



Chocolates, Cards, Flowers —and Pets, Too?

Valentine's-themed ad brings a record number of adoptions

BY LESLIE SMITH

There's always love in the air at the Peninsula SPCA in Newport News, Va., as staff care for the thousands of animals who come through the shelter each year.

But just before Valentine's Day last year, things got especially mushy. The SPCA's "cupids" took aim—and their arrow brought 26 of the shelter's pets something far better than roses: new loving families.

Most days, the organization sees about seven adoptions; on Saturdays that number can grow to 15 or more. The record-setting Saturday before Valentine's Day was the result of a clever advertisement created by shelter board members Meredith Hines and Carrie Lenhart.

With her background in marketing and design, Hines knows that whipping up a fabulous ad is no simple task. Corporations spend billions trying to produce the perfect, action-inspiring zinger—a combination of the right message with the right tone. For shelters, the marketing challenge can be even tougher: Many people find that it's easier to just buy a dog or cat from the pet store down the street than to face the likely barrage of barking, plaintive gazes, and heartbreaking stories at their local shelter.

So Lenhart and Hines set about creating an ad that would not only provide a bit of humor but strike a chord with anyone who's been alone on Valentine's Day. Thus, the ad below was born: *Think finding a date on Valentine's Day is hard? It asked. Imagine if your only pick-up line was "Woof."* The idea behind the ad, which appeared in the local newspaper: Thinking about your local animal shelter should elicit a smile, and in this case, connect the romance of the holiday with the unconditional love a pet provides.

While Hines can't say definitively that the ad was behind the upsurge in adoptions, she can't explain it any other way. "We have not spiked that weekend in years past, nor have we hit that number since," she says.

Humor can help make an ad thought-provoking and memorable, Hines says—leading to more adoptions and a better reputation for shelters. Seeing the ad, she says, "thousands of people began to see our animals in a different light and will hopefully choose our SPCA when they decide to get a pet in the future."

Hines recommends reading Andy Goodman's *Why Bad Ads Happen to Good Causes*, and she wants other shelters around the country to "borrow" her ideas. In striving to achieve a common goal—bettering the lives of animals—sharing successful strategies is crucial, she says. "I encourage other shelters that have had successful campaigns to share them too," says Hines. "We are all on the same team."

The Peninsula SPCA plans to run the ad again this Valentine's Day season. "This time, however," says Hines, "the image will feature a cat." AS

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