilson</td>
<td>Rice</td>
<td>Lindsay</td>
<td>Clancy</td>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>Pitbull</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:rice@food.com">rice@food.com</a></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Cpurchase</td>
<td>James</td>
<td>Joan</td>
<td>Annabelle</td>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>Westie</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:james@yahoo.com">james@yahoo.com</a></td>
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</tr>
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<td>12359</td>
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<td>Tilya</td>
<td>Erin</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>Yorkie</td>
<td>222-222-2236</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ali@ameritech.net">ali@ameritech.net</a></td>
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<td>Lreider</td>
<td>Al-jardin</td>
<td>Ilya</td>
<td>Velma</td>
<td>Rat</td>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>222-222-2237</td>
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<td>Kjohanson</td>
<td>Ming</td>
<td>Hon</td>
<td>Daphne</td>
<td>Rabbit</td>
<td>Lop</td>
<td>222-222-2238</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ming@hotmail.com">ming@hotmail.com</a></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
No One Home?

- The fact that you called or emailed has a positive effect on adopters
- More likely to contact you with problems
- Toll-free number left on answering machine
Making It Work for Adopters

• Adopter Support” versus “Adopter Follow-up”

• Customer Service

• Provide Efficient Service with problems

• Integrate them into your organization
## Tracking Contacts by Volunteers

### 2015_Adopter Support Contacts
**Rochester**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adoption Week</th>
<th>2015 Adoptions</th>
<th>No. Valid Email</th>
<th>No. Bad Email</th>
<th>% Email</th>
<th>Week Phone</th>
<th>% Contacted</th>
<th>Month Phone</th>
<th>New Email</th>
<th>% Contacted</th>
<th>2014 Week</th>
<th>2014 Adoptions</th>
<th>No. Valid Email</th>
<th>No. Bad Email</th>
<th>% Email</th>
<th>Year Phone</th>
<th>% Contacted</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan-15</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>103</td>
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<td>90%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>Jan-14</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>92%</td>
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<td>Feb-15</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>101%</td>
<td>Feb-14</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
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<td>Mar-15</td>
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<td>101</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>Mar-14</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr-15</td>
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<td>May-14</td>
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<td>75%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>79%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jun-15</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Jun-14</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>76%</td>
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<td>0%</td>
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<td>Jul-15</td>
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<td>Aug-15</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Aug-14</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>83%</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Sep-14</td>
<td>73</td>
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<td>Oct-14</td>
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<td>Nov-14</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>64</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec-15</td>
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<td>0%</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>Dec-14</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>469</strong></td>
<td><strong>403</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>96%</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
<td><strong>97%</strong></td>
<td><strong>24</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>94%</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>1,106</strong></td>
<td><strong>875</strong></td>
<td><strong>61</strong></td>
<td><strong>79%</strong></td>
<td><strong>59</strong></td>
<td><strong>84%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Limitations of the Surveys

Responses are not necessarily representative of all adopters

More online responses than phone surveys

Question interpretation:

• 99% of respondents still have their pets

• Doesn’t mean 99% of all of your adopters still have their pets
Check Surveys Daily

Can filter so that only people needing help are viewed

Can look at individual responses

Will have person’s email address, name, and adoption location at top

• But not for phone surveys!

Check surveys every 24 hours on weekdays
Analysis is Done for You

**Response Summary**

Total Started Survey: 1105
Total Completed Survey: 1003 (90.6%)

Select a page to view below or view all pages

#2. Demographics

**Page: Demographics**

1. Type of animal:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cat</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
<td>536</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>501</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reptile</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferret</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guinea pig, hamster, gerbil, rat, or other small mammal</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question: 1101 skipped question: 0
Using Filters

Filters are easy to set up
They make regular analysis possible
Easy for management to access and view

MHS filters:
• By location
• By species or breed adopted
• By time period
• By specific answers to individual questions
Advanced Analysis

Results can be exported in different formats:
• PDF for reports
• HTML for web pages
• CVS for spreadsheets

Results offer pre-made graphs and charts, and the ability to compare locations or species or months within a single question

Can save individual survey responses as PDF and attach to animal’s record in software!
MHS Experience

- 2014: 96% of our adopters contacted at one week; 95% at one month; 90% at one year
- 79-83% email; rest by phone
- 23-26% response rate
- Hundreds of behavior and health questions answered
- Thousands of hits on Adopters Club website
- Clear identification of strengths and weaknesses in our customer service
- 40%+ previous adopters
80% is the 2015 goal for email collection at all three adoption centers: Inconsistencies due to staff training, etc.
Animal Adjustment

“Extremely Well”

- 75% 1 week
- 81% 1 month
- 92% 1 year
Animal Health

No health problems:

• 77% 1 Week

No unresolved health problems

• 92% 1 Month

• 94% 1 Year

Main health problem reported at 1 week for dogs and cats was URI @ 61% of pets with problems
Vet Visit for Pets

One Week:
• 62% of dog adopters
• 51% of cat adopters

One Month:
• 80% of dog adopters
• 67% of cat adopters

One Year:
• 17% of cat adopters and 7% of dog adopters still no vet contact
Behavior Problems

• No behavior problems

• 86% 1 Week

• No unresolved behavior problems:
  
• 80% 1 Month

• 84% 1 Year

• Dogs had 12-16% higher incidence of behavior problems than cats
Cat Behavior Problems

- **1 week**: aggression to humans (28%) and destructive behavior (25%)

- **1 month**: aggression to humans (29%) and high energy (29%)

- **1 year**: destructive behavior (28%) and aggression to humans (24%)
Dog Behavior Problems

• **1 week**: housetraining (37%) and destructive behavior (33%)

• **1 month**: housetraining (41%) and destructive behavior (38%)

• **1 year**: destructive behavior (31%) and household manners (31%)
How satisfied were you with each of the following items during your animal adoption experience?
Overall Impression @ 1 Week

89% of respondents would **definitely** recommend MHS to others

10% would **probably** recommend MHS
Adopter Support—
They need it and you can do it!
This webinar is based on Chapter 16 of Animal Behavior For Shelter Veterinarians And Staff

www.ASPCApro.org/animalbehavior