Information access in UAM

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'Reinventing the wheel' may be a familiar expression to most of us, but in terms of UAM it's a particularly relevant expression…

Around Australia some 700 local Councils are simultaneously striving to balance the needs of pets, pet owners and non-pet owners. Ask almost any local Council anywhere in Australia whether dogs and cats are a major source of complaint and the answer will be a resounding 'YES'. Take it a step further and ask them to list the major dog and cat problems they experience and the list will generally start with 'barking dogs' followed by 'roaming & stray dogs'. Not far behind are problems such as 'dangerous dogs', 'dog poo', 'dogs off leash', 'unregistered pets', 'stray cats' and 'cats and wildlife'. This list may be a generalisation, but it's apparent that the majority of Councils are dealing with similar issues; pet problems tend to be common and consistent and many local authorities have put a big effort into solving them. It stands to reason that a range of innovative strategies already exist that have been proven to assist the management of dogs and cats in the community. The real point here is that we can learn from the things that others have done. Instead of struggling under a barrage of complaints and problems it is possible for Councils to readily find and implement simple, cost effective solutions.

INFORMATION RESOURCES

Twelve years of UAM conferences have created a mass of published research and information relating to the management of companion animals. In fact, Australia is leading the world in this area – we have great information available, the problem is that we often don't know how to access it. Companion animal management plans, school education programs and off-leash area provisions are just a few examples of areas where Councils don't need to do all their own background work. Experts have already researched and developed programs and guidelines to make the job easier.

A key resource for this and other information is the proceedings of previous UAM conferences. But how do you find what you're looking for? It's not always practical to locate and trawl through back copies of proceedings in the hope of finding a paper or papers that relate to the area in which you're seeking information.

THE INDEX TO URBAN ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PUBLICATIONS IN AUSTRALIA

To assist local authorities to access information on UAM, the Australian Veterinary Association has created 'The Index to Urban Animal Management Publications in Australia' this document is a great resource, cataloguing just about all of the existing research on dog and cat management in Australia. It covers not only papers given at UAM conferences but also a range of research, surveys and more general information.

The user-friendly format of the Index alphabetically lists a full bibliography of the information that's available on a range of topics. From **A**nti-barking collars to **Z**oonoses the index can help you locate data on whichever UAM topic interests you. Simply look up your chosen topic in the index and any available information that relates to that topic will be listed, along with where it is published, how to access it and even which page it's on.

For example, you may decide to review the compliance with dog registration laws in your local area and discover that (like most Councils) only a minority of dogs are registered, to find out more about strategies to increase compliance in this area look under 'registration' in the Index and you'll find the following:

registration

 campaigns **UAM95:**12-13
 cats **UAM99:**52; **UAM01:69**; **UAM02:18,25**
 compulsory **UAM94:**23-34
 dangerous dogs UAM00:52
 database systems. *See* registration database systems
 fees **UAM95:**14
 legislation **UAM98:**70-71
 measure of owner commitment **DCUE:**74
 overview of issues **DCUE:**139-156………
 ………………..etc

The first entry "registration campaigns **UAM95:**12-13" indicates that by accessing the UAM proceedings from 1995, pages 12 and 13, you'll find information about registration campaigns. You can locate the 1995 conference proceedings on the UAM website and access the paper 'Problems: a Council perspective' by Fred Pallas of Mornington Peninsular Shire Council. Fred details the processes undertaken by his Council to increase dog registrations. He highlights both the elements he considered to be successful and those that failed and the reasons for this.

The second entry 'registration cats **UAM**99:52' is located in the proceedings of the 1999 UAM Conference on page 52. This is a paper by Deb Kelly of the South Australian Department of Environment and Heritage which gives a retrospective view of the South Australian dog and cat management legislation and discusses cat registration at some length.

The above example alludes to the huge amount of information catalogued in the Index and the potential to build up a profile of published material relating to almost any UAM topic.

The Index to Urban Animal Management Publications in Australia can be obtained both in hard copy and via the Internet.

THE UAM WEBSITE

Whilst hard copies of the Index and other UAM literature are readily available, it's often easiest to start an information gathering exercise by getting on-line. The UAM website should be the first stop, it's hosted by the Australian Veterinary Association at www.ava.com.au and can be accessed by clicking on the UAM button on the left hand side of the AVA Homepage.

The UAM website contains information on previous and upcoming conferences along with The Index to Urban Animal Management Publications in Australia, People & Pets Newsletter and every UAM Conference Proceedings from 1992 to 2002.

The website also provides a variety of ways to access UAM data. If you're looking for a paper and you know the year of the UAM conference at which it was presented, it's easy to go to the 'Conference Proceedings' section of the website and select the appropriate proceedings from the list. If you're unsure as to which conference a paper was presented or if you're looking for information that may not have been covered at a conference, you can use the on-line version of the Index as detailed above or, alternatively you can use the AVA's on-line search engine.

The search engine is located at the top right hand corner of the UAM homepage and whilst it isn't specific to UAM, it can nonetheless help you locate information on a range of UAM topics and has the added benefit of providing a direct link to the information. Simply type in the topic you're researching and hit the search button. The search will provide you with a list of matches for that topic and a short abstract describing each match. You can access the full document by clicking on the hypertext associated with each abstract.

