

Pets in advertising

A social concern



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

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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.

We know that not all images will depict scenarios where it is possible to address each of the five welfare needs eg if an animal is shown as a 'cut out' or if an animal is not situated around food. With this in mind, it is important to emphasise that 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.

BVA is well placed to advise both vet practices and advertisers on any uncertainties regarding good practice in the responsible use of pets in advertising.

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

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide clear guidance on the responsible use of pet animals in advertising, marketing, and communications materials. The remit of this document covers all representations of pet animals in advertising or communications materials that may influence owner behaviour, including the use of cartoon and computer-generated images (CGI). The recommendations made in these guidelines are intended to support decision-making on the use of animals in marketing materials and to enable advertisers to promote positive animal welfare through the appropriate use of animal imagery.

From television advertising to marketing materials in veterinary practices, the prominent visibility of pets has the potential to normalise hereditary defects, poor welfare, and inappropriate diet and housing, as well as drive demand for certain breeds with physical and behavioural problems that are not always recognised by the public.

Under the UK Animal Welfare Acts, pet owners have a legal responsibility to ensure that the health and welfare needs of their animals are met. With pet owners and the general public increasingly exposed to images of animals in marketing campaigns across a range of media, it is paramount that

both advertisers and veterinary professionals present their consumers and clients with messages that encourage responsible pet ownership and positive animal health and welfare outcomes.

Social responsibilities

Advocating animals' interests and protecting and promoting animal welfare is at the heart of the veterinary profession, with each veterinary surgeon declaring upon admission to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS):

"... ABOVE ALL, my constant endeavour will be to ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to my care."

From a business perspective, the responsible use of pets in advertising should also form part of the decision-making process for both advertisers and veterinary professionals in terms of how they enact their corporate social responsibility to make environmentally and socially responsible business decisions and outputs.

In this sense, not only does the responsible use of pets in advertising carry the benefit of preventing the normalisation of poor animal health and welfare, but also presents advertisers and veterinary practices with an opportunity to enhance brand image, reputation and customer/client loyalty.

How to achieve this

To protect animals and equip pet owners with information that enables responsible ownership, all promotional images using pets should, where possible, reflect and meet the five welfare needs for animals as set out in the UK Animal Welfare Acts.

These five welfare needs are:

- the need for a suitable environment (place to live)
- the need for a suitable diet
- the need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- the need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
- the need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

BVA's guidance for responsible use of pets in advertising is based on expert veterinary opinion and identifies good practice across each of these five welfare needs.

The role of the vet 'on set'

When featuring animals in advertising, the Advertising Standards Authority sets out that:

"Depicting anything that is potentially harmful and could feasibly result in emulation is likely to be considered problematic. Marketers should, therefore, take care when considering such approaches and ensure the

content isn't likely to result in harmful emulation..."

"Regardless of the content of an ad, all animals featured must be looked after well and should not be harmed or distressed in the process. [...] Marketers may wish to have a vet present to ensure animals are treated and cared for appropriately."

The RCVS has urged vets on set to give thought to the way in which the advert may be perceived, in addition to the health and welfare of the specific animal in their care and raise any issues of concern with the advertisers.

We would therefore strongly encourage all vets that are involved in the use of animals in advertising to give thought to the way in which animals are depicted and whether or not this messaging could give rise to owners attempting to replicate inappropriate behaviours or situations that would have a negative impact on animal health and welfare.

Pre-production

We would also encourage production companies to ensure that any animals used in marketing materials and promotional campaigns are responsibly sourced from companies who employ trainers or behaviour experts that use reward based methods, as opposed to aversive training devices (eg electric pulse

collars), which have the potential to cause welfare and behavioural problems.

Production companies should only consider trainers or behaviour experts with recognised qualifications or accreditations. In the **RSPCA Guidelines for the Welfare of Performing Animals**, the following organisations are signposted to as having members with an appropriate combination of qualification, experience, skills and knowledge:

- **The Animal Behaviour and Training Council** (www.abtcouncil.org.uk)
- **The Association of the Study of Animal Behaviour (ASAB)** (<http://asab.nottingham.ac.uk>)
- **The European College of Animal Welfare and Behavioural Medicine (ECAWBM)** (www.ecawbm.com)

In addition, **the Association of Pet Behavioural Counsellors (APBC)** represents accredited behaviourists (www.apbc.org.uk).

