



Corporate Social Marketing for Sustainable Animal Well-Being: The Pedigree Promotion of Homeless Dog Adoption

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Learning Objectives

1. To know which are the leading animal well-being problems worldwide.
2. To identify the most appropriate social causes to be selected by brands to be supported internationally as a long-term corporate ethical commitment.
3. To study successful corporate social marketing initiatives in the field of animal well-being.

1 Introduction

Treating animal companions as one more family member has grown the pet industry worldwide. However, animal causes like pet abandonment and low adoption rates of homeless pets are animal causes needing solutions. Companies like Mars Petcare, owning brands like Pedigree, have internationally become industry leaders in sales and corporate social marketing. Pedigree has established a successful long-term partnership with the social cause of dog adoption. As a result, the Pedigree Foundation has been created by the brand to launch different types of initiatives to promote dog adoption continually.

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2 Case development

2.1 Pet Industry and Animal Well-Being Figures

Worldwide, the care of dogs, cats, fish, and domestic birds create an industry of million euros in full expansion. The ownership of cats and dogs has been steadily increasing globally, including in emerging economies. In 2022 it was estimated that over 470 million dogs and 370 million pet cats are kept as pets around the world (Simply Insurance, 2022). Globally, dogs are the most popular pet in around one in three homes worldwide. Almost a quarter of pet owners have a cat. More than a billion pets live with families in the USA, Europe, Latin America, and Japan (PFMA—Pet Food Manufacturers Association, 2021).

The tendency to treat companion animals as children promotes an industry that has grown by over 66% in the last decade, while the global economy has expanded by just 43% (The Economist, 2020). Only in Europe, 90 million households owned at least one pet, of which 113,588,248 were cats and 92,947,732 dogs in 2021. That same year, pet food products had an annual sales volume of 10.2 million tons and reached a turnover of 27.7 billion euros in Europe, while pet-related products and services were valued at €23.5 billion: €9.5 billion for accessories and €14 billion for services also in Europe (Fediaf, 2022). It is estimated that 110,000 direct and 950,000 indirect jobs are related to the pet business throughout Europe. Europe has 150 pet food companies and 200 production plants, and this part of the pet food industry alone is growing at an annual rate of 3.1% (Fediaf, 2022).

Homeless companion animals are one of the main animal well-being problems worldwide. Although it is difficult to find official figures, some independent institutions provide rough data. Only in the USA, approximately 6.3 million companion animals enter animal shelters annually (3.1 million dogs and 3.2 million cats) (ASPCA—American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 2022). The European Union estimates that there are about 100 million abandoned companion animals in Europe and most of them living in the Union's Member States like Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Spain (ESDAW—European Society of Dog and Animal Welfare, 2022).

In Spain, the abandonment of pets and their adoption at a low rate are causes of animal welfare that urgently require the search for solutions. In 2020 Spanish animal shelters collected 286,000 dogs and cats (162,000 dogs and 124,000 cats). Firstly, 49.3% were adopted in the dogs' case, 15.6% were returned to their owners, 20.2% remained in the shelter, 6.2% stayed in foster homes, 5.3% were transferred to another entity, and 3% died. Secondly, 42.6% were adopted in the cats' case, 15.1% remained in the shelter, 14.4% were relocated to cat colonies, 10.1% stayed in foster homes, 4.5% were transferred to another entity, and 9.7% died (Fundación Affinity, 2020).

