

In-FUR-mercials: Advertising & Adoption

The Animal Foundation is a nonprofit organization operating Nevada’s largest open-admission animal shelter, the Lied Animal Shelter and pet adoption center. The Lied Animal Shelter is located in Las Vegas and is financed by taxpayers, grants, and individual donors. It provides a refuge for thousands of lost, unwanted, neglected, and abandoned animals every year.

In recent years, the Lied Animal Shelter has been plagued by a variety of problems from overcrowding due to a spike in animal intake as residents in the greater Las Vegas area (Clark County) surrendered or lost their pets. Analysts believed that the recession of 2008 was a major contributing factor to pet abandonment. April Corbin, writing for *Las Vegas Weekly*, reported:

“The Las Vegas Valley has a problem with domestic animals: we have more that we seem able or willing to handle, and those without homes mostly end up at the Lied Shelter. On any given day, it may be the busiest animal holding facility in the nation. ...Some blame the recession, which led to the foreclosures of more than 150,000 homes in Clark County between January 2007 and May 2014, triggering the wholesale abandonment of animals.”

In 2013, the Lied Animal Shelter took in over 40,000 abandoned or lost animals. From that population, more than 10,000 animals were adopted, nearly 5,000 were reunited with their owners, and over 2,500 were transferred to other facilities. But 21,000 animals—more than half of the animals brought to the shelter—were euthanized. Many in Clark County were discouraged by the seemingly insurmountable problems that the Lied Animal Shelter faced.

Leaders at R&R Partners, a full-service, international advertising agency headquartered in Las Vegas, believed that their persuasive communication skills could help solve Animal Foundation’s problem. R&R took on the nonprofit as a pro bono client with goals of promoting pet ownership and driving traffic to the Animal Foundation’s pet adoption website, NewPetNow.com. The agency staff conducted qualitative research in the form of focus groups with R&R employees who were pet owners. They came up with the strategy of framing pet adoption not about love and companionship but about pets’ many household uses (e.g., alarm system, sleeping mask, vacuum cleaner) with a tongue-in-cheek tone. The agency staff created an integrated communication campaign of “In-FUR-mercial” spoofs that portrayed pets as multi-purpose products for the home. Below are links to examples of the “Pet Dog” and “Pet Cat” In-FUR-mercials, and examples of print ads (Exhibits 1 and 2) follow in the Reference section.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ChMYMHvpJ0c>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MID3BZHtcqA>



After the release of the ads in early 2015, the campaign immediately received critical acclaim from industry analysts. *ADWEEK* contributor Gabriel Beltrone stated, “The writing is sharp and funny, the acting perfectly overdone, and the voiceover as cheesy as possible—dead-on parody.” The In-FUR-mercials also received CynopsisMedia’s award for the Best 30-Second Spot.

The campaign connected with audiences in Las Vegas and generated positive press for the Animal Foundation and the Lied Shelter, helping them to achieve their goal of increasing pet adoption. The percentage of available pets adopted increased by 9.39 percent during 2015, which meant that more than 1,000 additional animals were adopted.

Leaders at R&R Partners acknowledged that the campaign also resulted in important benefits for the agency that extended beyond the success and visibility of the campaign. Morale and comraderie within the agency were increased and the agency’s reputation as a responsible corporate citizen was reinforced. Sarah Catletti, an account supervisor at R&R Partners, described the benefits to the agency:

“Welcoming the Animal Foundation to R&R Vegas’ list of clients was a great way to boost morale within the agency. The pro bono client was chosen through an employee voting system. Since the Animal Foundation was the organization that received the largest number of votes, the entire agency was invested and excited to hear about the work, even those who weren’t directly involved with the account.”

Discussion Questions:

1. What is moral imagination? In your opinion, did the employees at R&R Partners exercise moral imagination in the work that they did for the Animal Foundation? Why or why not?
2. What benefits did the “In-FUR-mercial” campaign provide and for whom? Explain.
3. In this case study, what did moral imagination have in common with other types of creativity and innovation? Explain.
4. This case is about pro bono work that an advertising agency did for a pro bono client. That is, the agency did the work for free. Do you think that an advertising agency could exercise moral imagination in its work for corporate clients that pay the agency? If so, how? If not, why?
5. Can you think of an example of another company or advertising campaign that has demonstrated moral imagination? Explain.

References:

The Animal Foundation’s 2013 Annual Report

https://issuu.com/theanimalfoundation/docs/2014_annualreport

About The Animal Foundation

<http://animalfoundation.com/about/>

Pets are Exciting Multi-use Tools in these Fantastic Infomercials for an Animal Shelter: Every House Needs One

<http://www.adweek.com/adfreak/pets-are-exciting-multi-use-tools-these-fantastic-infomercials-animal-shelter-163663>

The No-Kill Dilemma: Can Las Vegas Save All Its Shelter Animals?

<http://lasvegasweekly.com/news/2014/aug/07/no-kill-dilemma-can-las-vegas-save-shelter-animals/#/0>

Animal Shelter Infomercial Spoofs Show Incredible Household Uses for Cats and Dogs

<https://www.good.is/articles/animal-shelter-infomercials>

<p>Exhibit 1 "Pet Cat" Print Ad</p>	<p>Exhibit 2 "Pet Dog" Print Ad</p>
	

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