If you are unsure about how to contact a veterinary professional for this purpose, please contact BVA at policy@bva.co.uk for more information. For more information regarding the role of behaviourists on set, please consult the **RSPCA Guidelines for the Welfare of Performing Animals**.



Give thought to the way in which animals are depicted and whether or not this messaging could give rise to owners attempting to replicate inappropriate behaviours or situations that would have a negative impact on animal health and welfare."

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.

The five welfare needs



The need for a suitable environment



The need for a suitable diet



The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns



The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals



The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

BVA recognises that not all images will depict scenarios where it is possible to address each of the five welfare needs eg if an animal is shown as a 'cut out' or if an animal is not situated around food. With this in mind, it is important to emphasise that this framework is intended to encourage decision-making that is mindful of the different welfare needs that different scenarios imply, as opposed to recommending that all five welfare needs must be captured in all imagery.

Both advertisers and veterinary professionals should ask themselves the following questions before publishing marketing materials depicting pets:

- 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? Is the animal at risk from injury, pain and stress in the scenario presented?

BVA recognises that for purposes of animal health and welfare education images will sometimes serve as educational tools and will therefore need to reflect poor health and welfare outcomes by illustrating situations where the five welfare needs are not met.

We also understand that images of breeds with specific characteristics or behaviours that are deemed harmful and problematic are often needed to promote specific products or services that – by definition – seek to improve health and welfare outcomes of the pets used in their marketing. This should be made explicit in any images.

Above all, animals should always be represented in situations where they are treated humanely and respectfully. They should not be featured in situations which are demeaning, dangerous or derisory for them or their owner/responsible human. Neither should they be used to portray socially unacceptable norms or discriminatory behaviour.

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 horses



Common mistakes in portraying exotic animals and birds



Common mistakes in portraying cats



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



Common mistakes in portraying fish



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, socialise appropriately and safely with other animals, and avoid injury from housing or fencing materials.

The list below details suitable environments for different pet animals as examples of good practice in advertising, as well as common mistakes to avoid. This list is not exhaustive, for more information about a specific species [read the Animal Welfare Foundation's leaflets on pet care advice \(www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/petcare-leaflets\)](http://www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/petcare-leaflets) or contact your local veterinary practice/BVA.

1.1. Suggested environments

1.1.1 Dogs

Dogs should be shown in environments suited to their breed, size and activity level. For example, large breeds require larger living space and very active breeds should be shown with clear access to open spaces. If you are unsure as to whether an environment is suitable for a specific breed type, please consult a veterinary professional for further advice.

1.1.2 Cats

Cats should ideally be shown with access to spaces above ground and where they can hide. Cats prefer solitary living and so should be shown to be housed in isolation away from other cats and not part of a multicat household.

1.1.3 Rabbits

Rabbits should be shown to be living in large, sheltered hutches and runs with space to run, jump, graze, dig, rest and stand up on their hind legs without their ears touching the roof. As rabbits are social animals amongst their own species, they should be shown in groups, with room to sit or sleep with other rabbits and space to be apart if desired. Hutches should appear to be secure from predators and have good quality, deep bedding like straw or hay.

1.1.4 Guinea pigs

Guinea pigs should be shown to be living in a large, sheltered hutch with a run to give them opportunity to exercise and move around freely. The hutch should be in close proximity to a grassy area where guinea pigs could graze, with areas to hide if they feel threatened. As guinea pigs are social animals amongst their own species, they should have room to sit or sleep with other guinea pigs and space to be apart if desired. Hutches should appear to be secure from predators and have good quality, deep bedding like straw or hay.

1.1.5 Ornamental fish

Facilities for fish depend on their type, they should either be housed in an aquarium or pond. For aquaria, any aquarium or tank housing fish should be as large as possible, kept away from direct sunlight and fitted with a water dechlorinator/conditioner and biofilter.

The use of plants in tanks and ponds is encouraged as they provide food, shelter and general environmental enrichment for some fish. Where ponds are used in imagery, the most important thing to consider is their locations. Fish in ponds require shade and a location where there is no risk of plant matter such as leaves falling or chemical contaminants (eg weed killer) washing into the pond and polluting the water.

