

ADOPTING ONLINE

your next

best friend might be just

a mouse click away



by *B.J. Candella*

"I found myself quite lost after my beloved miniature dachshund Mr. Mann passed away," says Jill Kirkland of Scottsdale, Arizona. "After a brief time I knew that the best thing I could do would be to find another furry friend to adopt." Jill logged onto the Internet and found an online adoption site called PETS 911. "On my first search within my zip code, I found an adorable long-haired mini-Dachshund mix," says Jill. "The photo of his 'knowing smile' was all it took to win my heart,

and the rescue he was at was only four blocks from my home. Meeting him proved he was all I hoped for, so I made immediate arrangements to adopt him."

As Jill's story indicates, the influence of the Internet has gone far beyond downloading music or auctioning your old junk on Ebay. More and more people are using the World Wide Web as a way to find their soul mates, both human and animal.

Online adoption is changing the way we find and adopt our animal companions. It's not like browsing Amazon.com (your dog or cat will not be Fed Ex'ed to the door!), but free services such as PETS 911 (PETS911.com), which works with more than 10,000 non-profit shelters and rescues, is where you can begin your search. "We knew there had to be a better way to bring animals and people together," says CEO Chris Warner, who launched the site in 1999.

"Sometimes well-meaning citizens hesitate to go to their local shelter when they are looking for a pet because they are worried it will be depressing, or that there will be too many animals to pick from," says Betsy McFarland of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). "Offering adopters the ability to search for pets from the comfort of their home gives them the ability to see if there are any animals that fit their criteria. It's fun and easy – and best of all, when they find the perfect pet, they can go to the local shelter and start the adoption process."

PETS 911, and others sites like it, such as www.AdoptAnAnimal.ca for Canadian adoptions, allow you to narrow down your search to the kind and breed of animal you're looking for, and the shelter or rescue nearest you. You can even browse pictures of available shelter animals near your home, until all that's left is a quick drive to pick up your new companion.

"When using online services, be patient, advises Betsy. "If the kind of pet you're seeking doesn't show up on the first search, try again next day. There are always more animals needing homes, and it will be just a matter of time before your perfect companion appears."

Internet adoption services help shelters and rescues

Those looking for animal companions are not the only ones who appreciate Internet adoption. Shelters and rescues always face the prospect of too many animals and not enough homes, but online services help stem the tide, and many shelters are seeing their adoption rates climb.

"The Internet is a wonderful tool in helping with adoptions," says Pam Migneco, Secretary for the City of Arnold Animal Control in Missouri. "The Internet reaches so many people who would have never known our facility existed. I personally adopted a cat from a facility through the Internet. He is now living a wonderful life and showered with love every day."

"The Internet is one of the best ways to reach people," agrees Cary Rentola, Marketing and Events Manager for the Larimer Humane Society in Fort Collins, Colorado. "Being able to post adoptable animals on the Internet improves the chances of that animal finding a home. It's amazing how many people are tuned in."

Online adoption services also provide an avenue for specific breed placement groups to highlight the animals they have for adoption. "Because these groups work mostly out of a network of

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foster homes, it can be challenging to advertise the animals needing homes," says Betsy. "PETS 911, and other sites like it, give them a great option for promoting adoption and can be a great fit for someone looking for a particular breed."

How does it work?

Finding an animal online may sound overwhelming, but it's actually a simple, streamlined process.

- When you visit PETS911.com, enter your zip or postal code and then decide if you want to search for the shelter or rescue closest to you, or for a specific breed available in your area. You'll find information on each shelter or rescue, including their mission, pictures of adoptable animals, adoption fees, hours of operation, their contact details, and their web site address if they have one.
- If you see an animal you want, hit "print" and you'll have a hard copy of everything you need to know about the animal. Along with the picture and kennel number, the printout lists the species, gender, breed, color, age, and comments such as "enjoys children" or "cannot live with cats."
- Go to the shelter where the animal is being cared for and give them the printout. The adoption process has started!

"Online adoption services have helped to tremendously increase public awareness," says Betsy. "It brings pet adoption to a whole new audience of folks who might not have considered it before."

Let the search begin!

ADOPTION TIPS

Here are a few things to remember when using an online service:

- Find out how often the site is updated. "Our site's adoptable animal page updates twice a day," says Cary. "This allows us to provide accurate information about animal availability."
- Never use an online service that is not free to both users and shelters. You should never have to pay for adoption information.
- Understand that adoption policies and procedures vary from shelter to shelter. Check directly with individual organizations to find out how to start the adoption process.
- Keep in mind that shelters take in all types of animals, including purebreds; in fact, HSUS estimates that as many as 25 percent of dogs entering shelters are purebred.
- Don't limit your use of the Internet to adoption or finding a lost pet. "What's great about PETS 911, for example, is that they go beyond adoption," Betsy says. "You can search for volunteer opportunities in your area, or find a veterinarian, emergency clinic, local affordable spay and neuter services, or pet-friendly rental housing - all with a few clicks of a mouse."

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