

Thinking outside the square: how can councils increase registration, desexing and microchipping rates?

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NOTE:

The workshop titled: **thinking outside the square: how can councils increase registration, desexing and microchipping rates?** will require the workshop participants to do the thinking. The workshop outcomes will hopefully inspire participants to go back to their patch and implement ideas constructed as part of the workshop. This won't be death by PowerPoint slides or a one to many talkfest. This will be fun, active and inclusive – we can't lie though – there may be butchers paper and markers involved. The below information is to provide some background and to spark the neurons in the brain ready to act.

Darwin's 'survival of fittest' concept relates to managers just as much as to every other subspecies. Managers have evolved over time as a product of their environments – the environments that they are constantly influencing and to which they are adapting. Those who adapt best, survive. (Davidson et al 2009), we have several excellent specimens cultivating in petri dishes, limited to a strict diet of snark, sarcasm, and the occasional genius thought, in readiness to revolutionise registration rates and responsible pet ownership.

Just like managers, people like us who work within the animal management discipline are no different. Same theory applies – those who adapt best, survive. For those of us working in local governments across Australia we need to adapt so we can increase registration, desexing and microchipping rates along with increasing population rates. How many times have we heard the following:

“why should I register my dog?”; “what do I get for my registrations?”; “why should I register it when its already microchipped?”; “desexing!!! You're not touching my dog's balls!!”

Really the above list could go on and on. We hear them all the time yet how often do we reply by simply saying 'because it's the law' or 'because it's a legislative requirement'. We may as well say 'because I said so'. It's relatively easy to find a couple of preaching points i.e. registration helps council return your dog faster, we all know that registration represents many benefits to council, including revenue, but conveying the complexities of data

collection versus service delivery and operational planning in the community, for example, is impractical on a day to day basis, and far more difficult when the converted tend to be the only audience. People, the community, need to understand why so we can help them change their frames of reference. Frames of reference are those deep seated underlying values and belief systems that guide, shape and dictate our everyday attitudes and behaviours (Delahaye, 2005).

There are two ways you can change the frames of reference. One way is through a disorienting dilemma – for instance - a divorce, death of loved one, change in job status etc, all of which create significant consequences and spark a shift in attitudes and thinking, sometimes quite suddenly. A relative example may be someone who chooses not to vaccinate their pet finds out that the virus that killed their pet could have been prevented by vaccinations – the loss of their beloved pet may change their attitude to vaccinations the next time they adopt.

The second way, and the way we will be concentrating on, is to gradually change assumptions and perceptions through communicative learning and modelling. Communicative learning occurs when the learner attempts to understand what is meant through any given modus, such as speech, writing, drama, art, dance. You are involved in communicative learning as you read this text. But it goes deeper than words – its understanding the underlying values, intentions, morals etc. (Delahaye, 2005). A relative example may be that through watching short online videos and reading stories of people who have lost pets through not vaccinating may change their beliefs in relation not only to vaccination of pets, but in the realisation that there is associated value in the action and service, with the cost factor shifting into a secondary consideration.

Which brings us back to adapting so we can survive. In order to survive, that is, increase rates of registration etc, we need to adapt. By adapting we need to understand the community and its individuals. Why won't they register? Why won't they desex? We need to debunk the myths and change their frames of reference. How do we do that? Once again we need to inspire the means and ability to adapt. We need to think outside the square, we need to use the modes of communication that they are using, we need to use a language they understand, we need to use images they relate to, we may even need to give them something in return that they can

relate to or attribute a value to. We can also 'sell' the importance of pet registration, packaged with responsible pet ownership, to relevant sectors of the business community, as well as people who may not own animals but to whom we can demonstrate a value in services.

Ipswich City Council Registration Rewards Program

Ipswich City Council recently introduced a new initiative called the Registration Rewards Program (RRP)

The RRP was created to reward and thank owners for registering their pet. Equally, it was also created to provide an incentive for people to register their pet. It helps to provide an answer to the questions of "why should I register and what do I get for it". Council also hopes that microchipping, desexing and vaccination rates will increase as a subset of the program (through increased value of pets, stronger relationships between owners and vets, motivation for services through vouchers etc). In addition to range of animal management services Council currently provides there is now something quite tangible for owners to benefit from when they pay their registration. Council is trying something new and something outside the square. Will it work? Only time will tell as it is early days.

