



The Pet Identification Summit

Moving Beyond Identification: Shifting the
Microchipping Paradigm

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Seattle

Summary Report

Summary

OVER the past few decades, pet ownership has experienced continued growth. Concurrently there has been an explosion of pet-centric products and services dedicated to improving the lives of both owners and pets.

However, while experts agree the number of microchipped pets will continue to grow, in part because of animal shelters increasing the practice of implanting microchips in every animal adopted to a new home, the overall pace of microchipping compliance has been slow for many years, despite enjoying solid awareness levels. While there is consensus within the veterinary and animal welfare communities about the priority of pet care and wellness, there is seemingly a philosophical breakdown of this connection as it relates to microchipping.

Convened by resQ[®] from Bayer Animal Health, the Pet Identification Summit was held on July 11, 2009, coinciding with the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Annual Meeting. With participants from across the full range of the professional and animal welfare communities, a diverse array of perspectives was represented, and provided important insight into the future prospects and challenges for pet microchipping in the United States. Participants' goals were to exchange information and points of view, and to come up with action ideas that would both raise awareness of microchipping and begin to address what all agreed was most critical – increasing the number of microchipped, registered pets.

Led by Linda Lord, Ph.D., D.V.M, (The Ohio State University) the Summit brought together a consortium of leadership members from eight veterinary and animal welfare organizations, including: American Animal Hospital Association; American Humane Association; American Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; American Veterinary Medical Association; American Society of Veterinary Medical Association Executives; Humane Society of the United States; National Association of Veterinary Technicians; and Steve Dale, syndicated journalist, radio host and pet expert.

Several strategic priorities and themes emerged during the dialogue, providing an overarching and broad framework:

- **Validate the need, and demonstrate “real-life” relevance, for microchipping with research**
- **Empower the veterinary and shelter communities through education**
- **Enhance the perception and value proposition of microchipping with pet owners**

Overall, the group believed microchipping requires a fundamental paradigm shift to redefine its value, elevating its importance to be on par with other successful wellness programs, such as dental care, spay/neuter and adoption.

Microchipping Must Shed Some of Its Past.

PAST commercial turf wars and lack of a unified approach has created a residual impact on positive perceptions, fostering continued confusion and a lack of confidence within some of the professional and shelter communities. These complex perception issues also filter down to many pet owners who either aren't convinced or are unwilling to believe the harsh reality their pet really "could" get lost, and therefore, question if the microchipping (and in many cases registration) expense is worth paying. And yet, microchipping is often heralded as a "hero" in many lost pet reunion stories nationwide, so its importance is touted.

Ideas were generated about contemporizing microchipping in a more relevant and more personal way to give greater merit to its worthy, lifetime investment.

Microchipping Considered Wellness Standard.

MICROCHIPPING continues to combat a reputation as an ancillary service, in comparison to vaccinations, dental care and other services that allow veterinarians to practice medicine and treat pets. Resistance to actively promote microchipping is partly based on the fact it is perceived differently and defined narrowly as simply pet identification, which the group agreed may be considered a less-prioritized area of practice management.

It is critical for veterinarians to understand that microchipping is a key component to secure and preserve the human-animal bond by keeping an animal in a home. Discussion centered on the fact that overlooking microchipping's role in keeping pets as clients is a fundamental breakdown of this bond. Because of this, Summit participants agreed that microchipping should be part of every wellness conversation between veterinarians/technicians and pet owners.

The group universally supported the idea to formalize microchipping's role in the wellness dialogue by including it in wellness guidelines to be developed and issued by one of the leading, third-party veterinary professional organizations. In addition, it was agreed that microchipping and registration protocol priorities must be established, supported and communicated across all team members, with a special emphasis on veterinary technicians and support staff who are at the forefront of microchipping in most clinics today.

Many participants pointed to the industry's need to glean important insights and best practices from how successful pet wellness programs, such as dental care and spay/neuter, that were not initially well-embraced have now become "standard" in most shelters and clinics.

More Research Is Needed.

