

PUBLISHED BY THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

JAN-FEB 09

Animal Sheltering

animal services / rescues / shelters

Breakable Chains *The Fight Against Tethering*

The Quest for Bequests
Got Pigs in Your Digs?



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

Reeling in the News Media

Shelters can plan ahead to find seasonal news hooks that will generate coverage

BY PATRICK KWAN



By tying their cause to other local news and events—such as the Chinese Lunar new Year—New York animal protection groups have gotten more media attention, such as this piece in the *Daily News*.

We all know how powerful the media can be. Take, for example, Oprah's recent exposé of Pennsylvania's puppy mills, which helped spur national awareness of the issue, a spike in adoptions, and passage of long-linging legislation for some improvements to the canine factory farms in the state. Reaching our media goals can still be challenging, but the payoff—even if it doesn't include a seat on Ms. Winfrey's couch—is priceless.

"The more the public is exposed to the adoption message and the more familiar people become with rescue groups and shelters, the more likely they will be to choose adopting over purchasing their next new four-legged family member," says Steve Gruber, director of communica-

tions for the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals. Gruber handles the organization's media and communications efforts in New York City—the biggest, most cluttered, and most competitive media market in the nation.

An oft-cited Princeton University study conducted in the 1950s by George A. Miller led to the coining of the marketing guideline known as "the rule of seven," which holds that an average person needs to be exposed to a message seven times before it really sticks. Modern studies and corporate marketers say that the rule should be updated to a "rule of 21" or

more to take into account the astronomical growth in the amount of information and advertising people are exposed to through the Internet, television, newspapers, magazines, and even text messages. These days, it takes a lot more juice to fully saturate a market!

But few (if any) nonprofit organizations can come up with the marketing



The media is in the business of covering *news* stories—not just good or interesting stories, but stories with news elements. While extraordinary stories may prevail without a news element (or a particularly strong one), pairing the powerful stories we encounter in our daily sheltering and rescue work with news hooks gives our adoption and spay/neuter messages new life and makes them relevant to the media. News hooks also create “expiration dates” on the great stories you have—and stories that can’t wait will light a fire with the media to choose to cover your story over others that can be covered a week or a month down the road.

Some of the simplest and most effective news hooks for your messages are seasonal ones, such as a local or national holiday or the anniversary of a major event.

“Seasonal news hooks help put the issue at hand into a context not previously considered by editors, producers, and reporters,” says Joan Grangenoi-Thomas, an account director at Make Waves, a marketing and communications company for nonprofits.

In 2006—year 4073 and Year of the Dog on the Chinese lunar calendar—the Mayor’s Alliance for NYC’s Animals, along with partner organizations Animal Haven, Bideawee, Humane Society of New York, and Animal Care & Control of NYC, celebrated the Chinese New Year in New York’s Chinatown neighborhood.

Joining the parade, the groups found a wealth of media opportunities. Dogs wore “Adopt Me” vests and festive Lunar New Year outfits to promote adoptions on local TV morning shows in the week before the parade. On the day of the event, they posed for news cameras as they strutted down Chinatown’s historic Mott Street—later dubbed “Mutt Street” by the *New York Daily News*. Local papers such as the *New York Post* and national news wires such as the Associated Press highlighted the groups’ participation and discussed the need for adoptions. The result? Millions of people saw images and read coverage of the event in dozens of television, radio, and print outlets.



Dressed as Santa, a representative from the Mayor’s Alliance for Animals (and some elf helpers) encourage Fifth Avenue shoppers to take home something way better than Gucci—poochie!

“While many groups are savvy in taking advantage of celebrations like Halloween to do a costumed pet contest, we don’t often also think about how we can take advantage of media opportunities as celebrations and seasons come and go,” says Jane Hoffman, president of the Mayor’s Alliance for NYC’s Animals, who arranged the groups’ participation in the parade.

“You have to ask yourself, ‘This issue has been going on for a while. How do we make this story relevant to people now?’ Once that hook is found, multiple stories can stem from it,” says Maureen Isern, a former broadcast news professional and owner of Moped Productions, a company that develops media for nonprofits.

“I think if you’re staying on top of trends and news that relates to your organization or cause, it can be very simple to find a way to shed new light on your group,” adds Isern. “Whether it’s research-related, an anniversary month, or something happening on the national or international level that can be tied to what your agency does, all it takes is the connection. And over time, cultivating a relationship with your contact person at the local news outlet can help you learn what they respond to.”



Even Lady Liberty lifted her torch for the city’s critters during “I Love NYC Pets” month.