1.1.6 Non-traditional companion animals eg reptiles, amphibians, small mammals, caged birds, birds of prey

In terms of depicting an appropriate environment, non-traditional companion animals have exacting husbandry requirements eg for humidity, lighting, enrichment materials, space and socialisation.

For example, reptiles require housing that has specialised heating and lighting, and these systems should be reflected in any images using reptiles. In addition, accommodation for reptiles should meet the physiological and psychological needs of the animal in question by replicating elements of its natural habitat. Therefore, any representation of housed reptiles should include appropriate enrichment materials which encourage normal behaviours.

In addition, as reptiles often prefer to be housed in isolation, reptiles should be photographed as being housed apart from other reptiles and members of their own species alike. If an advertising agency or veterinary professional is unsure as to the environment that should be depicted for a non-traditional companion animal, please consult a veterinary professional for further advice.



For further information about the use of depicting several animals within the same environment and/or in contact with humans please see Chapter 3

'Behavioural needs' and Chapter 4 'Social needs'. For further information about the use of environments that allow animals to express normal behaviour please see Chapter 3 'Behavioural needs'

1.2 Rare, wild or dangerous animals in a domestic environment

There are some species whose five welfare needs are so specialised they could rarely or never be met in a domestic environment. With this in mind, marketing materials should avoid depicting species which are not appropriate to be kept as pets in a domestic environment. If an advertising agency or veterinary professional is unsure as to whether a non-traditional companion animal is suitable for use in advertising, BVA would encourage them to seek veterinary advice.

In addition, to avoid normalising ownership of potentially dangerous wild animals, those derived from wild capture or hybrids of these breed types eg wolf crosses or wild-cat crosses should not be used. It is recommended that promotional outputs avoid depicting any animals that must be kept under licence (eg requiring a licence under the Dangerous Wild Animal Act), or for defined and authorised conservation purposes, as being kept in a domestic environment. [Read the full list of animals that require a Dangerous Wild Animal Licence \(www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/2465/schedule/made\)](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/2465/schedule/made).

2

Suitable diet

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

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

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.

The list below provides specific areas of good practice and common mistakes to avoid in the representation of pets around food in advertising. For more information about the dietary requirements of specific species [read the Animal Welfare Foundation's leaflets on pet care advice \(www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/petcare-leaflets\)](http://www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/petcare-leaflets) or contact your local veterinary practice/BVA.

2.1 Food type

There are many common stereotypes regarding food and animals that are incorrect and can result in misconceptions by pet owners that are harmful or result in an unbalanced diet for the animals in their care. These tropes should be avoided and pets used in advertising should be shown to be eating, or shown situated around, food which is known to be a part of a nutritionally balanced diet for the animal in question. For example, rabbits should be shown with fibre-based food types, including grass, hay and leafy greens, as opposed to carrots and 'muesli-style' dry food that can be high in sugar. 'Muesli-style' dry food can also lead to selective eating by rabbits, whereby they select the aspects of the dry food they like and leave the rest. This can lead to an underbalanced diet, dental issues and obesity.

Images should also avoid depicting animals eating food made for human consumption.

2.2 Quantity

With pet obesity and over-feeding a leading cause of wider health and wellbeing issues for pets, it is important that the amount of food that animals are shown to be eating is proportionate to their size, dietary needs and lifestage. In practice, this means not showing food bowls full to the brim, overfull or overflowing, for example.

2.3 Proximity to poisons and toxins

It is important to remember that many human foods and products are toxic to animals, such as chocolate, raisins and grapes, artificial sweetener, lilies and human medicines. Animals in advertising should not be depicted in close, or accessible, proximity to any toxic substances. [Read more about pets and poisons \(www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/petcare-leaflets\)](http://www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/petcare-leaflets).

2.4 Commercial treats

Advertisements using animals to promote commercial treats should ensure that pets are depicted as consuming these treats in moderation, in the wider context of a balanced, nutritional diet and it should be made clear that these should be consumed in addition to, not in place of, an animal's daily food allowance.

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.

ALL SPECIES

✗ 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 or breed type

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. Images in advertising should take care to reflect the specific behavioural needs of different species and breed types.