Table 1 Homeless pets index in different countries

Country	Total Cat & Dog Population	Total Homeless Counts	% Homeless Companion Animals
United States	185,407,416	47,700,000	26%
India	93,841,422	79,900,000	85%
Germany	28,460,000	2,060,000	7%
Greece	5,509,232	2,828,000	51%
China	257,738,944	75,000,000	29%
Mexico	38,895,368	7,600,000	20%
UK	20,953,432	1,079,400	5%
South Africa	14,915,084	4,050,000	27%
Russia	67,547,799	4,079,000	6%

Source: data from endpethomelessness.com (2022)

2.2 Raising Awareness About the Homeless Animal Problem: endpethomelessness.com

Homeless companion animals are one of the leading animal well-being problems worldwide. However, few countries provide official national figures, and it is not easy to study the phenomenon internationally. Because of this, some independent institutions have made considerable efforts to collect reliable data and visualize the magnitude of that problem. The company Mars Petcare, the owner of the pet food brand Pedigree, has developed the website “endpethomelessness.com” to provide data. Only in 9 countries (US, UK, India, Mexico, Germany, Russia, South Africa, China, and Greece) are 224 million dogs and cats in shelters or on the street.¹ This is a severe animal well-being problem in emergent economies like India or China, and in the USA or European countries like Greece or Spain (Table 1). The UK is one of the countries with a lower percentage of homeless animals and, at the same time, with high pet adoption rates (Mars Petcare, 2022).

The project “endpethomelessness.com” aims to address pet homelessness issues around the world with a wide range of programs, including responsible pet owner and breeder education, expanded access to veterinary care, shelter support, branded partnerships and donation. The last informational initiative of the website has been the development of the State of Pet Homelessness Index. This index is the first consistent, methodological measure of pet homelessness by country to identify the most impactful factors in each country (Mars Petcare, 2022).

¹Map of countries available online for download at: https://endpethomelessness.com/static/INFOGRAPHIC-2021-State-of-Pet-Homelessness_Index-6ffc70c761ddce2d99480d6c718c9722.pdf

2.3 Providing Comprehensive Non-Profit Solutions to Pet Homelessness: The Pedigree Foundation

The Pedigree Foundation was established in 2008 by the company maker of Pedigree food for dogs, Mars Petcare, to help increase dog adoption rates. It is a private foundation that supports shelters and rescue organizations and encourages people to adopt, volunteer, and donate.² Since 2008, Pedigree Foundation has given more than nine million dollars through 5700 grants, working with organizations that support its missions of ending pet homelessness and helping dogs find their forever homes. Shelters and rescues in the US can apply for annual and emergency grants specially addressed to programs such as temporary fostering, transport from overpopulated areas, and matching homeless dogs with their owners (Pedigree Foundation, 2022).

Only in 2021, a total amount of 782,067 dollars was dedicated by the Foundation to different types of grant programs. Firstly, 345,307 dollars were spent on “Development Grants,” for transport, foster, behavior, or matching programs that increase dog adoption rates. Secondly, 187,595 dollars were addressed to “Disaster Relief Grants” for an emergency response to natural disasters, hoarding, puppy mill seizures, or other crises. And thirdly, 100,000 were dedicated to the “Dogs Rule Grant,” providing 50,000 dollars a year for two years to the awarded shelters for an innovative initiative that could be a best practice model to increase dog adoption (Fig. 1).

The Pedigree Foundation’s money to cover these different grant programs and the related management costs comes from various financial sources. Corporate donations are the primary source of financial support providing 167,885 dollars in 2021, followed by individual donations (225,665 dollars), in-kind contributions (167,885 dollars) and gear sales (114,144 dollars) (Fig. 2). Yearly Pedigree Foundation runs specific short-term programs and campaigns to collect funds and in-kind contributions.

2.4 Encouraging Dog Adoption: Creative and Emotional Communication

In January 2008, Pedigree launched “*The Pedigree Adoption Drive*” to help charities re-home over 100,000 abandoned dogs each year in the UK. This long-term social marketing initiative increased those who believed that Pedigree had the well-being of dogs at its heart (Marketing Society, 2008). Under the umbrella of “*The Pedigree Adoption Drive*” different renewed initiatives are developed year after year. The main goal of “*The Pedigree Adoption Drive*” is to promote dog adoption. However, the program also encourages alternatively donating, fostering, and volunteering (Pedigree.com, 2022).

