



Stanford eCorner

Expanding the Customer Base for the Non-Profit

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It's not just about spaying and neutering anymore. Changing the role of the animal shelter to completely support the human/animal bond is a huge undertaking for Humane Society Silicon Valley's President Christine Benninger, but one that's critical for the longevity and livelihood of the pets and animals served. Her innovative vision revamps the entire role of the animal shelter, including a pet-friendly community center and numerous family events. The result is a sociological shift in the integration of her organization as it weaves itself into the fiber of its constituent's daily routine.



Transcript

As we're now continuing the transition, then the next question is not only how do we continue to save more lives but how do we really get to the core issues of what are driving animals into our shelters? And if you look at the core issues, the core issues have to do with regards to commitment to pets. So Lily, for example, is not an overpopulation problem. She came into a shelter as an adult. Her issue was a commitment problem. I'm actually the fourth owner. So she had three other owners who didn't want to commit to her and kept turning her into shelters. So how do we really deal with that core issue because it's not just about us spaying and neutering anymore. And that's where we started to say, "You know the only way to do that is we've got to really change this paradigm of shelters away from being warehouses because that's what shelters traditionally are. To being essentially involved in our community where we're really supporting that human-animal bond to that's where the enhancement comes in over the life of the pets. So that people are really committing to their pets for a long-term basis and not.

So they don't end up at the Humane Society. So we made a decision that our current facility which is over fifty years old, does not really fit in with this new dynamic that we want to promote going forward. So we're in the process right now of building a new facility, the first of its kind in the country. Very exciting. We call it an Animal Community Center. Not just a shelter. And what that will be is a combination of traditional Humane Society types of functions which is adoption, education, spay and neuter with the enhancement of community outreach and services like: Doggie Day Care, Dog and Cat boarding, a grooming center, a sports and training facility, a pets store, a cafe, dog parks. So, what that means is on a Saturday morning, you know, you can come over to the Humane Society with Lily and your six year old. And you drop your six year old at our amphitheater where we have the troop of marionettes from Happy Hallow Park and Zoo who comes over and does marionette show with an animal based theme but is fun and is interactive for your six year old. You go out into the dog park where there's an exercise class going on where you and your dog exercise together.

Or maybe you do a yoga class together or a dance class. But it's not just about training with your dog. It's this is my best buddy. You know? We've got to go out and do something together. And then afterwards, an hour later, you meet at the cafe and you get a little something to eat and there's a dog bakery there and Lily gets a little something too. So ? And how does, how do you reach though the families, the three families that had Lily before you? How do you change their mind about this commitment? And this is a, if this were a software company we'd be talking about how to modify customer behavior to make a bigger market, right? And this is a fundamentally different domain but same problem. How do you modify human behavior to

create a bigger market so that there's a permanent home for Lily? One of the big problems that we have at Santa Clara County and for anybody who's got a dog, you'd probably know there are very few places you can take your dog. Parks don't allow them. A lot of you go on, you know, even walking your animal down the street. A lot of people are like "Whoa!" You know, they're going to walk on the other side of the streets.

So, creating a space, you know, I'm convinced that if her first owner had a place to come where he or she could have done something fun with her, met other people who were like minded and start to build sort of a social network around that, then probably that person would've been less likely to dump her. Uh hmm. Because she then becomes a part of the family. But the way to really change that behavior is we've got to get out there into the community. We've got to be a place that people want to come in and really work with our community to provide fun and interactive things. Not just a piece of paper when you walk in the door about, you know, how you take care of your pet. Uh hmm.