The list below provides specific areas of good practice and common mistakes to avoid in order to depict normal animal behaviour in advertising. For more information about the social needs of specific species read the Animal Welfare Foundation's leaflets on pet care advice (www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/petcare-leaflets) or contact your local veterinary practice/BVA.

3.1 Environment

Images in advertising should ensure that the environment in which a pet is housed, and filmed or pictured, enables the animal to exhibit their normal behaviours as opposed to restricting them. Examples of good practice in this area include:

- Reptile housing that is equipped with appropriate enrichment materials such as vegetation, pools and rocks.
- Rabbit hutches that are large enough for rabbits to stand up in without their ears touching the ceiling. They should also be equipped with a sizeable run and near an outdoor grassy area where rabbits can exercise and graze. Hutches should appear to be secure from predators and have good quality, deep bedding like straw or hay.
- Dogs should be shown in environments suited to their breed, size and activity level. If you are unsure as to whether an environment is suitable for a specific breed type, please consult a veterinary professional for further advice.



For further information about depicting several animals within the same environment please see Chapter 1 'Suitable environment' and/or Chapter 4 'Social needs'

3.2 'Novel' or problem behaviours

Animal imagery should avoid depicting novel or stereotypical behaviours such as chasing tails, sustained aggression towards other animals or humans, destructive behaviour, excessive barking or crying. To avoid the normalisation of problem behaviours and potential compromise of animal welfare, advertising should avoid depicting these behaviours.

3

3.3 Human contact and anthropomorphising

3.3.1 Human contact

Despite strong human-animal bonds between pet owners and their animals, many pets, including dogs and cats, find close human contact such as hugging very stressful. Also, small animals such as rabbits and guinea pigs find being lifted away from the ground and carried very distressing. Images of animals should therefore avoid showing humans hugging or holding animals off the ground and images of humans and pets interacting should always be as passive as possible.

3.3.2 Avoiding danger

As the human-animal bond is two-way, imagery depicting humans with animals should ensure that no danger or injury is posed to the human from the animal(s) they are alongside. For example, animals should not be unrestrained in cars as they may pose a risk to front seat passengers if the vehicle comes to a sudden stop and can be a hazardous distraction to drivers. Humans should also not be depicted with their heads or faces too close to an animal's or being licked by their animal as this leaves humans vulnerable to unexpected aggression and at risk of the transmission of bacterial disease.

3.3.3 Children

As children of a young age are less able to interpret an animal's behaviour and body language, for safety reasons children under 13 should not be shown to be alone with a dog or walking a dog on their own without an adult present in the picture.

3.3.4 Anthropomorphising through interpretation

Animal behaviours presented through a human lens can encourage pet owners to anthropomorphise, which can lead to traits and behaviours which might otherwise be indicative of compromised health and welfare being misinterpreted or attributed to a human emotion (eg subdued animal being 'sulky', or a horse 'laughing' when actually its facial expression is indicative of pain). Promotional images should avoid anthropomorphising animals by avoiding dressing them in clothes, depicting them being carried in handbags or wearing 'fake nail' cosmetic claw coverings known as 'peticures' that restrict animals from expressing normal behaviour. Clothes can also restrict the natural movement of pets, as well as compromising the animal's ability to control body temperature, whilst carrying dogs in handbags can reduce opportunities for exercise and socialisation.

Behavioural needs: Common mistakes



- ✗ 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.



Animal behaviours presented through a human lens can encourage pet owners to anthropomorphise, which can lead to traits and behaviours which might otherwise be indicative of compromised health and welfare being misinterpreted or attributed to a human emotion."

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.

The list below provides specific areas of good practice and common mistakes to avoid when depicting animals interacting or living with other animals in advertising. For more information about the social needs of specific species [read the Animal Welfare Foundation's leaflets on Pet Care Advice \(www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/petcare-leaflets\)](http://www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/petcare-leaflets) or contact your local veterinary practice/BVA.

4.1 Together

Some species enjoy the companionship of other animals. It is important to represent these animals as interacting or being housed with members of their own species, whilst ensuring that there is enough space for them to be able to move freely near, around and away from each other.