²Pedigree Foundation website: <https://www.pedigreefoundation.org/donors/>

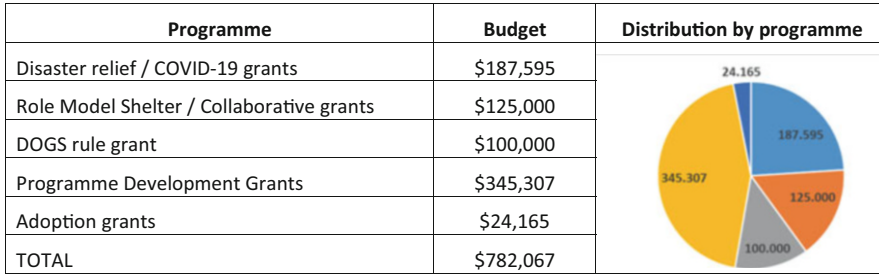


Fig. 1 Budget distribution by different grant programs. Source: data from Pedigree Foundation Impact Record (2021)

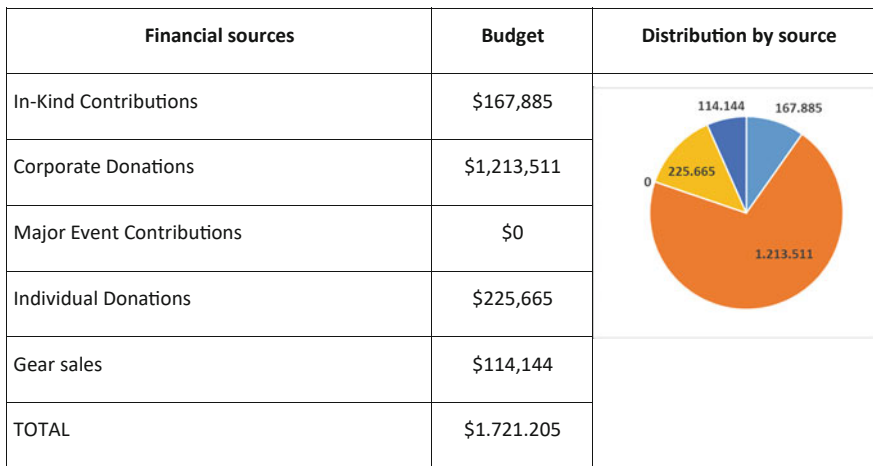


Fig. 2 Financial sources of Pedigree Foundation’s budget. Source: data from Pedigree Foundation Impact Record (2021)

The use of cutting-edge communication technologies has been a constant of the “Adoption Drive” program. On the one hand, the initiative “Dog-A-Like” was recognized with “The One Show” award given by The One Club for Creativity in the category of non-profit mobile applications in 2012. This tool used facial recognition technology to capture the details of each dog’s face in over 16 dimensions and compare them to human faces to achieve a similar match.³ The application was launched in Australia (The One Club for Creativity, 2012). More recently, the “Dogs on Zoom” video-conferencing initiative, firstly used by Pedigree US, was implemented to minimize the negative impact of the COVID-19 crisis on dog

³Dog-a-like app image: <https://www.oneclub.org/awards/theoneshow/-award/18400/pedigree-dog-a-like-app>

adoption in 2020 by taking advantage of communication technologies⁴ (Pedigree.com, 2022).

The brand Pedigree considers its social advertising as necessary as its commercial advertising. As a result, the most prestigious advertising agencies have created some of the most popular social campaigns for the brand. Also, independent institutions have recognized the high quality and innovativeness of Pedigree social advertising. A paradigmatic example of that was the campaign “*Tenemos que hablar*” (“*We need to talk*,” in English), promoted for several years under the common name of “*Adóptame*” (“*Adopt me*,” in English).⁵