ONE key challenge to combat resistance and increase compliance is to bridge the current knowledge gap about the lost-pet issue. There is a real need for qualified and quantified data that validates the importance of microchipping and registration, as well as shines the spotlight on key issues and concerns. This data can be the gateway to improved clinic-to-pet owner communications.

Existing data accounts for some, but not all, perspectives on this topic matter and there is no national data that details critical factors, such as:

- how many pets are lost each year
- what are the top reasons for lost pets – escape through open doors, jumping fences, broken leashes/chains, etc.
- how much time pets are lost for and where most are found
- what are the most common reunion methods and success rates
- what differences are there between lost pet and reunion experiences in cats and dogs

Summit participants agreed a broad and diverse national research initiative is critical. Solid data can help uncover commonalities in the lost pet experience that could: aid in clinic communications with pet owners about how pets *can* and *do* get lost, help pet owners better safeguard their pets, and provide veterinarians better tools to assess risk among their clients.

Education Is Essential.

THERE was widespread agreement that animal welfare and the veterinary communities serve important roles and have responsibilities beyond the services that take place in their clinics and facilities. It was recognized that veterinarians and veterinary technicians are influential role models to pet owners.

Despite this influence, many Summit participants believed these two groups did not emphasize implementing and promoting microchipping and registration as a critical function of their “job” per se. In some cases, this may result in educated pet owners requesting microchipping as part of being responsible pet owners (and going to a responsible clinic), but may then get talked out of it for a variety of reasons. Or, a pet owner may decline microchipping during a routine visit and the clinic professionals are not armed with the best tools and resources to help counter these objections. Without complementary education about the merits of microchipping with both veterinarians and owners, most agreed increased compliance will be difficult.

In addition, there is still some concern that further in-clinic training is needed to improve microchipping and scanning techniques. Methods to promote participation can help strengthen the appeal for continued education.

Other key educational components may include: designing new ways to assess microchipping skills and training; offering professional development for veterinarians, veterinary technicians and shelter employees; and creating certification programs with curriculum standards that reflect the importance of competency and communications wherever appropriate. As these models develop, recognition and award programs could provide validity to the work for practitioners and help communicate the value of these skills to others.

Communications Must Be Collaborative.

Effective communication requires collaboration between professional and animal welfare organizations that can share ideas broadly, surface and reward innovation, and help raise awareness and visibility of the issue, including identifying influencers within the field.

Third-party organizations and governing bodies are crucial to convene conversations and dialogues, encourage the publication of papers and research, sponsor professional journals, and assemble conferences on the topic. Existing communities of practice should be encouraged to

share work and developments in the field, and to highlight successful models and practices. The group agreed collaboration and integration to share unified messaging is important to share with their members, as well as to utilize their assets to expand communications to broader audiences.

In addition, the industry, veterinary community and animal welfare organizations must seek to use new media in a way that complements existing communications channels. The internet, mobile and other digital channels offer the opportunity to build a closer dialogue with pet owners, building loyalty and deepening the bonding experience. New media are becoming vital channels through which to distribute content and build awareness.

Conclusions.

THE Summit members concluded that making microchipping more relevant today could be accomplished by looking at ways to define it as an essential element of the overall wellness dialogue. In addition, there was a noted desire to improve the quality of communication and education provided through the veterinary and animal welfare communities, as well as to pet owners.

Limited understanding exists about the extent of compliance and how pets are lost due to a lack of comprehensive research and information collection.

Microchipping has been viewed as problematic to implement in a way that other successful animal welfare programs and services have not. This has resulted in a lack of universal compliance among key audiences.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A universally supported effort to:
 - Raise the profile of microchipping and registration
 - Improve communication between veterinarians/veterinary technicians and pet owners
 - Contribute to the development of protocols and standards of care.
2. Expand microchipping data collection and analysis.
3. Elevate the profile of microchipping through a collaborative effort that integrates communication among professional and third-party organizations, as well as their members.
4. Engage governing bodies in the development of standards, specifically wellness guidelines, in a systematic and strategic way.
5. Promote training and continued education as best practice.