

Microchip Implants; Only Half the Battle to Protect Pets

Five years following the wreckage left by Hurricane Katrina a cat named Scrubs was returned to his family, thanks to identification only made possible with a microchip. In December, after eight years and a 2,700-mile separation, a dog named Petunia made it home, also thanks to a microchip. Just this past weekend, Snowbell of Citrus County spent her first night home in three years, and I am sure by now you can guess why.

With stories like this penetrating mainstream news on a weekly basis, the public is quickly catching on that microchipping is a vital tool to protect their beloved pets. However, these reunions would never have happened had the microchips or “chips” not been registered. All too often pet owners fail to understand that microchipping itself is only half the battle when it comes to a successful lost pet recovery.

According to a 2009 study by Linda Lord, D.V.M., Ph.D., assistant professor at the College of Veterinary Medicine in Ohio State and service head for Community Practice, Outreach and Shelter Medicine, microchipped pets have a better chance of being returned to their owners after entering an animal shelter than those who are not.

Specifically, study results indicate the return-to-owner rate for cats and dogs is 20 and 2.5 times higher respectively for microchipped pets than the return-to-owner rates for all [stray cats](#) and dogs in surveyed shelters. However, the study also found relying on pet owners to register their microchips results in lower database accuracy, reducing the chances of successful lost pet recovery and reunions. The implication of fewer successful reunions is an increased length of stay for lost pets, which in turn can lead to behavioral deterioration.

Although Dr. Lord finds microchipping is a valuable, permanent way to identify pets, issues related to registration may undermine its overall potential. *“In the study, the biggest reason owners couldn’t be found was because of an incorrect or disconnected phone number in the registration database,” she says. “The chip is only as good as my ability as a pet owner to keep my information up to date in the registry.”* By facilitating point-of-adoption registration through PetPoint, we ensure more pets are registered properly and more lost pets get home.

In 2011, the 24PetWatch call center handled over 186,000 inbound calls from pet owners looking for a lost pet. To support this call volume and facilitate reunions, the call center is staffed 365 days a year, 7 days a week, and 24 hours a day by trained Lost Pet Recovery Specialists and the operating costs of maintaining this kind of facility are supported by annual and lifetime membership fees. Communicating to pet owners the enormous value of this support is important to prevent the continued misperception that microchipping alone can assure the safe return of a lost pet. 24 PetWatch call center provides organizations who have found a pet client information quickly with no restrictions on the contact information unless the owner has chosen to not release. Some recovery services have started restricting organizations access to this lifesaving information.

One way to communicate the value of call center support is by comparison to similarly managed services offered by companies, for example OnStar or LoJack which are recovery services for cars. The Safe and Sound plan through OnStar costs \$18.95 per month or \$199 a year, plus \$10 a month or \$100 a year with navigational support. LoJack on the other hand may cost \$595 – \$695 and while there is no monthly

service fee, the system has to be serviced every 5 years for which you can of course purchase an extended warranty for \$85 – \$200 depending on your system and requirements.

When compared to the expense of these types of services and in the context of protecting a furry family member, \$16.95 per year or \$49.95 for a lifetime maintenance plan to benefit from the services offered by the 24PetWatch Lost Pet Recovery Network is an inexpensive investment to be sure.

To ensure the ongoing accuracy of their account information, pet owners are asked after the free year following registration to pay this nominal fee. It's difficult to place a value on the peace of mind this maintenance plan, and the full support of the 24PetWatch Lost Pet Recovery Network offer; should the unthinkable happen and a companion animal go missing, the owner's account information will be up to date – helping to facilitate a quick recovery and reunion.

Client education is a key component to maintaining complete and accurate records, so it is important to encourage adopters to maintain their accounts with 24PetWatch. A microchip only works if it is registered and we all love a happy ending!

Did you know?

The 24PetWatch team not only coordinates reunions, of which over 42,000 were facilitated last year alone, but are also qualified to help educate pet owners about the function and value of micro chipping.

This value is now more significant with the launch of the “Recover a Pet, Uncover a Cure” campaign which supports the American Breast Cancer Foundation while raising awareness about lost pet recovery and the exclusive new 24PetWatch MiniChip™. Through this unique campaign, a portion of the purchase price of every MiniChip will be donated to the American Breast Cancer Foundation in support of breast cancer research.

Sincerely,

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