Resources

Animal Sheltering's 2002 feature, "Making the Media Work for You," online at animalsheltering.org/media

Online Publications

Now Hear This!—The Nine Laws of Successful Advocacy Communications, available through fenton.com

Free-Range Thinking (a free monthly journal on public interest communications): agoodmanonline.com/newsletter/

Books

Making the News: A Guide for Activists and Nonprofits by Jason Salzman

Media Relations Handbook for Agencies, Associations, Nonprofits and Congress by Brad Fitch

Storytelling as Best Practice: How Stories Strengthen Your Organization, Engage Your Audience, and Advance Your Mission by Andy Goodman



MAYOR'S ALLIANCE FOR NYC'S ANIMALS

Cute kid + cute dog + local cultural event + professional photograph = media gold.

Sample Bait

Here are some successful seasonal news hooks used by New York shelters and rescue groups that you can incorporate into your PR plan for next year. Hey, if these can make it here in New York, they can make it anywhere, right?

I Love NYC Pets Month: The Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals, ASPCA, Animal Care & Control of NYC, the Humane Society of New York, and the North Shore Animal League, along with dozens of other New York City-based shelters and rescue groups, came together during the month of hearts and flowers (February) to encourage New Yorkers to adopt a furry valentine or to show their pets some love by having them spayed or neutered. With extended adoption hours, special gifts and discounts for adoptions and spaying and neutering, and more than 50 adoption events under the I Love NYC Pets month banner, the promotion proved irresistible to the media.

In addition to dozens of stories in local media that carried the adoption and spay/neuter messages throughout the month, the promotion was covered nationally by the Associated Press and made a couple of appearances on the *The Early Show* on CBS. See links to their media coverage at ilovenycpets.com.

Tip: Don't limit your promotion to just a day or weekend. Give yourself and the media some bandwidth and more opportunities for coverage by making it a week or month.

Keeping fit and giving dogs some fresh air: Animal Care & Control of NYC promoted its volunteer dog-walking program by pegging the story to the nice weather that the late springtime offers. Volunteers walked dogs who donned "Adopt Me" vests for the cameras. AC&C staffers explained to reporters that they would love for dogs at the shelter to get more fresh air and suggested ways for New Yorkers to pitch in to ex-

pand the volunteer program. During a taping for a story on an ABC affiliate, a lucky pooch was spotted by a passerby and later adopted. The unplanned happy ending became part of the segment and powerfully demonstrated how volunteers can make a difference.

Tip: Create a photo library of your best photos in a high-resolution digital format (minimum 300 dpi) to distribute to the media to help illustrate your stories. This great photo helped the dog-walking program garner several features.

Best summer vacation idea: The Humane Society of New York and the rescue group Bobbi & the Strays asked the media, “Ever wonder what some teachers do during the summer?” Fostering, of course! The groups lined up a few volunteer fosterers who were also school teachers to speak to the media about kitten season, the need for more foster homes, and how important it is for New Yorkers to spay and neuter their animals.

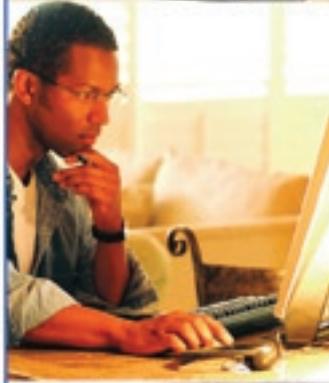
Tip: It’s not news that nonprofits need volunteers, but seasonal news hooks and the use of interesting “characters,” such as teachers in this case, give the message new life and allow for the reinforcement of additional messages promoting adoptions and spaying and neutering.

Santa trades reindeer for pooches: The Mayor’s Alliance for NYC’s Animals and Animal Care & Control of NYC created an excellent visual when they had Santa, adorable pooches wearing “Adopt Me” vests, and volunteers wearing Santa hats hit the famous Fifth Avenue shopping district to encourage lunchtime shoppers to give some four-legged New Yorkers a home for the holidays.

Tip: Think about how you can create colorful visuals for the cameras. This ensures prominent coverage by the media who need photos and video to illustrate their stories. AS

Patrick Kwan is New York state director for The Humane Society of the United States.

HUMANE SOCIETY UNIVERSITY



HUMANE SOCIETY UNIVERSITY (HSU) provides the animal care and control community with the skills necessary to maximize their ability to help animals and truly make a difference.

HSU offers a variety of exciting educational opportunities:

- A Bachelor of Science in Humane Leadership and a Master of Science in Community Leadership from Duquesne University: humanesociety.org/du
- Noncredit online courses covering a variety of humane topics at our virtual classroom: humanesociety.org/hsuonline

For more information on these and other HSU programs, please e-mail hsu@humanesociety.org or call Frances Gaeta at 301-548-7731.

Go to humanesociety.org/university to see how HSU can help you gain knowledge and advance your career.

A program of

