



357 Channels and Nothing On? Tune in to Your Next Pet

Comcast On Demand
brings shelter animals to
a wider audience

BY CARRIE ALLAN

Insomniacs in Utah, California, and Washington, D.C., have a new place to go when they get tired of 3 a.m. reruns of “Hogan’s Heroes” and the endless slew of press-the-flesh reality dating shows: their local animal shelters.

Designed to allow viewers to choose their own material and watch it when they want, Comcast’s On Demand service works a lot like TiVo: Viewers can select programs to watch when they choose, fast-forwarding or rewinding at their own speed.

Starting last year, along with the movies and sitcoms available in other markets, viewers in Salt Lake City could also get Comcast’s On Demand Pet Adoptions—video segments from the Humane Society of Utah featuring an adoptable pet romping or purring with a shelter employee who explained the needs and qualities of the animal.

The program is Comcast’s baby, says the shelter’s community outreach director, Jared Jones, who usually appears with the animals in the videos. After another company tried the concept on the East Coast but experienced technical problems, Comcast developers took on the challenge and ironed out the glitches, Jones says. For the Humane Society of Utah, the program has been like a prime-time hit, drawing frequent questions from the public about the pets they’ve seen on TV.

The idea spread west to California, where the company started working on a similar arrangement with several area shel-

ters. “We thought we’d start with a smaller shelter,” says Cindy Kuntz, marketing manager with Comcast Central California.

After the program’s May launch at the Placer SPCA in Roseville, the effect was immediate, says executive officer Leilani Vierra, who’d been initially suspicious of Comcast’s motives and wondered if they were just trying to get advertising money. “It turned out to be exactly what they said, which was a terrific opportunity to market our animals to a larger audience,” says Vierra.

The first week the programs were available, the animals the shelter featured received 15,000 viewings. What’s more, one of those animals was a black cat named Belinda who had been at the shelter for nine months. In the video segment, staff mentioned that the cat was the shelter’s longest resident, and within a day, Vierra says, someone came in to adopt her.

The program not only promotes adoptable animals but explains the challenges animal shelters face and illustrates the range of animals in their care. And at a time when Placer County is one of the fastest-growing communities in California, the SPCA can use all the promotional help it can get. The influx of new residents makes it hard to stay on everyone’s radar—but with Comcast’s assistance, the shelter can wire itself into homes 24-7.

When Jones talks about each animal in the segments, he makes a point of discussing existing temperament or

Cameraman Bret Van Blaricom films a dog at the Placer SPCA in Roseville, California, for Comcast’s On Demand Pet Adoptions program.

WHAT IT IS:

Comcast’s On Demand Pet Adoptions is a new way to market shelter pets and shelter services.

HOW IT WORKS:

Adding to their nightly choices of classic movies and sporting events, Comcast On Demand viewers in certain markets can now tune in to adoptable pets at local animal shelters.

WHAT IT’S DONE:

The program has turned formerly unnoticed homeless critters into the latest hot celebs—and turned viewers on to the joys of adoption.

behavior issues and advising viewers of training solutions. The approach clarifies that the “problem animal” is just a great pet waiting to happen, Jones says, and it also helps “people at home who have pets with the same problems—they can learn from the segments, too.”

In Washington, D.C., the Washington Humane Society works with Comcast to show viewers photographs and written profiles of adoptable animals, says Jim Monsma, former director of community outreach. Though a video component has not yet been added, the pet profiles are already popular.

“The calls that we’re getting are from the younger generation, almost exclusively,” Monsma says. “It’s the wave of the future. Now people go to the Web for information, to find a plumber or a movie time, but I can see a time when that will be eclipsed by cable TV. So now’s the time to start doing it.”

Vierra agrees, remembering with amusement her own skepticism about the uses of the Internet. “Years ago when shelters started listing pets on websites, I thought, ‘Well, I don’t know whether that’s going to work,’” she says. “And, you know, I ate my words. And this—video—captures them at play, their behaviors. You can show how trained they are.”

Comcast has expanded the program to other shelters in California, including the Sacramento SPCA, the Delta Humane Society, and several organizations in the Bay area, Kuntz says. And the company is exploring other markets as well. Comcast donates staff time to tape animals with shelter employees and then edits the segments before putting them on the air. As the program continues to expand, though, Comcast may ask more shelters to do the taping and send the video to the company for editing. Availability of resources will depend on



Longtime Placer SPCA resident Belinda appeared on TV with staffer Matt Green, and within days, someone came to adopt her.

the market, Kuntz says.

The company’s community-mindedness has already earned at least one new loyal customer: Vierra previously got her cable service from another provider, but when Comcast started doing On Demand Pet Adoptions, she says, “I switched over so I could watch our features.” 🌟

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