

# INTHEMAIL

## Can we speak, dog to dog?

Wyers Direct Communications and the Toronto Humane Society connect with donors on another level *By Kim Hughes*



**Client:** Toronto Humane Society  
**Campaign:** 2010 Holiday Appeal  
**Account/Creative Team:**  
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**H**ousehold pets don't usually get a lot of mail. So when an envelope arrives specifically addressed to Snowball or Spot, chances are the human in their lives will take notice, particularly if that envelope contains a gut-wrenching anecdotal letter authored by a fellow feline or canine.

That's the basic idea behind a recurring seasonal fundraising campaign executed by the Toronto Humane Society in concert with Wyers Direct Communications, their longtime agency.

This year, the purpose of the DM was two-fold: the THS was keen to top up its coffers but also to bolster its image, which took a beating in 2009/2010 when its former board of directors faced charges of neglect, mismanagement and lack of transparency.

Like most smart, effective DM campaigns, the THS's poignant/playful 2010 Holiday Appeal mailer was highly targeted, with cat owners – or rather the cat owner's cat – receiving a letter from Jayden the cat and dog owners receiving a letter from Sophie the dog, both actual residents at the shelter, which currently houses between 250 and 300 animals.

Touch points in the database without pets or with pets that were unknown or more exotic (rabbits, hamsters, birds and the like) received the dog mailer, which

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functioned as the default.

But the notion of animal-to-animal communication – possible because the THS captures species and pet-name info among its donor base and has done so for decades – is part of what makes the THS mailer so unique in the already vibrant fundraising landscape.

"You are reaching out to a completely different demographic – people who have a great deal of compassion," offers Rob Wyers, CEO and creative director of Wyers Direct Communications which has worked with the THS "pretty much since our agency was founded 27 years ago. They were my second clients after the Heart and Stroke Foundation."

Wyers continues: "So you do tend towards a softer,

more loving, empathetic approach. Plus the animal-to-animal communication works well at Christmas when I think people are willing to suspend their disbelief... or at least are willing to play along with it being a magical time."

Concurs Stephanie Ratcliff, THS fundraising administrator, "people want to do something special for the holidays. Plus I don't think people realize how much it costs to take care of the animals.

"So it's exciting to see results coming in because it means you have the money to buy the supplies and offer the medical care that's needed," she says.

Actually, the dog-to-dog communication is only one part of what makes the THS appeal unique.

Another is the myriad ways in which the DM recipients can elect to contribute – either by topping up the amount of their current monthly contribution, by pledging a one-off gift or by purchasing a symbolic gift (say, the cost of an animal spay/neuter or the cost of daily cat or dog care at the shelter) for a friend or family member.

This latter option, dubbed Tail Wagging Gifts and fleshed out in a colour catalogue included with the mailer this year, also drives to an online microsite (tailwagginggifts.ca). Donors are provided with a tag they can include with their Christmas card to alert someone a symbolic gift has been given in their honour. A tree tag is also included; when returned with a donation, it's displayed at the shelter.

"So when people come into the shelter they can see these tags and buy into being part of the success story," says Wyers.

In all, some 70,000 pieces were mailed last November, a total of 14,367 cat versions and 55,644 dog versions targeting both monthly donors (those giving pre-authorized monthly donations, referred to internally as members of the Society's Save the Animals Team) and so-called regular donors who have given single gifts. Past donors were also targeted.

All players agree that this year, amid a diminished

member base and with its status as a revamped, well-run organization still taking root, the stakes for the THS's direct mail campaign were very high.

"All of our current messages are focused on accountability and transparency," confirms Mark Climie-Elliott, senior development and marketing advisor to THS. "Every dollar that is coming into this facility is enhancing an animal's medical needs, daily care needs... whatever.

"The money is also supporting the refurbishing we have done within the facility. So for instance we have expanded our dog runs, the cat rooms and cat cages have been remodeled. A lot of work needed to be done. And supporters are coming back because they have seen the difference that's been made within the organization."

The campaign clearly illustrates the costs involved in daily animal upkeep and medical care vis-à-vis the gift amounts associated

with each available selection in the Tail Wagging Gifts plan.

For example, buying dog lodging for a month costs \$50, cat vaccinations are listed at \$60 while medical care/surgery for cats can be purchased for \$300. Regular donors can also elect to join the Save the

Animals Team by pledging to donate a monthly minimum of \$18.

"Illustrating the daily costs involved in caring for the animals makes it much more tangible for people," Climie-Elliott says. "And people can mix it up; purchase five lodgings say or two spay/neuter.

"It's alternative giving. Instead of buying someone another tie or another housecoat they don't need, here is something different and meaningful. It says, 'I know you love animals and I'm acknowledging that.'

"When you hear the dogs barking and the cats meowing, it can break your heart... or it can strengthen your resolve that there is still more work to be done," Climie-Elliott adds. "That's what you take away when you work here. The dogs remind you every minute that there's a reason you're raising money and a reason you shouldn't stop working."

