

WebFOCUS POWERS NATIONAL ADOPTION DATABASE

DogMatch Saves Canine Lives

Every day, more than 30,000 healthy dogs are euthanized in the United States. Due to the pet over-population crisis – and a public myth that shelter dogs are “damaged goods” – most of the dogs taken to an animal shelter have only a few days to find a new home. Some dogs are lucky: they are adopted in time and find a loving family to care for them. Others are never adopted at all, or are taken by families who later regret their choice and return the animals to the shelter.

“Some families make a hasty decision and find themselves unprepared for the breed or personality of dog that they bring home,” explains Teresa Teravainen, executive director at The Shelter Connection in Long Island, New York. “Our mission is to improve the quality of dogs’ lives by increasing the rate of successful adoptions through training and socialization.”

Thanks to a new Web service powered by Information Builders software, Teravainen and other volunteers at The Shelter Connection are making great strides in this direction. DogMatch.com uses Information Builders’ WebFOCUS reporting technology to streamline the process of finding suitable homes for shelter dogs.

“We don’t just want the dogs adopted. We want them adopted by the right homes,” adds Teravainen. “Part of our job is to educate families about what type of dog is best for them. Instead of just scanning a list, DogMatch helps them find dogs that match their lifestyle and family living environment.”



SNAPSHOT

ORGANIZATION: The Shelter Connection, a non-profit volunteer organization in Greenvale, NY, working in partnership with The Town of North Hempstead Animal Shelter

CHALLENGE: To improve the rate of successful adoptions of shelter dogs across the U.S.

STRATEGY: Working with Arisoft Software, The Shelter Connection created DogMatch.com, a web-based data warehouse that simplifies data management activities at local shelters while improving the rate of adoptions on a national scale

RESULTS: DogMatch is helping match up dogs with loving families across the U.S. and, in so doing, reducing the rate of euthanasia for healthy animals

INFORMATION BUILDERS SOLUTION: WebFOCUS



HOW MUCH IS THAT DOGGIE IN THE BROWSER WINDOW?
It's an undeniable case of puppy love for all involved in the DogMatch adoption program (l-r): Dr. Bob Slifkin, president, The Shelter Connection; Andie Hymen, commissioner of Public Safety, Town of North Hempstead; Max Wright, president, Arisoft, and developer of DogMatch; Jim Mileti, DBA/analyst; Teresa Teravainen, executive director, The Shelter Connection.

Dog's Best Friend

As the founding beneficiary of DogMatch, and working with volunteers from The Shelter Connection, the Town of North Hempstead Animal Shelter is the first municipal shelter to use the DogMatch software. "We are starting by featuring our local dogs on the DogMatch Web site, but the business plan is to quickly add other shelters from all across the United States," says Teravainen.

According to Max Wright, the database engineer who designed and developed DogMatch, a lot of dogs are already adopted through the Web, proving the public's willingness to use the Internet as an adoption vehicle. But other Web-based adoption services have rudimentary database technology, which limits their effectiveness. "Most adoption sites are list-oriented, operating like an electronic catalog," Wright explains. "Our approach fits better with the adoption process."

Here's how it works. Through DogMatch.com, Web users specify precisely what type of dog they are looking for, such as sex, age, breed, color, type of coat, how much they wish to exercise the animal, and so forth. The system helps them decide what types of dogs best match their requirements, then returns photos of potential adoption candidates, along with information about their backgrounds. Users can enter zip codes to look for dogs in designated geographic areas. And by offering their e-mail address, they will be notified as new animals are brought in that match their profile.

"Using WebFOCUS, it was possible to create a highly visual presentation, where all aspects of the selection and review process take place on a single browser screen," Wright says. "WebFOCUS provides seamless, real-time access to the database engine, plus powerful ways to manipulate and manage data remotely."

Technically, it's impressive, but Teravainen tends to emphasize the real beneficiaries: the dogs themselves. "Each shelter dog now has a real opportunity to be adopted by a loving family," she says. Our goal is to significantly reduce the number of shelter inmates and the catastrophic death toll associated with these loving animals."

