



THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPATHY

How Moxxy Used Audience Understanding
to Improve Spay and Neuter Rates (with Almost No Marketing)



79% of people
DON'T KNOW
when to fix their pets.



Only **1 in 10**
DOMESTIC
CATS entering animal
shelters are spayed or
neutered

BACKGROUND

The SPCA for Monterey County's adoption program had operated successfully for many years.

But the organization knew the key to reducing the high number of unwanted cats and dogs that ended up euthanized or in shelters was to convince people to spay and neuter their pets.

Monterey County is diverse, and many homeless pets came from areas with mostly Hispanic populations. These areas also had lower household incomes and a high percentage of Spanish-speaking residents. One theory suggested machismo, or masculine pride, was limiting the use of spay and neuter programs.

In 2016, the SPCA received a generous donation to fund an outreach campaign plus veterinary services to provide spay and neuter procedures, and they turned to Moxxy for help.

CHALLENGE

The objective was clear: increase spay and neuter procedures for the pets of residents of the target areas.

The challenge was less clear. We needed to understand more about our predominantly low-income Hispanic audience:

- How they viewed their pets
- Where they got information about pet care
- The role of machismo
- What would motivate them to spay and neuter their pets

APPROACH

To motivate our audience, we knew we needed to understand them first. So Moxxy began not with strategy documents or advertising mockups, but with a series of focus groups.

We recruited participants at popular grocery stores, scheduled meetings at a trusted location (the local public library) and offered groups in both Spanish and English. Participants were offered \$50 gift cards at the same grocery store as incentive.

Focus group questions were designed to elicit attitudes about pet ownership overall, including how they cared for their animals, where they turned for pet health information, and their thoughts on spaying and neutering.



INSIGHTS

The focus groups confirmed the role of machismo, and we learned it would be difficult to change this thinking.

But the conversations also uncovered a large group that was concerned about their pets' welfare and considered their pets members of the family. This group had limited knowledge of the health and safety benefits of spay and neuter procedures. We also learned they saw their veterinarian

as the most credible source of information on pet welfare. Once they understood the importance of spaying and neutering, convenience and cost became the biggest barriers.

By getting to know our audience, we learned the best way to

increase spay and neuter numbers was to reach responsible pet owners who could be influenced, instead of machismo-driven male heads of household.





MESSAGING

The SPCA originally planned to spend their budget on advertising and communications.

Instead, after our research, Moxxy recommended they offer increased subsidies for spay and neuter procedures. We also recommended they provide weekend appointments, so working people could get to the facility. The SPCA agreed.

Moxxy created ads that presented a dual message: “it’s good for your pets, and we have an inexpensive, convenient way to do it.”

Using our focus group results as our guidepost, we realized a message from a veterinarian would be most effective. We also wanted the ads to be visually appealing, so we photographed friendly SPCA veterinarians in playful situations with cats and dogs.



“We could not be more pleased with the response to our spay and neuter offer. We are booked solid through the June clinic, and that’s after doubling our available spots in the May clinic. We’ve seen all this without spending real money on promotion.”

– SCOTT
DELUCCHI
Executive Director
SPCA for Monterey County

RESULTS

The campaign exceeded the client’s expectations by a long shot! In the first two months, 147 pets were spayed and neutered under the new program.

This was accomplished solely through a little social media advertising and distribution of flyers at strategic locations, including school districts with large Hispanic populations.

The response was so strong, the paid media advertising planned for newspapers, outdoor and movie theaters was cancelled before any of the ads ran, saving money to help more pets in need.

