EMAIL MARKETING
FOR ANIMAL SHELTERS

Why Email?

You depend on the support of others to keep your shelter running. Be it money, volunteers, supplies, adopters or foster homes, you want to know you have a group of people who care. This is where email comes in.

It's a digital age. Pew Internet Research reports 92% of U.S. adult Internet users send or read email, with 61% doing this daily. So, not surprisingly, 72% of respondents on an Econsultancy survey rated email's return on investment as excellent to good. And these aren't the only stats that support email.

Email helps develop and improve your network. You have consistent communications with your subscribers, with little work required on your part. Most email marketing services allow you to set up a series of emails that you can set to go out at certain intervals, along with messages that can be queued to send at a specific time.

And most importantly, pet lovers are online. With services like Petfinder.com, people can be easily introduced to local shelters and animals in need. In the 15 years Petfinder has been online, 17 million adoptions have taken place through the site. All of these pet families are potential readers for your email campaign.

Building Your Network

People won't know about your mailing list unless you tell them, so a big part of getting subscribers involves asking and advertising. Carol Bryant, Social Media and PR Director of FIDO Friendly Magazine, believes that most people interested in animal shelters would like to help out: "I believe many want to give back but are uncertain the best way to do so," says Bryant. She herself connects with animal shelters via email.

Here are the top five ways to get more subscribers:

- Ask on adoption applications
- Provide sign up sheet at your shelter
- Include a form on your website
- Ask on social media platforms
- Encourage others to spread the word

We'll go over each of these methods in detail.

First, a Note on Permission

While most people love to support animals, it's important you only email people who request to be added to your mailing list. Emailing anyone who doesn't request it is considered spam. If someone marks the message your message as spam in their email service, this hurts your deliverability, which makes it harder for the people who do want your emails to actually get them.

Adoption Applications

If someone chooses to adopt or sponsor one of your animals, they're already making a big commitment. They trust you, and want to support your cause. These are prime candidates for your mailing list.

Check out how this looks on an application from [Cat Tales](#):

Cat Tales clearly asks for permission to stay in touch with the adopter via their newsletters.

In the Shelter

Not everyone who checks out the animals will be able to make the commitment of adopting one. That doesn't mean they don't want to help though.

Invite visitors to sign up for your mailing list. Explain that they can learn about fundraising, make donations or just share your emails with their friends.

Website

[78% of U.S. adults](#), both male and female, use the Internet. If someone can't make it to your physical location, they may be a regular at your online address.

Offer website visitors the convenience of having your shelter's news delivered right to their inbox. You can do this by installing a sign up form on the page. AWeber offers a couple animal templates:

You can also choose to have AWeber host the forms, and you'll get a URL to direct potential subscribers. This works even if you don't have your own website.

Check out the form on the Second Chance Animal Rescue Society's site:

Social Media

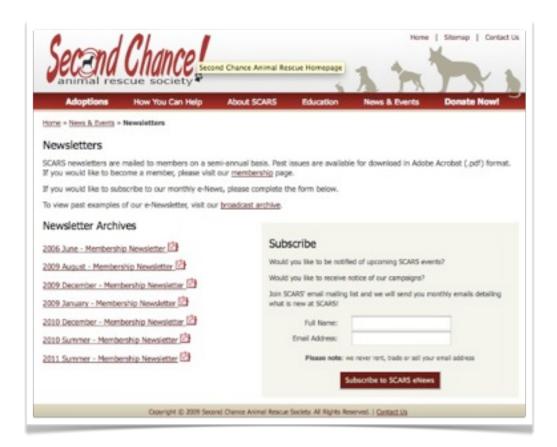It's free and easy to set up a Facebook page for your shelter. If you aren't ready for a website, set up a page there or supplement your site by creating a social media presence.

Social media allows for easy sharing and conversations, which is great for building relationships. Ask fans to subscribe by providing a link directly to your form, or just invite them to your website where there's already a form.

Sherry Suhosky, President of the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters (NAPPS), says she both uses Facebook to spread the word about shelters she supports, and hears about other shelters. "A stronger social media presence would cause more interaction with animals shelters," says Suhosky.

Word of Mouth

Encourage subscribers, adopters, volunteers and donators to tell their friends about you. They'll know who will be interested, and they can bring your target audience right to you.

You can do this by asking them to forward your emails to a friend, passing out business cards with instructions or providing a link to an archive of what you've sent in the past in your emails.

The Delco SPCA has a link to forward the email at the bottom of their messages:

Now that you know how to get people to sign up to your list, it's time to think about what you're going to say to them.

Email Content Ideas

Sure, it's one thing to say you'll start a newsletter or email series, but what do you actually write?

Think about your audience and you'll get the answer: pet and adoption-related material.

