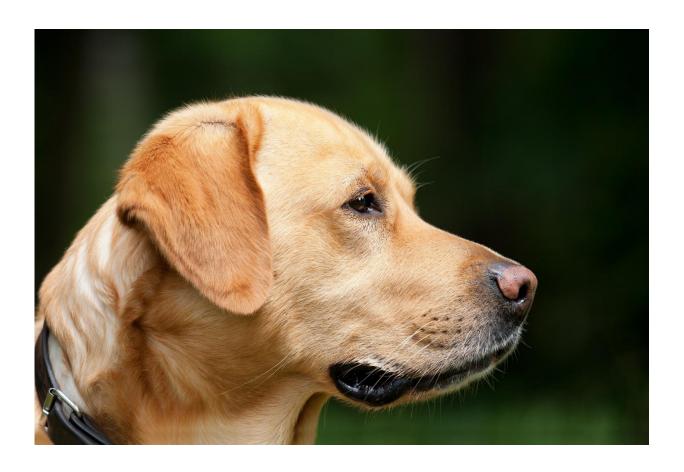# Match for mutts? New website helps people adopt the best dog

April 21 2017, by Mark Pratt

Credit: CC0 Public Domain

People looking for the perfect family pet tend to choose a dog based on appearance or breed—but that's barking up the wrong tree.

"If you think they're cute, you bring them home," said Jodi Andersen, a dog trainer and author.

That's why Andersen, along with MaryAnn Zeman and Sharon Mosse, founded the new online business How I Met My Dog. It works like Match or eHarmony, fitting humans with dogs based on what really matters: personality, lifestyle and behavior.

Several other online services match people with pets, but the founders of How I Met My Dog say they take things to a new level with a more detailed, science-based questionnaire that narrows the number of dogs that meet a human adopter's lifestyle and expectations.

The service is needed because about 4 million dogs per year are handed over to shelters and rescues, they said. Too many end up back in shelters, and too many are being euthanized because they can't find good homes.

"The system we're using now is broken and has to be fixed," Andersen said.

Placing a pet in the wrong home is one of the biggest concerns at the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which finds homes for thousands of dogs and other animals every year, spokesman Rob Halpin said.

Persuading adopters not to fall in love with the first dog they see is a major issue.

"Sometimes our emotions take leave of our senses," said Halpin, who was not familiar with How I Met My Dog.

The MSPCA has "adoption counselors" who try to ensure people are matched with the right dogs, but Halpin embraced the idea of services

that smooth that process.

"We welcome the notion of technology helping people do some of the hard work it takes to pick the right pet," he said.

How I Met My Dog, which also helps people who want to find a new home for a dog they just can't live with anymore, so far has partnered with 24 Boston-area shelters and rescues.

The plan is to role it out nationally by the end of the year.

A person looking to adopt fills out what the founders call a "PET profile" for personality, expectations and training style. Are you a couch potato or an active athlete? Do you want a dog that gets along with children? Are you a disciplinarian when training a dog or more laid back?

The dog profiles are completed either by the shelter staff or the current owner.

The algorithm matches the humans with dogs that complement their lifestyle.

"For example, if you have kids, you will never see a dog from us that doesn't get along with kids," Zeman said.

Once the website matches someone with a dog, it's up to the adopter to meet that dog in person. The shelter or owner ultimately determines whether there's a match.

Pawfect Life Rescue, of Uxbridge, Massachusetts, was one of the first rescue organizations to sign on with How I Met My Dog.

"They have been pretty spot on so far with having the right people come and look at the right dog," Pawfect Life founder and president Julie Uthoff said.

The Fredette family, of Waltham, Massachusetts, adopted their dog, Roscoe, from Pawfect Life after being matched through How I Met My Dog. Kate Fredette, her husband and two children had been thinking of getting a new dog for about a year, but they just didn't know how to ensure they would get a good fit.

"It was confusing," Fredette said.

They obviously wanted a dog that gets along with children. They wanted a dog they could take on family trips. They wanted a social dog they could take to the park.

They couldn't be happier with Roscoe, a 4-month-old mixed breed.

"Mornings are so much better around here," Fredette said.

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