This spot was made by the Mexican advertising agency BBDO and was the winner at the 2014 Cannes Lions International Festival of Advertising Creativity. The ad recreates the welcome a dog gives its owner when he arrives home. The action occurs in the kitchen, where the man nervously tells his dog that he must give him some news. In the face of the serious and attentive look of the dog, the man confesses with concern: “*You are adopted*.” The dog, far from being disappointed or angry with the revelation, reacts with signs of affection towards his owner. At the end of the video, the Pedigree brand logo appears, and a brief slogan in favor of dog adoption appears. This campaign carried out by BBDO Mexico for Mars Mexico won the bronze medal at the 61st Cannes Lions Festival 2014. The Cannes Lions Festival award constitutes an independent endorsement that the ad is a good example of advertising effectiveness suitable for academic research (Tapia et al., 2016). And the advertising of the brand Pedigree has been proposed several times as an advertising case study.^{6,7}

3 Conclusions

Pedigree, a dog food brand of the company Mars Petcare, has internationally become a leader in the pet food industry. Its solid positioning as a brand concerned about dog adoption’s social cause has made it a referent of corporate social marketing.

The following could be critical points in the establishment of successful partnerships brand-cause:

⁴Dogs on Zoom campaign image: https://d26eb5y2jukpbz.cloudfront.net/ebs/cache/ebs/archive/2021/thumbs/384x384/focus_point/OS_IN21_074M.jpg

⁵“We have to talk” ad image: <https://elefantgrafico.com/publicidad/pedigree-mexico-tenemos-que-hablar/>

⁶See, for example, Ildikó (2009); Mora and Vila (2020); Mora et al. (2020); Mora et al. (2021).

⁷The level of creativity and emotiveness of the spot “*we have to talk*” were assessed by a sample of 1232 respondents (462 Spanish, 195 British, and 572 Ecuadorian). Measured in a 7-point Likert scale, this audience find this spot highly emotional ($M = 5.85$; $SD = 1.26$) and highly creative ($M = 5.74$; $SD = 1.34$) (Mora et al., 2020).

- The partnership between the commercial *brand Pedigree and the social cause of dog adoption* is an example of a *high fit*: animal brand and animal social cause. Congruence or fit brand-cause seems to be a critical factor in achieving successful partnerships brand-cause.
- The *international scope* of both allies, the brand, and the cause, seems to be another success factor. The global leader Mars Petcare owns 39 pet nutrition and pet health brands, including the dog food brand Pedigree. Pedigree products are sold in over 60 countries. At the same time, the problem of homeless pets is present in many countries, making it possible to keep this brand-cause partnership internationally.
- A *long-term strategic social marketing approach* reduces the perception of a commercial intention behind supporting a social cause. The suspicion of true altruistic motivation in developing social marketing campaigns could damage both partners.
- Developing *creative and emotional communication campaigns* to spread social marketing initiatives will generate more positive attitudes in audiences and even promote viral behaviors that will result in greater dissemination and participation.

4 Discussion Questions

Question 1—Which animal well-being issues urgently require solutions based on social marketing initiatives?

Question 2—What relevant elements make the brand Pedigree and the social cause of dog adoption compatible?

Question 3—Which corporate social marketing initiatives Mars Petcare carry out could help solve animal well-being issues?

Teaching/Classroom Notes

Synopsis

Partnerships between businesses and non-profit organizations through corporate social marketing initiatives will contribute to the SDG revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development. Animal companion well-being should be included in sustainable development. However, low adoption rates of homeless pets need solutions. Companies like Mars Petcare, owning brands like Pedigree, have internationally become industry leaders in sales and corporate social marketing. The brand has created the Pedigree Foundation in charge of developing ongoing support campaigns. The partnership between Mars and Pedigree foundation contributes to sustainable development: firstly, by raising awareness about pet homelessness issues; secondly, by providing comprehensive solutions to support shelters; and thirdly, by encouraging dog adoption through creative and emotional communication.