The RRP in a nutshell: when an owner registers their pet with Council they will receive a booklet that contains vouchers with dollar savings for them. For instance, the program for the 2013/2014 year will provide just over \$2200 worth of savings at pet shops, produce stores, behaviour specialists, veterinarians, boarding kennels, pet groomers, pet photographers to name a few.

The pet related businesses can participate in the program by including a voucher that provides a saving to the registered pet owner. This may be a discount off a service or product or may be a free add on, for example for every kennel stay you get a free hydrobath included (Valued at \$x, for every vaccination you get a free health check (Valued at \$x). By attributing a dollar value to the savings (rather than say 10% off a product or service) allows the program to highlight the real savings in dollar terms.

Businesses in return get their business and branding exposed to a much wider community and hopefully an increase in new clientele.

The Pilot Program

The RRP was started by undertaking a pilot program. The pilot program was a way that Council could quickly get something out to the community to highlight where the program was headed, what it was about and also to have something tangible to show businesses and discuss if they wanted to be involved in the first year of the full program. The Pilot Program consisted of 14 participating businesses (including

two vet clinics) with over \$230 value in vouchers. The businesses were asked to participate in the program after they attended Councils RSPCA Million Paws Walk earlier that year. It was a way to provide a cross section/sample of different types of pet related businesses.

There was positive and negative feedback to the pilot program. There were pet owners who congratulated Council on giving them something back for the registration fees and businesses who were eager to participate in the first year of the program (post pilot stage). Whilst there were two vet clinics involved in the program other vet clinics in the area were upset that they weren't asked and saw the pilot program as quite anti-competitive. All vets were then invited to participate in the pilot program and all but two clinics did sign up. A separate voucher booklet for those vet clinics was then sent out to all registered owners with over \$500 in savings.

For the 2013/2014 RRP has realised 43 participating businesses (including 13 vet clinics) culminating in over \$2200 worth of savings. A full evaluation of the program will be done via redeemed vouchers (businesses send us vouchers each month so we can track usage and how many are new or existing clientele), sample population surveys of registered owners and participating businesses.

What would we do differently?

- ✓ Promote that the pilot program is very much a marketing tool for the bigger picture
- ✓ Offer participation to all vet clinics in the pilot program
- ✓ Provide advice on how businesses may wish to market their business and what type of offer they may want to go with (eg. \$10 off; free hydrobath with each vaccination; free dog leash with every \$50 spent in one transaction, one days free accommodation when you book 7 days)
- ✓ Provide more advice/evidence on the benefits to businesses who participate in the program



The RRP is a program that will grow over the years. We can't start with a platinum service – we need to build up to that over time. Who knows, in years to come we may include any type of business in the program (not just pet related); instead of a booklet it may be a card; it may be a card/coupons that can be stored within a smart phone application. The important this is that we started.

What other ideas have/could work in council land to increase registration, microchipping and desexing rates? **[workshop group work]**

For further information on Ipswich City Council's Registration Reward Program please contact: Barbara Dart or Kylie Goodwin.

References

Delahaye, B.L. (2005) *Human resource development: adult learning and knowledge management (2nd Ed.)* Milton: John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd.

Davidson, P., Simon, A., Woods, P., & Griffin, R. (2006) *Management (4th Ed.)* Milton: John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd.

About the authors

Barbara Dart manages the Health Policy & Operations Branch at Ipswich City Council which includes the strategic planning, promotion, education and policy development for animal management. Barbara has worked in local government for thirteen years. Other roles at Ipswich City Council have included red tape reduction projects and managing a full review of Councils local laws. Prior to Ipswich City Council Barbara worked at the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) in the Policy and Representation Branch. Barbara holds a degree in Adult Education and Training, has two small dogs named Andre (Agassi) and Rapha (Nadal) and thinks the movie Bridesmaids was ripped off not winning an Oscar for best film. Seriously.

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Kylie Goodwin manages Animal Management Operations for Ipswich City Council, coordinating pound and shelter operations, service delivery, and response across the LGA. Prior to her work with council Kylie spent nine years in the private investigation, legal support, and risk management sectors, delivering services to individuals, private firms, government agencies, and global corporations. Her greatest interests within animal management are service delivery v community benefit and expectation, and strategic improvement in the management of regulated dogs. She is also an authorised implanter and lives on the Gold Coast with her beautiful daughter, Jasmine, and Cat of No Tails, Yolandi, a small but nasty piece of work with a penchant for raw carrots. Seriously.

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