Survey of reasons clients visit the shelter and how their expectations affect adoption decisions

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Background

Why do some people visit an animal shelter and leave without a pet?

Research has looked into:

- Characteristics people prefer in a pet
- Characteristics that caused adopters to choose a particular pet
- Factors associated with decreased length of stay until adoption
- Effect of animals’ behavior on adoption

Few studies have looked at shelter visitors who did not adopt a pet.
The Survey

The purpose of the present study was to compare adopters and non-adopters in terms of their adoption plans and what they were seeking in a new pet.

- Visitors to a medium-sized, private, urban shelter.
- Anonymous online survey available at a kiosk in the shelter lobby.
- Participants were approached as they were leaving and adoption decisions had been made.
- Participants completed the survey on their own although a volunteer was available if anyone needed help.
- A total of 158 visitors comprised this convenience sample.
Visitor Plans

• Half of visitors were “browsers” with no plans to adopt that day, but were considering adopting in the future.

• One third had plans to take a pet home that day.

• 18% were “just visiting” and had no plans to adopt that day or in the future.
Plans vs. Outcomes

- One quarter of visitors adopted a pet on the day of their visit.
- 5% adopted spontaneously, without plans to take a pet home.
- 11% of those planning to adopt ended up disappointed.
Just Visitors

17% of all visitors and one quarter of non-adopters
Opportunity for education
Browsers

• Make up half of all visitors to shelter
• Group indicates that many people begin visiting shelters weeks or even months before they consider themselves ready to adopt a pet.
• Potential pool of future adopters
Spontaneous Adopters

Small subset of “browsers” ended up adopting despite their plans
No difference in retention has been found due to spontaneous decisions
Disappointed Non-Adopters

Had plans to take home pet that day, but did not find one they wanted

Lost adoption opportunity!

• Possibly due to low number of animals, particularly dogs available

• Diversity in dogs particularly important to adoption

By further investigating this segment, may be able to increase adoptions.
Comparing Adopters and Non-Adopters

Adopters were looking for:
1. Friendly
2. Affectionate
3. Playful
4. Age
5. Good Health

Physical characteristics and age were significantly more important to adopters than non-adopters.

Non-adopters were looking for:
1. Affectionate
2. Friendly
3. Animal’s Reaction to You
4. Playful
5. Calm

The animal’s reaction to the visitor was significantly more important to non-adopters than adopters. Lack of reaction was the most chosen reason why a visitor did not adopt when they were planning to.
Applications

• Many visitors are not planning to adopt *that day*, but they may return and adopt in the future. Impressions matter!
• Highlight how affectionate, friendly and playful animals are.
• Increase opportunities for shelter pets and visitors to interact.
Thank you!

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