We'll give you some more specific ideas and examples.

Tips for New Pet Owners

Adopters may not be familiar with what they should expect, and you can be the one the walk them through the early days. Talk about feeding, play time, introducing the new family member to the current residents, what to look out for and any other interesting facts.

Adoptable Animals List

Who doesn't like looking at adorable animals? You can provide a couple stories or a link to a whole page of them, and someone might be moved to adopt. They may also know a friend who is looking to adopt, and pass the email on to them.

Success Stories

It's also nice to share happy stories of pets that found homes. Give the background of the animal and how they found their forever home. The adopter will probably like to share it with their family and friends, giving you more exposure.

Fundraising

For Christmas, Cat Tales does gift wrapping and pet pictures with Santa. Throughout the year other events may come up when funds are needed. You can do other events like bake sales or 5k races, or sign up to something such as iGive.

What You Need

Since not everyone will be aware of what you need and how they can help, let them know. If they're close, they can volunteer for fundraisers or cleaning. If they're busy, they can donate supplies. If they're far away, they can donate or assist with marketing efforts.

Example: Cat Tales

Cat Tales newsletters include the featured pet and tips from the volunteer veterinarian. The side bar on the right lists how people can help the shelter:

Example: Second Chance Animal Rescue

Second Chance includes recent success stories, upcoming events, and also has the side bar that contains how people can help by donating:

http://www.cattalesinc.org/Library/CTINewsletter201112.html

http://archive.aweber.com/scars_news/Af8L./h/SCARS_Newsletter_Please.htm

Both shelters do a great job talking about their animals and communicating how the public can help out.

Offering Multiple Email Campaigns

The idea of one email campaign may sound intimidating if you're not familiar with email marketing, but you'll find yourself getting more comfortable over time. You may even want to try more advanced methods, like campaigns based on interest.

For example: Some of your subscribers may be volunteers at the shelter. You want to keep these volunteers updated with inventory, vet checks, cleaning protocols and schedule updates. Not everyone on your mailing list will be a volunteer, so you can have a separate list or segment that you send volunteer information to.

Here are three other groups that would benefit from their own campaign:

New Adopters

Earlier we talked about offering tips for new pet owners. While you may still want to include tips in your newsletters, you can set up a separate series that goes into more details about how to adjust to a new pet. If they're sponsoring an animals, talk about the care the animals receive and how sponsoring helps.

Potential Adopters

Visitors will be interested in adopting different animals. There will be the classic dog vs. cat people, people interested in specific breeds, people that want to help special needs animals and people looking for certain physical or personality traits. You can set up lists per species, per breed or per whatever other groups you think are appropriate.

Local People

Subscribers within driving distance will be able to interact with you offline. They can receive upcoming schedules for fundraisers, list of supplies needed and what you need help with.

Wait, How Do I Make All This Happen?

By now you should have plenty of ideas for getting started, but I did promise it would be easy. This is where an email marketing service provider comes in.

Automated Emails

You can set up a whole series to go out at intervals you determine. You can also create announcements or newsletters and schedule them to send out at a specific date and time.

Read about how you can create a follow up series and broadcast newsletters in AWeber!

Templates

Don't have access to a designer but you want professional looking emails? Templates are available for you to just plug in your words and pictures. You can even copy previously created messages so you have less work to do next time.

Check out the AWeber templates and template manager.

List Management

Keeping track of who wants on and off the list can be hard work! An email marketing service does the management for you. Confirmation messages can be triggered as soon as a subscriber is added, and the subscriber will be removed as soon as they click the unsubscribe link automatically appended at the bottom.

Read more about the confirmation process.

Segments

In order to send a message to a specific group within your list, you need to be able to create segments. Segments contain subscribers that share specific criteria, such as those who picked the same answer on a web form or have clicked on the same link in an email. This information is kept stored so you can send a message to this group when you're ready.

Check out segmenting in AWeber.

What To Do Now

If you haven't already, set up your website so you can begin establishing your online presence. Remember, you can set up a free Facebook page or blog if you don't have the funds for your own site.

Set up and use your social media accounts to build and develop relationships with your audience, and invite everyone to join your email list. With email marketing, social media and your shelter itself, you can grow your supporters and increase funds to help your furry friends.

About AWeber

What do leading sites such as Social Media Examiner, Copyblogger, Which Test Won, ProBlogger and Harvard Business Review all have in common?

They rely on AWeber for easy-to-use email and social media tools to cultivate relationships with their readers. Since 1998, AWeber has been the email engine powering the growth of organizations around the world.

Today, more than 110,000 small- and midsize-businesses, entrepreneurs, agencies and nonprofits are making the most of AWeber's sophisticated segmentation and analytics capabilities, social media and testing applications, extensive template libraries, and industry-leading deliverability and live support.

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