Potential Audience and Instructor's Material

This case has been developed as a successful example of a corporate social marketing initiative based on a profit and non-profit partnership. The potential audience of this chapter consists of:

- Undergraduate students pursuing degrees in business administration or marketing
- Graduate students pursuing MBA and masters in marketing or business ethics

Learning

1. To know which are the leading animal well-being problems worldwide.
2. To identify the most appropriate social causes to be selected by brands to be supported internationally as a corporate long-term ethical commitment.
3. To study successful corporate social marketing initiatives in the field of animal well-being

Time Frame for Class Discussion

This case can be taught in one session of 60–90 minutes.

Suggested Discussion Questions

Question 1—Which animal well-being issues urgently require solutions based on social marketing initiatives?

Question 2—What relevant elements make the brand Pedigree and the social cause of dog adoption compatible?

Question 3—Which corporate social marketing initiatives Mars Petcare carry out could help solve animal well-being issues?

Analysis

Answer to Question 1—Which animal well-being issues urgently require solutions based on social marketing initiatives?

The most important thing is that students identify animal well-being issues like high homeless pet indexes and low adoption rates by reading the text. It is also advisable that students can search for other animal well-being problems like animal mistreatment or euthanasia, among others. A complete answer to this question should provide specific figures from at least one country to highlight the issue's magnitude. In this way, students become familiar with the field figures and the informational sources providing reliable data.

EXAMPLE. In Spain, the abandonment of pets and their adoption at a low rate are causes of animal welfare that urgently require the search for solutions. In 2020 Spanish animal shelters collected 286,000 dogs and cats (162,000 dogs and 124,000 cats). Firstly, 49.3% were adopted in the dogs' case, 15.6% were returned to their

owners, 20.2% remained in the shelter, 6.2% stayed in foster homes, 5.3% were transferred to another entity, and 3% died. Secondly, 42.6% were adopted in the cats' case, 15.1% remained in the shelter, 14.4% were relocated to cat colonies, 10.1% stayed in foster homes, 4.5% were transferred to another entity, and 9.7% died (Fundación Affinity, 2020).

These figures show the vast magnitude of the problem of dog abandonment and how dog adoption is the best long-term solution. However, current adoption figures are not enough to completely solve the question. As a result, the promotion of dog adoption is urgently needed to achieve the sustainable goal of animal companion well-being fully.

Answer to Question 2—What relevant elements make the brand Pedigree and the social cause of dog adoption compatible?

The main purpose of this question is that students practice their capacity to relate common elements between a commercial brand and a social cause. In this way, they will identify those congruence elements determinants in successful partnerships between profit and non-profit organizations.

Some ideas to work this question could be the following:

- Congruence or fit brand-cause seems to be a critical factor in achieving successful partnerships brand-cause. In this case, both partners are related to the animal industry and animal social causes.
- The international scope of both allies, the brand, and the cause, seems to be another success factor. Mars Petcare sells its pet products internationally, and the dog adoption issue is an animal well-being problem in many countries worldwide.
- The brand is a leader in its sector, and the animal cause is a priority in the animal social field. The partnership between a leading brand and a principal social cause in corporate social marketing initiatives could be critical.

Answer to Question 3—Which corporate social marketing initiatives Mars Petcare carry out could help solve animal well-being issues?

By answering this question, students should demonstrate they have learnt the most important types of corporate social marketing initiatives developed by Mars Petcare and the Pedigree Foundation. The main social marketing goal is promoting dog adoption and alternatively donating, fostering, and volunteering among brand audiences. To this end, the company primarily uses social marketing initiatives punctually complemented with specific fundraising actions. Some ideas to work this question could be the following:

- Raising awareness about animal well-being issues like the necessity to adopt homeless pets. In this regard, the website endpethomelessness.com provides reliable figures about the problem, and advertising campaigns promoting adoption indicate citizen contribution.

- Providing integrated non-profit solutions to pet homelessness issues. In this way, it is necessary to highlight the creation of Pedigree Foundation, a non-profit foundation in charge of collecting and distributing the helping resources individuals and corporations provide.
- Encouraging dog adoption in creative and emotional communication campaigns.

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