Small pets such as rabbits, guinea pigs, mice, rats, gerbils and degus should all be photographed with other animals of the same species, unless they are clearly in a clinical setting where you would expect them to be alone and in the care of a vet.

To avoid competitiveness and fighting, dogs who are depicted as living together should be shown to have appropriate enrichment materials, including dog-safe toys and sufficient space for each dog to move near, around, and away from each other.

4.2 Apart

Equally, other species of pets prefer to be housed in isolation and solitary living, such as cats, some reptiles and some fish. These animals should be depicted in their own accommodation or living space, away from any other animals. This includes other animals from their own species, as intra-species housing amongst certain animals can lead to fighting and injury.



For information about depicting animals interacting with humans please see Chapter 3 'Behavioural needs'

5

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



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



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



Small pets such as rabbits, guinea pigs, mice, rats, gerbils and degus should all be photographed with other animals of the same species, unless they are clearly in a clinical setting where you would expect them to be alone and in the care of a vet.”

Protected from pain, disease, and suffering

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

5

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.

The list below provides specific areas to avoid in order to depict pets that are free of pain, disease, and suffering in advertising. This list is not exhaustive and should be used to support decision making. For more information about healthy breed types within species please consult your local veterinary practice/BVA.

BVA recognises that for purposes of animal health and welfare education and the advertisement of breed-specific services, the use of animals possessing the characteristics mentioned below may be necessary in very limited circumstances, for example veterinary medicines licensed for specific breeds/species.

5.1 Extreme characteristics

Images should avoid using animals with extreme characteristics or body shapes – portraying these breeds as cute or humorous in marketing campaigns has the potential to perpetuate demand for the breed and normalise poor health.

Of particular concern is the prevalence of brachycephalic dogs (dogs with short muzzles) in marketing, such as British Bulldogs, Pugs and French Bulldogs. These dogs experience health problems associated with their flattened face, including respiratory issues, skin infections, eye disease and spinal disease. However, their media presence is driving demand for the breed, increasing the number of these dogs that are predisposed to specific health problems and, consequently, the number of dogs predisposed to suffering.

To encourage responsible ownership and breeding, photos or videos of animals in advertising should avoid the following characteristics or body shapes.



Avoid using animals with extreme characteristics or body shapes – portraying these breeds as cute or humorous in marketing campaigns has the potential to perpetuate demand for the breed and normalise poor health.”

- **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.
- **Bulging eyes** – this is a characteristic of some dog breeds that needs targeted care and management to prevent eye damage and infection.
- **Visible skin folds anywhere on the body or head** – these folds can lead to skin health problems and restrictions in expression.
- **Drooping or ‘diamond’ eyes** – these can cause a range of eye health problems.
- **Long back and short legs** – pets with long backs and short legs can suffer from back, hip and leg problems.
- **Sloping backs** – pets with sloping backs can suffer from hip, back and leg problems, resulting in difficulty walking or running.
- **Any animals that have a clearly over – or undershot jaw** – this can decrease comfort, health, and function of a pet’s jaw and teeth.
- **‘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.
- **Excessively long or lop ears** – animals, such as rabbit and dog breed types, with long or lop ears can lead to ear health problems.
- **Extreme feathering** – extreme feathering on cage birds may hinder freeflight and movement.
- **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.
- **Pets 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.
- **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.
- **Small pets with excessively long hair** – too much hair can lead to overheating, hindered mobility and, in turn, hindered ability to socialise and exercise. In addition, excess hair must be managed carefully by pet owners; it is more likely to matt if not groomed properly, which can lead to discomfort in pets, skin irritation underneath their coat and elevated risk of skin infections.

5

5.2 Surgically altered characteristics

5.2.1 Tail docking

BVA believes that surgical operations such as tail docking in dogs should not be undertaken unless necessary for therapeutic and veterinary medical reasons. These procedures cause pain to the animal involved and deprive them of a vital form of canine expression. As such, images of animals with surgically altered characteristics should not be used in advertising to avoid the normalisation of these procedures. We remind advertisers and vets that UK legislation states that tail docking is banned – except for certain working dogs or for medical reasons. It is also illegal to show a dog with a docked tail (docked after April 2007 in England and Wales, or 1 January 2013 in Northern Ireland) in any shows where the public pay to enter, except where they are demonstrating their working ability.

