Ideas for User Friendly Websites

Below I've listed ways to make your rescue/shelter's page as user friendly and accessible as possible. The main goal of any animal group is to rescue animals and then place them in safe environments. You may be wondering if it really matters how good your website is, when what you care about is rescuing animals. I wouldn't devote a lot of funds or unnecessary time on creating the perfect website. However there are a few steps you can take to help increase the likelihood your animals will be adopted. After all, you want to make it as easy as possible for people to find out what you do, why you do it and the animals you have for adoption! I would also like to note here that I do not know very much about making websites. The following information is written from my own experiences as a website user and helping to create the SHC website as well as what I think makes for a great user friendly website. Suggestions and comments are always welcome so drop us a line through the 'contact' page.

1. Make the animals number one! Novel buttons and quirky graphics can be a great edition to you website, but if people don't recognize them as a portal to another page then they aren't very useful. Try and have a main page button directing people to look at your animals. Use as many different resources you can to advertise your animals. If possible remind people on a couple of other different pages (with a simple button or link) to your adoption page. Give extra

focus to one or two animals every once and awhile to draw more attention to them. Have an easy way of sorting through animals by using categories like species, colour, breed or age.

2. Promote any way you can. Try and promote your website, animals and ideas in any way you can. Connect with other organizations, write a blog, create a facebook page or twitter account. Anything to draw attention to your organization can make a big difference. So many people use social media that it's a great way to connect with your supporters. People are genuinely interested in what you have to say and what's new, so make it easy for them to find out what's going on! You can also link your website with Facebook so that users can re-post content fro your website (like one of your pets that needs a new home!) In this you not only connect with them, but all of the friends that they post to! This can also be accomplished through Twitter, Stumble Upon and many more.

3. Navigation is key. Do you have buttons that disappear when you travel to a new page? Giving users options at all times is very important! If they constantly have to backtrack through their previous steps they could get frustrated and unable to find the page they want. Try and put important navigation buttons on all pages so no matter what people can get to them (this could include a home, contact and adoption button for example).

4. Communication. Always keep the lines of communication open! Giving people the ability to share information, thoughts and questions with you is so important. It keeps you in contact with your supporters and can also benefit you when they want to donate something or make a suggestion! Try and give them as many ways to contact you as possible including contact forms, email, phone number, mailing address and social media sites. If you know how long it normally takes you to respond put this on the contact page so people will be patient. This also ensures that you are not getting repeat communications from

people who are impatient or unsure if you got their initial message (If possible it's great to have some sort of acknowledgment of their message so they know that you did indeed receive it!)

5. Keep it simple. While the appearance of your website is not crucial to usability, it can make for a more positive user experience. Try and avoid flashing graphics, pages that take a million years to load, big patterned backgrounds and 100's of colours all competing for attention. Pick a cohesive colour scheme and complementary images or videos to make your site engaging. You want people to focus on the rescued animals not on the overwhelming design elements.