



**ADVERTISING
STANDARDS
BUREAU**

Level 2, 97 Northbourne Avenue, Turner ACT 2612
Ph (02) 6173 1500 | Fax (02) 6262 9833
www.adstandards.com.au
ACN 084 452 666

Case Report

1	Case Number	0173/14
2	Advertiser	Pet Rescue
3	Product	Community Awareness
4	Type of Advertisement / media	TV
5	Date of Determination	28/05/2014
6	DETERMINATION	Dismissed

ISSUES RAISED

2.1 - Discrimination or Vilification Other

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

A man and woman are seated on a sofa. The woman says, "We've got something to tell you....you're adopted". The camera then turns to show that she is speaking to a dog, a cat and a duck. The text on screen reads, "Who says you can't choose your family. PetRescue.com.au".

THE COMPLAINT

A sample of comments which the complainant/s made regarding this advertisement included the following:

I am the father of a beautiful young girl adopted from China. She understands what this means and does not have any issue with defining a "real" parent in her mind. The problem we have with this ad is that other children tease her based on the definition of adoption used for animals. In this sense the ad is not funny to us and is in fact completely insensitive to adoptive children. These children are constantly questioned on who their "real" parents are and this ad really works against us in trying to instil confidence and a sense of positive identity in these young people.

I hope this oversight stems only from a lack of perspective and not from the want of doing harm. I do hope that now that this has been brought to your attention the ads will be discontinued.

THE ADVERTISER'S RESPONSE

Comments which the advertiser made in response to the complainant/s regarding this advertisement include the following:

SECTION 2 CONSUMER COMPLAINTS

Please find my response to each point in section 2 below.

2.1 Although family make up is not included in this point I believe that this is the area that the complainant wishes to address in his letter and have included my full response to this point below.

2.2 There is no use of sexual appeal in our ad.

2.3 There is no use of violence in our ad.

2.4 There is no sex, sexuality or nudity in our ad

2.5 The use of language is appropriate, and we do not use strong or obscene language.

2.6 We do depict material contrary to Prevailing Community Standards on health and safety.

Full response to complaint:

PetRescue's 'Who say's you can't choose your family' ad has been played in various CSA spots for the past 15 months. In this time we have received overwhelming community support and adoptions via our website have increased by over 30%, saving the lives of many pets. In Australia more than 150,000 healthy animals are killed each year because homes are not found for them, whilst the pet shop industry alone sells approximately 500,000 puppies. The ad brief was to respond to this issue by presenting an ad that is positive and the main message is pro-adoption.

The ad's premise is that animal lovers see their pets as part of the family. The source of humour in the ad is the human couple, who mistakenly believe that their pets would not be aware of, or would care that they are all different species.

The complainant states that his issue is with the definition of the word 'adoption' in relation to animals. 'The problem we have with this ad is that other children tease her based on the definition of adoption used for animals'.

The words 'adopt' and 'adoption' are terms used globally in animal welfare and animal rescue. In our industry 'adopt' is extremely positive and used to signify that a pet is a sentient being and part of our families, rather than the words 'buy' or 'sell', which implies the animal is material goods.

Our ad does not discriminate against or vilify adopted people. The ad is not comparing adopted children to animals, nor are we depicting adoption in a negative light.

Although I take this complaint seriously I do not believe that the complainant should be considered to represent adopted people as a section of the community. I myself am adopted and do not feel this ad is negative or offensive in any way. I feel it is incredibly positive toward the idea of adoption as a whole and specifically pet adoption. Of course, everybody views things from their own perspective and experience, but the idea that the word adoption should only be used in relation to children is invalid. In fact, as an adopted person myself, I find the idea that 'adopt' should be considered taboo in other circumstances is actually in direct opposition to the idea that adopted families are just as 'normal' as other families. As an adopted person and a parent, the thought of a child being teased or bullied at school is distressing. However, I believe this is an issue that should be addressed directly with the parents and teachers of the school, rather than to an animal welfare organisation.

THE DETERMINATION

The Advertising Standards Board (“Board”) considered whether this advertisement breaches Section 2 of the Advertiser Code of Ethics (the “Code”).

The Board noted the complainant’s concern that the advertisement treats the issue of adoption insensitively.

The Board viewed the advertisement and noted the advertiser’s response.

The Board considered whether the advertisement complied with Section 2.1 of the Code which requires that 'advertisements shall not portray or depict material in a way which discriminates against or vilifies a person or section of the community on account of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual preference, religion, disability, mental illness or political belief.'

The Board noted the advertisement features a couple explaining to their dog that it is adopted and that the cat and the duck are not the dog’s ‘real’ siblings.

The Board noted that the advertisement is promoting the adoption of animals and that the animals are presented as family members and considered that this emphasis on a family connection was a positive depiction of animal adoption. The Board noted that the advertisement was concerning to the complainant due to their own personal experience. The Board noted and appreciated that adoption can be a difficult experience and agreed that depictions of adoption in advertisements should be sensitive to this. However the Board considered that this advertisement was clearly referring to and depicting animal adoption and it was not a likely reference to child adoption. The Board considered that whilst it was sympathetic to the complainant’s concerns in the Board’s view the advertisement is clearly referring to the adoption of pets not people.

The Board determined that the advertisement did not breach Section 2.1 of the Code.

Finding that the advertisement did not breach the Code on other grounds, the Board dismissed the complaint.