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Victorian Toolbox options: Information for the masses

ELKE TAPLEY + STEVEN MOORE

Coordinator Local Laws,
Knox City Council

Licensing and Audit Officer,
Bureau of Animal Welfare, Vic

Abstract

Today Animal Management Officers have to work in very physical and electronic environments. No longer do Officers work in the field with static equipment, the modern day Officer requires access to e-tools to implement legislation and address complaints. Whether it is access to GPS for location information, access to the internet for legislative advice through to scanners for animal identification purposes; Officers are required to perform their duties not only with a pole in one hand, but a computer in the other.

Background

Many Departments from the States and Territories responsible for the administration of legislation that Officers are required to enforce have developed websites to assist Officers implement these regulations. These websites provide information on legislation, case studies that give an insight to precedence, standard operating procedures and templates to assist with implementation.

The internet provides a path to information for Officers both in the office and out in the field. The hardware required to access the internet is affordable, easy to use and now usually handheld. This means that more than ever information is power.

As a State Government Department, the Department of Primary Industries has a responsibility to provide information to the public in relation to legislation, guidelines for operation and basic information of our role in the community (www.dpi.vic.gov.au). This is provided through a tiled website with individual pages of specific information on primary and energy industries. The Bureau of Animal Welfare has a significant number of pages dedicated to providing information to the community and Officers on animal welfare and responsible pet ownership.

In 2003 the Bureau of Animal Welfare launched the Animal Management Officer Extranet Site. This username and password based website provides a range of educational and legislative resources to Officers for their information, downloading or printing. The aim of this site is to provide Officers with a *'One Stop Shop'* to meet most of their information and resource needs.

Since 2003 the Bureau, in conjunction with other organisations, has developed further websites to assist Officers, including A Guide to Domestic Animal Management and regulated websites such as the Victorian Declared Dog Registry and the Implanters Online Database.

The Victorian E-toolbox - Animal Management Officer extranet site

The AMO Extranet Site is designed to be a secure site for Officers to access information to implement the Act and provide information to other Officers by way of case studies. The site is provided on a server that cloaks the site from Google or other search engines from identifying it to the public.

Generic user names and passwords have been provided to Councils to gain access to the site. As the information is for all Officers, individual access is not required and this is not a regulated website. The Site is designed to be a 'one stop shop' for information including education resources both for Officers and the community, legislation advice through interpretation or precedence via the courts and downloadable

templates and documents that Officers can use to implement the provisions of the Act.

Case studies from the Officers provide information sharing on implementing, educating or enforcing the Act. These case studies identify pit falls in implementing the Act, both successful and unsuccessful court action and the interpretation of the legislation by the courts.

Registering animals, auditing businesses and other implementation of the Act in Victoria requires documents and forms, many of which are available on the website in a MS Word template format that Officers can download and print on Council letterhead or adapt to their needs.

Pros and cons

- Pro – A one stop shop for all information
- Pro – Secure site, not identified by search engines
- Pro – Consistent information to assist with administration of the legislation
- Con – Keeping website up to date with new information and legislative change
- Con – The number of pages affected by one amendment

"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."

A guide to domestic animal management website

This website has been designed to be a secure site for Officers to access information to implement the Act. The website is provided on a server that cloaks the site from Google or other search engines from identifying it to the public.

The *Domestic Animals Act 1994* (the Act) applies across Victoria and there are 79 Councils in the State required to implement and enforce the provisions found within the Act. The purpose of the Act is to promote animal welfare, the responsible ownership of dogs and cats, and to protect the community from nuisance dogs and cats. The implementation of the legislation is significantly affected by the interpretation of the same Act by the Council and its Officers.

To assist the Councils in delivering a high quality and consistent animal management service to the community, the web based "A Guide to Domestic Animal Management" was developed by a Local Government Professionals working group to provide an extensive reference resource on how to manage, interpret and apply the provisions of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*. Benefits of the Guide include an easily accessible, adaptable guide that can be employed in urban, interface and rural Councils with linked referencing of provisions to the Act.

