

# PETS IN ADVERTISING

## A SOCIAL CONCERN

Good practice guidance for the responsible  
use of pet animals in advertising



Summary  
guide

Supported by



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# Here to help

BVA recognises that marketing campaigns use images of animals in differing ways, to target different demographics and that the situations depicted in these materials are not always intended to reflect or encourage day-to-day behaviours. The power and reach of advertising can be harnessed to promote positive animal health and welfare and this document is intended to support advertisers in their decision making to achieve this.

This framework is intended to encourage decision-making that is mindful of the different welfare needs that different scenarios require, as opposed to recommending that all five welfare needs must be captured in all imagery.

If you are unsure of any of the guidance set out in this document or have a query that is not addressed, we would strongly encourage that you seek veterinary advice on any plans to use animal imagery in communication materials by contacting BVA on [policy@bva.co.uk](mailto:policy@bva.co.uk).

Access  
the complete  
guide at  
[www.bva.co.uk](http://www.bva.co.uk)

# The five welfare needs – a framework



To ensure responsible messaging, BVA recommends that all animal imagery in advertising depicts pets in situations that meet their welfare needs.

## Consider:

- Is the animal shown in a suitable environment (place to live) for its species and/or breed?
- Is the animal shown eating food or near food that is non-poisonous, proportionate to its breed size and conducive to a nutritionally balanced diet?
- Does the animal shown have enough space and/or appropriate enrichment materials to exhibit normal behaviour?
- Is the animal shown housed with, or apart from, other animals appropriate for its species?
- Does the animal show any physical characteristics that negatively impact on its health and/or cause suffering? Eg. bred-in characteristics (extreme conformation) and surgically altered characteristics (such as cropped ears or docked tails).
- Is the animal shown safe? I.e. is the animal at risk from injury, pain and stress in the scenario presented?

Guidance on good practice in these areas and common mistakes to avoid is outlined in more detail in the following chapters. The recommendations made in these guidelines are not exhaustive, but are intended to support decision-making on the use of animals in marketing materials.

## Quick reference key for common mistakes by species areas



Common mistakes in portraying dogs



Common mistakes in portraying cats



Common mistakes in portraying horses



Common mistakes in portraying small furries, including rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters



Common mistakes in portraying exotic animals and birds



Common mistakes in portraying fish

# 1

## Suitable environment

Pets used in advertising should be shown to be living in environments that meet their physical, social and behavioural needs.

To ensure physical health and mental wellbeing, all pets must have enough indoor and, where relevant, outdoor space for them to move around and exercise freely, exhibit species specific behaviours and socialise appropriately and safely with other animals.

### Suitable environment: Common mistakes



- ✘ Images of small animals of different species housed together inappropriately eg. guinea pigs and rabbits.
- ✘ Images of rabbits housed individually.
- ✘ Images of rabbits and/or guinea pigs in small hutches with no space to run or graze.



- ✘ Images of fish shown in small 'fish bowl' tanks, in direct sunlight with no filtration system, and/or without plants.



- ✘ Images of large dogs without adequately sized living space eg. a large dog in a small apartment with no visible access to an outdoor space.



- ✘ Images of cats living in multi-cat households.



- ✘ Images of reindeer in a domestic environment in Christmas marketing.



- ✘ Images of penguins represented as pets in a domestic environment.

- ✘ Images of livestock or wild species being depicted as pets eg. so-called 'micro pigs' and meerkats.

- ✘ Images of rare, wild or dangerous animals in a domestic environment.

# 2

## Suitable diet

Pets used in advertising should be shown to be eating a nutritionally balanced diet and/or around appropriate food for their species.

Messaging in advertising can lead to pet owners providing their pets with unbalanced diets and compound existing misconceptions about animal diets. This has the potential to result in serious health issues for animals, including dental issues and obesity, which can lead to life-long and life-threatening illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes and arthritis.

### Suitable diet: Common mistakes



- ✘ Images of dogs eating raw meat off the bone. Exclusively raw meat diets may not fully address all of the individual nutritional needs of the pet animals. In addition, chewing cooked bones may cause splinters and/or the bacteria transmitted from raw meat can pose a risk to public health. Therefore, sensible precautions should be taken to avoid this.



- ✘ Images of more than one dog or cat being fed adjacent to other dogs/cats or from the same bowl.



- ✘ Images of rabbits with carrots and/or 'muesli-style' dry food.



- ✘ Images of pet food bowls filled to the brim or overfilled, depicting inappropriate portion size.
- ✘ Images of pets eating foods seated at a table and/or eating foods intended for human consumption.
- ✘ Images of pets sharing food with humans.
- ✘ Images of pets that suggest the consumption of poisonous human foods eg. chocolate, raisins.

# 3

## Behavioural needs

Pets used in advertising should be exhibiting, or shown to have the potential to exhibit, normal behaviours for their species.