5.2.2 Ear cropping

Ear cropping is illegal in the UK and as such advertisers and vets should avoid using images of dogs with cropped ears. The ear cropping procedure usually takes place when dogs are 8–12 weeks old and the trauma of the procedure can have a significant psychological impact on the maturing dog. However, this cosmetic procedure is not illegal in the USA, and so advertisers should be vigilant when using stock image libraries which may have been created in the USA.

5.2.3 Declawed cats

In the UK, on grounds of animal cruelty it is illegal to declaw cats (removal of the claw and end bone of the toe), as such advertisers and vets should avoid using images of declawed cats. The procedure is used in other countries to stop cats from damaging furniture or scratching. However, it can lead to acute and chronic pain and various behavioural problems in cats, including aggression and biting. It is important to note that this elective procedure is not illegal in the USA, and so advertisers should be vigilant when using stock image libraries which may have been created in the USA.

“
Images of animals with surgically altered characteristics should not be used in advertising to avoid the normalisation of these procedures.”

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 animals with extreme feathering – extreme feathering on cage birds may hinder free-flight and movement.
-    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 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 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 undergoing aversive training, for example dogs wearing choke chains, prong or spiked collars.
-    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 '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 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.



Animals should be shown to be partaking in activities that are safe, appropriate and enjoyable for their species.”

5.3 Over – or underweight animals

As animals that are over – or underweight are susceptible to developing associated health issues and other diseases, images depicting pets should therefore include animals of a healthy, normal weight. To guide the public as to what constitutes a healthy weight for different species of pet animals, the Pet Food Manufacturers’ Association has developed user-friendly ‘Pet Size-O-Meters’ (www.pfma.org.uk/pet-size-o-meter) based on Body Conditioning Scoring Charts. If more guidance is needed, please contact your local vet.

5.4 Dangerous activities

Pets in advertising should be shown to be partaking in activities that do not put their physical health and wellbeing at risk or cause them to become aggressive, fearful or anxious. For example, dogs should be photographed or filmed playing with dog-safe toys as opposed to sticks. The throwing of sticks can lead to injuries ranging from cuts, scrapes and infections in a dog’s mouth to life-threatening injuries, such as the stick becoming lodged in their throat. Animals should be shown to be partaking in activities that are safe, appropriate, and enjoyable for their species ie not partaking in activities designed to be carried out by humans or using aversive training methods or restraints.



Useful resources

Useful resources

Advertising Standards Authority, Paws and clause: Avoiding an advertising cat-astrophe when featuring animals

www.asa.org.uk/news/paws-and-clause-avoiding-an-advertising-cat-astrophe-when-featuring-animals.html

Animal Welfare Foundation (AWF) Feeding and exercise

www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/petcare-leaflets

AWF Caring for guinea pigs

www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/petcare-leaflets

AWF What makes my pet happy?

www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/petcare-leaflets

AWF Ornamental fish

www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/petcare-leaflets

AWF Pets and poisons

www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/petcare-leaflets

AWF Caring for rabbits

www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk/petcare-leaflets

British Veterinary Association (BVA) position statement on animal welfare

www.bva.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Content/News_campaigns_and_policies/Policies/Ethics_and_welfare/animal-welfare-policy-position.pdf

BVA position statement on brachycephalic dogs

www.bva.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Content/News_campaigns_and_policies/Policies/Companion_animals/BVA-position-brachycephalic-dogs-Jan-2018.pdf

BVA position statement on tail docking

www.bva.co.uk/uploadedFiles/Content/News_campaigns_and_policies/Policies/Companion_animals/Tail_Docking_Policy_Statement.pdf

BVA Rabbit health and welfare

www.bva.co.uk/news-campaigns-and-policy/policy/companion-animals/rabbit-welfare

Campaign for the Responsible use of Flat-Faced Animals (in advertising and the media)

www.facebook.com/groups/cruffa/permalink/1799513163599165

The Kennel Club 'Breed Watch' tool

www.thekennelclub.org.uk/breedwatch

Pet Food Manufacturers' Association Pet Size-O-Meters

www.pfma.org.uk/pet-size-o-meter

RSPCA, RSPCA Guidelines for the Welfare of Performing Animals

www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/performinganimals/guidelines