The Guide provides the Officer with the background of that particular section of the Act and the head of power relating directly to each issue; the considered minimum standards and/or best practice options to address the issue; related concerns together with an indication of the basic skills required to perform each function; and additional tools and resources in the appendix, such as downloadable templates.

Pros and cons

- Pro - One stop shop for all information;
- Pro - Downloadable documents and templates for consistent information and administration of the Act and Codes;
- Con - Keeping up to date, *Domestic Animals Act 1994* has had amendments each year since coming into operation in 1996;

Regulated databases - Victorian Declared Dog Registry

This Database enables the centralised recording of information from all Councils in Victoria concerning Dangerous Dogs (Attack), Dangerous Dogs (Guard Dog), Dangerous Dogs (Attack Trained), Menacing Dogs and Restricted Breeds.

The database contains details of the Declaration and animal and owner information including location of both animal and owner and history of all other locations. It contains all pertinent identification information along with a Council Reference number where further information at the discretion of that Council may be obtained.

Pros and cons

- Pro – Provides information to Officers immediately on declaration status of a dog
- Pro – Provides reports for comparison with Council's registration database
- Con – Only searchable by microchip implanted in a dog or Council reference number
- Con – Very rigid on information that can be typed in when recording a dog

Regulated databases - Implanters Online Database

The Implanters Online Database holds information on authorised implanters around the State of Victoria and interstate. It identifies if the implanter is a veterinary practitioner or authorised person and the address details of this person which is required by the *Domestic Animal Regulations 2005* to be recorded on a microchip registration form.

The information contained on the Database is accessible to all licensed animal registry service (also known as microchip recording companies) providers operating in Victoria. These licensed registries are responsible for the data entry and maintenance of the information of ownership information for microchipped animals contained on their databases. Specifically the Database avoids the necessity of authorised implanters to be registered with multiple licensed registries.

Where to from here

The future is already upon us with the development of the Victorian Rangers Forum website by the South West Authorised Officer's Group. This website has been designed to help bridge the many kilometres separating Officers working in isolation in regional Victoria.

Victorian Rangers Forum - South West Authorised Officer's Group

This website was developed by Officers for Officers and the main component has been the forum. The forum provides the place for Officers to ask questions of others and to provide feedback to questions on procedures, interpretation or on what has and hasn't worked for them in a project context.
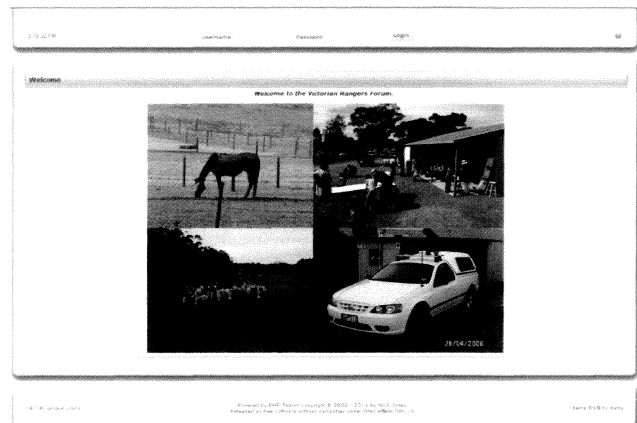
The forum was created and went live in December 2009 and to date has almost 200 members actively contributing.

Threads are posted according to their category and as Officers are multi-skilled, particularly in regional Victoria, the categories available include not only

animal management issues, but fire prevention, local law, parking issues, employment and legislation. A section for documents has recently been added which will assist Officers preparing reports and procedures contributing to consistency in the industry.