Enabling pets to express normal behaviours associated with their species is an integral determinant of their wider health and wellbeing. Problem behaviours can also be indicative of underlying health issues and should be recognised as such in advertising. Images in advertising should take care to reflect the specific behavioural needs of different species and breed types.

### Behavioural needs: common mistakes

#### ALL SPECIES

- ✘ Images of animals in housing that does not have appropriate enrichment materials to enable normal behaviours eg. rabbits in small hutches with no run or outdoor area, fish in aquaria with no plants.
- ✘ Images of children or adults hugging or picking up animals and holding them closely.
- ✘ Images of children sitting on or 'riding' pet animals such as dogs, cats etc.
- ✘ Animals unrestrained in cars.
- ✘ Images of animals in human clothing or fancy dress.
- ✘ Images of animals shown with excessive or derogatory displays of groomed or dyed coats.
- ✘ Framing images of animals exhibiting potentially problematic behaviours with human interpretations or for comedic effect.
- ✘ Animals licking human faces.



- ✘ Children alone with a dog or walking a dog without adult supervision.
- ✘ Images of dogs in handbags.
- ✘ Images of dogs chasing their tails.



- ✘ Images of horses with facial expressions/grimaces that could be misinterpreted as laughter.



- ✘ Images of livestock or wild species being depicted as pets eg. so-called 'micro pigs' or meerkats.

# 4

## Social needs

Pets used in advertising should be shown to be housed and interacting with, or apart from, other animals appropriate to their species.

Failure to meet an animal's social needs can have a profound impact on an animal's health and welfare. Messaging in advertising should recognise the different social needs of pets, both in terms of intra-species and inter-species social needs of animals.

### Social needs: Common mistakes



- ✘ Images of multiple social creatures, such as rabbits, shown alone.
- ✘ Images of small pets of different species housed together eg. rabbits and guinea pigs.



- ✘ Images of pets that prefer solitary living together, such as cats living in a multi-cat environment.



- ✘ Images of social animals of the same species housed together without sufficient room to move freely near, around or away from each other.



- ✘ Images of snakes or exotic fish of the same species housed inappropriately together.

# 5

## Protected from pain, disease and suffering

Pets used in advertising should be protected/free from pain, disease and suffering.

Perhaps the most obvious area to avoid when using animal imagery in advertising is depictions of animals in pain or at risk of disease and suffering. Yet, images of certain pets with hereditary defects or surgically altered characteristics have the potential to normalise suffering and exacerbate problems through driving demand for specific breed types.

### Protected from pain, disease and suffering: Common mistakes



- ✘ Images of animals in dangerous situations eg. playing on trampolines, skate-boarding, perceived to be consuming alcohol, sitting at a dinner table ready to eat inappropriate human food, chasing sticks.



- ✘ Images of dogs with docked tails or cropped ears.
- ✘ Images of animals with a long back and short legs – pets with long backs and short legs can suffer from back, hip and leg problems.
- ✘ Images of animals with sloping backs – pets with sloping backs can suffer from hip, back and leg problems, resulting in difficulty walking or running.



- ✘ Images of animals undergoing aversive training, for example dogs wearing choke chains, prong or spiked collars.



- ✘ Images of 'teacup' animals – these animals, often used to describe small dog and pig breeds, can have a range of health issues related to their unnaturally small size.



- ✘ Images of animals with extreme feathering – extreme feathering on cage birds may hinder free-flight and movement.
- ✘ Images of smooth variants of reptiles or those with pigment anomalies – reptiles with these morphological variations often require highly specialised care and these variations can be indicative of other genetic abnormalities that require specific, non-routine provision of care in order to meet their welfare needs.

Continued overleaf



## Protected from pain, disease and suffering: Common mistakes (continued)



- ✘ Images of any animals that have a clearly over- or undershot jaw – this can decrease comfort, health and function of a pet's jaw and teeth.
- ✘ Images of animals with short muzzle or noses – dogs, rabbits and cats with 'flat faces' experience health problems associated with their flattened face, including respiratory issues, skin infections, eye disease, dental problems and spinal disease.
- ✘ Images of animals with bulging eyes – this is a characteristic of some dog breeds that needs targeted care and management to prevent eye damage and infection.
- ✘ Images of animals with visible skin folds anywhere on the body or head – these folds can lead to skin health problems and restrictions in expression.
- ✘ Images of animals with Drooping or 'diamond' eyes – these can cause a range of eye health problems.
- ✘ Images of animals with excessively long or lop ears – animals, such as rabbit and dog breed types, with long or lop ears can lead to ear health problems.
- ✘ Images of animals that are so hairy that they cannot see, raise hackles or communicate – this could impact on socialisation and communication with other animals and humans, as well as the ability to exhibit normal behaviours.
- ✘ Images of hairless varieties of pets – although often branded as pets suitable for humans who suffer from allergies, these pets often have their own physical and wellbeing issues due to their bred-in hairless conformation. Hair or fur in pets enables protection, warmth and aids communication. Without this protection, animals are left with exposed skin which is susceptible to injury or infection.