

Helping Hard-to-Place Pets Find Homes

In this article, we want to provide some tips for how to identify and how to start immediately and positively impacting perceptions of hard-to-place pets.

It's our mission to ensure that every adoptable pet finds a home. Unfortunately, experience shows us that some are harder to place than others. Pets with health issues and older pets—even though they're still incredible animals—may have harder times finding homes.

At its core, this is a problem of perception. Potential adopters recognize that they'll have to invest **time, money and emotion**, all of which are barriers to adoption. They're afraid a pet will be hard to train, may be expensive because of a chronic illness or may be difficult to connect with emotionally because of age or temperament. How do we overcome these barriers and change perceptions? It's all about promoting these pets and marketing them the right way.

THE OPPORTUNITIES

In order to overcome the barriers of time, money and emotion, we need to address both the **risk** and **reward** ends of the equation. We need to show prospective adopters that the rewards of adopting a hard-to-place-pet are greater than the risks they anticipate.

We tested a variety of profiles that focused on the emotional reward of adopting an older pet or a pet with a chronic illness. After surveying 600 potential adopters, here's what we learned.

FOR SENIOR PETS:

WHAT WORKS:

- The perceived loyalty and devotion of senior pets
- More open to cuddling and love
- More emphasis on positive personality characteristics

WHAT DOESN'T:

- Acknowledging that older pets might not have a lot of time left (e.g. mentions of "golden years")
- Grandparent analogies

FOR EXAMPLE:



Meet Baxter! He's a 9-year-old mixed breed with lots of love to give. In his younger years, he was once a loyal companion to a family who couldn't take him overseas with them. But because of his past family life, we know he is good with kids, knows basic commands, is house-trained and ready for a new, loving home. Once he gets to know you, he's a big cuddle buddy. His heart is full of love and devotion for a family like yours!

POTENTIAL
ADOPTERS THAT
SAW PROFILES
WITH THIS CONTENT
WERE **2x** MORE
LIKELY TO
ADOPT

Continued →

FOR PETS WITH CHRONIC ILLNESSES

WHAT WORKS:

- Highlight the fact that their personality can be just like that of any other pet
- Despite their illness, they can still enjoy a full life
- An emphasis on positive personality characteristics

WHAT DOESN'T:

- Softening the language around special medical needs so as not to overwhelm potential adopters.

FOR EXAMPLE:



Meet Bailey! Bailey is sweet, energetic and has the best purr. She loves to play with feather toys, chase shadows on the floor and curl up by your head at night. Bailey is happy and playful and just happens to have diabetes—a common condition in cats. She needs daily injections and a special diet, but she can go on to live a happy, healthy life—just like any other cat!



These findings led us to three concrete things you can start doing **TODAY** to start positively changing perceptions.

- 1 Determine a course of action for hard-to-place pets at intake:** Keep the time, money and emotional investment in mind. Look for and remember positive traits and behaviors that will strengthen their bios. The earlier you identify these pets and promote them accordingly, the better chance they have of getting adopted.
- 2 Talk positively about hard-to-place-pets:** Emphasize the positive personality traits in the pet. Even traits that may be perceived as negative can be talked about in a more positive way. Instead of saying “She’s timid when you first meet her,” try “She’s a cuddler once she gets to know you.” Instead of “In his golden years,” try “A devoted companion.”
- 3 Highlight what’s in it for adopters, not what’s required of them:** Focus on the differences that make the pet great. Senior pets are house-trained; pets with a chronic illness are just as playful. Instead of “She can no longer eat her dry food, so you’ll have to feed her wet food,” try “She really enjoys her wet food.”

By helping shape perceptions of hard-to-place pets, you’re making a positive impact and helping them get the right kinds of attention. Stay positive!

■ In 2017, Purina invested in two research studies (Hard to Place Pets Qualitative, Reality Check & Hard to Place Pets Quantitative, Ipsos) to better understand adopter perceptions of pets that are traditionally harder to place, and to identify how to best optimize online postings for hard-to-place pets. Purina believes people and pets are better together and is working proactively to support animal welfare organizations in their mission to help more adoptable pets find homes.