

## Facial Recognition for Pets Could Help Cities Save Furry Lives

Colin Wood | July 17, 2014



Of the 6 million to 8 million dogs and cats cared for in shelters each year, about half of those animals are put down, according to the Humane Society of the United States. For animal lovers it's a sad reality, but even the most cold-hearted logicians can agree that it's also a huge waste of time and money collecting so many animals just to jail and eventually euthanize them.

The upshot is that new technology is helping to mitigate the problem. Two new apps that use facial recognition are aimed at keeping pets in the arms of their loving owners, and localities are paying close attention to ways they can use technology to keep animals out of shelters.

The overpopulation of pets is a national issue, and that makes it a concern for many community leaders. Riverside, Calif., Chief Innovation Officer Lea Deesing says these days, she's asking everyone she talks to if they know of a good app that can match pets with potential new owners. "I think there should be an app that's like a Match.com for pets so you could actually adopt pets before they go to the shelter," Deesing said. "I think it would be cool to have on a national level."

A Code for America Twitter bot called [Cuties in Denver](#) tinkers with the idea on a city-wide level, but it's far from putting dent in the millions of animals that are euthanized each year. There's also a lot of technology put toward recovering lost animals, like micro chipping and tattoos, but the lack of any standardization renders a lot of those efforts useless.

When Philip Rooyakkers, owner of one of the largest pet boarding facilities in Vancouver, lost his own dog, he got the idea for a facial recognition app that would help recover a missing pet. "Microchips are great if and when they work, and if someone has a microchip reader," he said. "But reality is that the vast majority of people who find a dog, of course they have a smartphone, but they don't have a microchip reader."

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"What we then do is take his image and all his information, and send out a notice to all the veterinarian clinics and all the animal control and stakeholders within a 10- to 15-mile radius of where you lost him, so if someone should happen to find him and take him to a local veterinarian, they already have a notice sitting on their desk saying that he's been lost," he said. "The problem with microchips is that they're using four different standards. Just because you have your dog micro-chipped doesn't mean that when they get found, that microchip can be read. In Canada there's over seven different databases. There's no centralized database for microchip information because they're from different manufacturers and they don't want to share that data."

PiP is now forming agreements with large U.S. counties that would share data and images with his company, Rooyakkers said. "These counties and cities are all very much struggling for income or struggling on their budgets, and we want to provide this service at really no cost, no expense to the cities so that ultimately it ends up lessening the amount of pets they have in their shelters."

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PiP uses facial recognition to find lost pets, but there's another app that uses similar technology to connect people with a pet they want to adopt. [PetMatch](#), available on iOS and Android, uses facial recognition to help potential pet owners find an animal they like by searching through the [Petfinder](#) database. Someone looking to adopt a brown and white husky, for example, can take a photo of one and the app will use the image to find similar-looking dogs (or not – your mileage may vary) in their area that are ready to be adopted.

<http://www.govtech.com/applications/Facial-Recognition-for-Pets-Could-Help-Cities-Save-Furry-Lives.html>