

Speed of dog adoption: Impact of online photo traits

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Summary: This US study examined how different characteristics in online photos of young and adult black Labrador Retriever mixed breed dogs affected the speed of adoptions. A subjective global photo quality measure had the highest association with time-to-adoption. Speed of adoption was also positively associated with direct canine eye contact, the dog standing up, an appropriately sized photo, an outdoor location and a non-blurry image.

Comment: I do not espouse a digital existence, and “twiddle”, “bumbler” and “sit on my facebook” are anathema to me. However, many clinics now have a significant online presence, and use public websites and social media for communicating and building relationships with their clients. Amongst the pantheon of specific goals that can be met through the digital domain, rehoming of animals is a noble one. According to the 2014 RNZSPCA annual report, nearly 49,000 animals passed through SPCA centres alone. Add to that the numbers of animals handled by council pounds, rescue shelters, and veterinary clinics, and the total is deeply concerning. There are no figures in NZ of what proportion are successfully rehomed, but in the US, it is estimated that 2.5% of the total dog population are euthanised through shelters. Of those that require adoption, few are held and rehomed by veterinary clinics, but we are often

highly motivated to be successful when we do so, and knowing what influences success is at least of interest. Previous research in the US has shown that dogs that are entire, black or brindle, and old, are significantly less likely to be adopted from shelters. But the study from Lampe and Witte might be the first to evaluate the influence that the characteristics of online images of animals has on their likelihood of being rehomed. The study evaluated images posted on websites in the US used to advertise dogs for rehoming, and compared image characteristics with the time to adoption. The researchers selected young black Labradors or Labrador-cross dogs as their study group to eliminate variation from dog-specific parameters such as breed or colour, and because they had been identified as a type of dog that is difficult to rehome. Although there were differences between old and young dogs as to what was effective, there was no characteristic that was positive for one and negative for the other. Aside from the photo characteristics mentioned in the abstract, it was very clear that having a human in the photo holding the animal significantly decreased the chance of rehoming. Whether it is heart-warming or slightly worrying, it seems that humans are either a distraction, or positively off-putting for people open to having their heart strings pulled.

Reference: J Appl Anim Welf Sci. 2015;18(4):343-54