Local Effort, National Results

As a database engineer with more than 20 years of IT consulting experience, Wright has been involved with many large data warehouses that were built using Information Builders technology. Today, as president of Arisoft, one of Information Builders' Info Elite partners, he is leveraging his experience to create an industrial-strength data warehouse for dog adoptions on a national scale.

A major distinction of the DogMatch model is that participating shelters are given a specially developed shelter management application. They use the software to enter

data about the animals in their shelters, building up a database of information on their local computers.

Then, on a scheduled basis, one single mouse click automatically prepares a list of currently available dogs, together with their digital photos, and uploads the information to the main DogMatch Web server. "Each night, a WebFOCUS procedure scans the database to determine which dogs are currently available, then creates an extract file that is uploaded to the national server," explains Wright. "By participating in the national adoption program,

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-Max Wright,
President, Arisoft Software;
DogMatch Designer and Developer

the shelters get added value – a database they can continually use. They merely have to enter information about the dogs, such as when they arrived and when they will be available for adoption – information they need anyway."

WebFOCUS distribution features include scheduled electronic bursting of reports into e-mail and automatic FTP transfers. "We are providing the animal shelters with the world's most sophisticated database and reporting solution," says Wright. "As a bonus, shelter personnel and volunteers find that their record keeping is greatly simplified. They are provided with a wealth of management reporting that simplifies routine operations."

Teravainen estimates that the software has the potential

to save many hours each week that shelters currently spend on routine data entry tasks. "Best of all, they don't need any in-house IT expertise to have their animals featured online," she exudes. "The whole process of maintaining information about dogs on the Web is a non-issue. It is done for them."

IT experts from DogMatch are available to install the software and help new shelters get started in the program. The response from shelters has been overwhelming, but Wright is confident that the underlying data warehouse architec-

ture can handle the load. "The multi-dimensional indexing scheme is extremely fast in returning matched answer sets – no matter how many records are stored on the server," he says. "We have the capacity to give near instantaneous response, even with every dog in the U.S. listed in the database. DogMatch has all the built-in technology of an enterprise reporting vehicle, including the ability to quickly access millions of records."



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Building a Better Dog House

According to Wright, this level of power has never been brought to bear on an adoption service before and, consequently, DogMatch vastly outperforms its competition in

terms of raw speed, record capacity, database flexibility and scalability. "By using Information Builders data warehousing technology, we are light years ahead of the competition," Wright says. "Now, for the first time, there is a service that accurately reflects recommended adoption procedures, while outperforming any existing technical offerings. This level of usability for shelters is unique, and its built-in capability for building a national adoption database – without any additional effort on the part of participating shelters – is without peer.

The national DogMatch database is made available through the WebFOCUS Managed Reporting Environment (MRE), an ideal method of distributing information to sites that are geographically dispersed over a wide area. WebFOCUS MRE includes facilities for deferred processing of high-volume analysis, plus the ability to download data extracts directly into spreadsheets for analysis.

These business intelligence capabilities will become especially important as more and more shelters enter data into the system. Teravainen and other volunteers can use WebFOCUS to track dog adoptions and adoption programs – getting a handle on what works and what doesn't, so these programs can be improved. "Other Web sites have imagined a national adoption database, but their systems make it cumbersome," says Wright. "For instance, shelters have to do additional data entry to indicate that a dog has been adopted. And once they upload new data to the Web, they have lost track of it, so there really is no motivation for them to take this extra step. In our case, merely by maintaining their local data – which they need anyway – they can contribute to a national adoption database. The WebFOCUS Managed Reporting Environment is an ideal structure for deploying this type of architecture on a national scale."

Volunteers at The Shelter Connection keep in touch with many people who have used the Internet to make good adoption choices, and the stories are often heartwarming. "We get pictures back of dogs sitting at the table with bandanas around their necks, or playing ball in the pool with the kids," recounts Teravainen. "That's the most rewarding part: knowing that we have not just rescued a dog from euthanasia, but we have increased its quality of life." 🐾