Pros and cons

- Pro – Provides Officers a forum to compare notes and apply best practice procedures and implementation
- Pro – Provides a forum for consistency in documentation development
- Con – Currently unavailable in Smart Phone format
- Con – Internet access limited in many municipalities unless in the office

The new frontier - social media (Facebook, twitter, etc)

This was an area that we were unsure of presenting on. Following the natural disasters that have occurred over the past twelve months and seeing the impact social media played – it became a given – and an experiment in its own right.
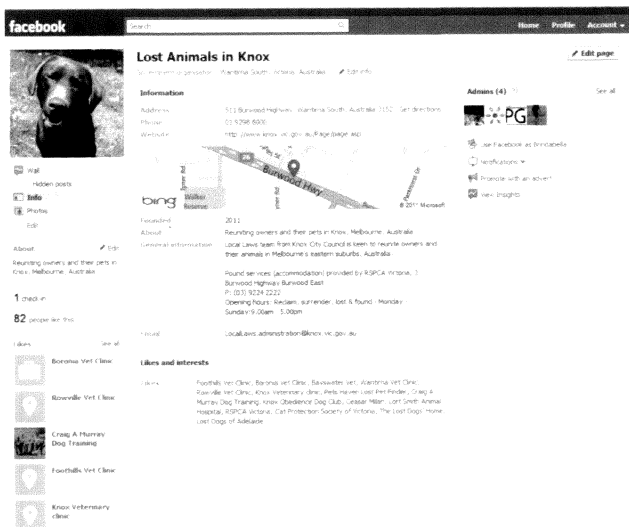
In July this year Knox City Council created a Facebook page – Lost Animals in Knox – and I am pleased to say that the response from the community has been great, not only from Knox residents, but from those around us who may have lost a pet.

Many animals have been posted whether lost, found or impounded and updated as they have gone home or been reunited. This page provides Council another opportunity to spread the word about different animal management messages including posts about registration, updates from the Dog Play Park and promotion for our Responsible Pet Owner Competition.

As this page is further developed Officers will have the ability to post animals 24/7 when impounded and

upload photos directly to the post.

- Pro – Provides the community 24/7 access to impounded animals
- Pro – Provides the community 24/7 access to lodge lost and found animals
- Pro – Provides another forum for education of the community
- Con – Providing 24/7 access means that it must be monitored regularly for updates
- Con – Having another avenue for providing the same data as not all of the community are on Facebook

Conclusion

As technology surges forward in leaps and bounds, animal management officers are provided with and have access to a wealth of information. It appears that the pros are obviously how beneficial this can be for officers and the community. The cons consistently point to the same thing – maintenance and upkeep. If you are regulating one of these toolboxes, can you keep on top of changes to legislation and regularly check in to these applications whilst still getting your day to day tasks completed?

◎ BIOGRAPHY

Elke Tapley

Coordinator Local Laws, Knox City Council

Email: elke.tapley@knox.vic.gov.au

Elke's role covers Animal Management, Local Law compliance, School Crossing Supervision and Traffic Management and her experience in Local Government spans over 15 years. She is always looking for new and better ways of applying technology and experiences to her work and hopes that one day soon, legislation and animal management practices will be consistent across Australia.

Elke commenced with Knox in 2006 and holds an Advanced Diploma in Business Management, Diploma in Business (Frontline Management), and Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training. She is a member of the Domestic Animal Management Implementation Committee (DAMIC), LGPro Statutory Services SIG, Metropolitan Council Animal Management group (MetCAM) and the Victorian State Government's Hoarding Taskforce Advisory Committee.

Elke was a member of the UAM/AVA 'AMO Team of the Year' in 2001 and the Knox Domestic Animal Management Plan won the AIAM 'Animal Management Plan of the Year' award in 2010.

◎ BIOGRAPHY

Steven Moore

Licensing and Audit Officer, Bureau of Animal Welfare

Steven has a degree in Applied Science from Monash University (Caulfield Campus) and has been employed with the Bureau of Animal Welfare for over seven years. Steven's primary roles include auditing Domestic Animal Businesses for compliance with the mandatory Codes of Practice, providing advice to Animal Management Officers on legislation and performing the Executive Officer role on the Domestic Animal Implementation Committee.

In 1996 the Frankston City Council employed Steven as the Cat Control Officer and he was later appointed to the position of Senior Animal Control Officer. Mid 2011 Steven took up the position of Local Laws coordinator with the City of Kingston supervising Animal Management Officers in their day-today duties until starting with the Bureau in November 2003.