For example, a search for information on 'dog attacks' provides 75 matches. The first match is a paper from the 2001 UAM Conference presented by Neva Van de Kuyt: 'Prevention of dog attacks in public places. A local government strategy adopted by 11 Victorian Councils.' In this paper Neva presents the results of a 1997-1999 dog attack survey and considers a number of strategies Councils can utilize to address the problem. The second match is an AVA press release issued in May 2002: "Banning dogs won't stop dog attacks". This press release presents some arguments as to why breed specific legislation for dangerous dogs may not work. Further exploration of other matches makes it possible to access a wide range of information.

OTHER INTERNET SITES

Apart from the UAM website the Internet is a truly rich information resource. Some other websites you may like to check out include www.petnet.com.au - the Petcare Information and Advisory Service website which contains 'government' and 'publications' sections plus the free 'Select-a-pet' service to assist with appropriate pet selection.

www.vein.library.usyd.edu.au - the University of Sydney's Veterinary Education and Information website covers a range of topics from shelters and pounds through to microchipping and can even provide a link to the relevant local government websites in each state and territory enabling you to easily access your own or other states' companion animal legislation. It's a bit of a job to access this site but worth the effort. From the VEIN homepage click on 'Links', then 'Specific Area of Study', then 'Urban Animal Management'. For the links to state legislation look under 'Councils/Local Government'.

www.dlg.nsw.gov.au - the NSW Department of Local Government Website contains, amongst other things, the 'Guide to Preparing Strategic Companion Animal Management Plans' by Virginia Jackson, an excellent tool for Councils interested in developing management plan for companion animals. To download the guide click on 'Companion Animals', then 'Councils', then 'Forms and Guidelines'.

www.rtca.com.au - the Rural Training Council website details the nationally accredited Animal Control and Regulation Training Package which is currently in the final stages of development. This is useful for anyone interested in gaining professional qualifications in animal management. Look under 'Animal Care and Management Training Package'.

www.pets.info.vic.gov.au - the website for the Victorian State Government details responsible pet ownership education programs for schools and communities and contains lots of other interesting information.

This is just a selection of what's available on-line and whilst the UAM Website, Search Engine and Index may be the easiest way of locating specific information, a bit of time spent surfing the links to various other websites may also yield some useful data.

COMMUNITY NETWORKS

But information resources don't only exist on-line, there are many other resources available that can be found much closer to home. Veterinarians, dog trainers, local media, welfare & community groups and local Council networks can all become information resources. In most local communities there's a wealth of animal management information and expertise just waiting to be accessed by local government.

VETERINARIANS

Veterinarians can be useful allies to local Councils, after all, both parties are interested in promoting responsible pet ownership. Maintaining a good relationship with your local vet (or vets) can be mutually beneficial. Vets can assist with microchipping, information days or evenings, many can provide pound facilities and some will participate in school education.

Local authorities can encourage residents to socialise their puppies and undertake early training by providing details of Puppy Preschool or puppy socialisation classes available in your area. If your local vet isn't running these classes you might suggest they consider starting them. The benefits to the community will be dogs that are better socialised, dogs that exhibit less nuisance behaviour and owners who are more responsible and possess a better understand their dog's needs.

DOG TRAINERS

Ideally dog training classes should be available close to or in your local area. Councils can support dog training by providing a venue and by promoting the availability and desirability of dog training to local residents. Some Councils even provide registration discounts for dogs that have attended training classes.

For owners experiencing problems with their dogs (and cats) it can be helpful for local authorities to provide contact details of local trainers. One-on-one training can often help to solve behavioural difficulties. For owners having serious problems with their dogs, such as aggression, it's useful to know who the leading specialist veterinary behaviourists are and recommend them.

Some Councils have taken this a step further and managed to coordinate interested local dog trainers into volunteer committees that help owners deal with barking problems free of charge.

WELFARE ORGANISATIONS LOCAL

You may find that your area is home to one of the many animal welfare organisations or charities in Australia. If this is the case it may be possible to combine efforts and resources to improve education or the provision of services for your residents.

LOCAL MEDIA

Local media can be used to educate the community and also to promote any positive animal management initiatives. It's important to not only improve the way pets are managed in the community but also improve the public's perception of animal management. Regional newspapers are often looking for local content and it may be possible to arrange a regular pet column providing useful information for owners.

LOCAL COUNCIL NETWORKS

In some areas, groups of Councils are getting together to exchange information and ideas. Two excellent examples of such groups are SEQROC, the South East Queensland Region of Councils and CUPS, the Councils Unite for Pets group in Sydney. These groups facilitate a healthy interchange of ideas and in some cases share programs, services and facilities. Informal networks also work well and all employees of local authorities should remember that sometimes the best way to access information is to get on the phone and call a contact from another Council and talk to them about what they're doing in their area – basic, but very effective.

SUMMARY

Companion animal ownership is a significant community interest involving the majority of the population. Whilst pet ownership creates many issues and problems it also provide enormous social benefits and is positive in terms of companionship and human health. Good companion animal management is a valid community service. There's a wealth of useful, free information available to assist local government to improve their management of pet problems. Access to this information has been made easier with the help of the UAM Website and the Index to Urban Animal Management Publications in Australia. In addition to research and literature resources there's also enormous potential to access information from experts at a local level. The UAM movement is all about providing resources for local government, so get involved and reap the benefits.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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