

## Puppies vs. Kittens – the age-old email conundrum

By Lauren Miller, Director of Email Programs, Dave Leichtman, Director of Analytics, and Alex Kellner, Content and Research

*Abraham Lincoln was made famous by bringing the first cat – Tabby – into the White House (and something else we can't quite remember). Fala – Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Scottish Terrier – was present at the signing of a declaration of war. We all remember Checkers, Barney and Socks.*

**Some people are dog people. Some people are cat people.** But what kind of people are email readers? Which cuddly pet tugs at people's heartstrings so hard that their wallets spring open?

For years, nonprofit organizations have boasted about the effectiveness of using cute, cuddly animal pictures in online communications. We've seen it everywhere: PETA's home page has a puppy – but launched a campaign to make fish cute like kittens. Care2's animal welfare page has a kitten in the header – but a puppy on the page background. The ASPCA has more puppies and kittens on their home page than we can count.

If the Obama campaign taught us anything – and it has taught us a lot – testing every component of an online campaign is integral to success. Whether it's the color of a donate button or the placement of links, the anatomy of an email matters. The lack of analytics on household pet emotion-eliciting factors is simply unacceptable.

As such, Blue State Digital has decided to fill that void and answer the age-old question – **which works best, puppies or kittens?**

### Action Alert Test: Photo of a Kitten vs. a Puppy

The double-blind variable-controlled test below was design to determine whether the inclusion of an image of a puppy or kitten would increase or decrease response rates to an email advocacy alert on toxic pet food. Based on a focus group of Sasha and Malia Obama, our grandmothers and our kindergarten teachers, we chose the cutest pictures of a puppy and a kitten that we could find, and used an anonymous high-profile client to conduct our test.



Message #1: Email image of Puppy



Message #2: Email Image of Kitten

The results were striking. While the kitten version had a slightly higher open rate, the click-through rate and action rate of the puppy version were shockingly higher. We can say with certainty that puppies are more effective for petition-based advocacy than kittens.

Signup Graphic	Test Size	Opens	Open Rate	Clicks	Click Rate	Signups	Conversion Rate
Puppy	100,000	24,937	24.94%	5,396	5.40%	623	0.62%
Kitten	100,000	25,562	25.56%	5,518	5.52%	414	0.41%
	<b>Puppy Margin</b>		<b>-1.24%</b>		<b>1.12%</b>		<b>20.15%</b>

#### Are kittens more effective in a fundraising appeal?

Puppies may drive petition signups – but do they also raise more money? We tested similar images (this time changing the focus group to 14 tourists who got in our way as we walked by the White House and the burrito guy at the corner of 15<sup>th</sup> and K) – changing “sign the petition” to “donate” – on two segments of a fundraising email instead. The results are below.

Surprisingly, the kitten fundraiser greatly outperformed its counterpart puppy email. While the average gift size was nearly identical, the kitten email not only had a higher click-through rate, but double the number of donors and more than double the amount raised.

Fundraising Graphic	Test Size	Opens	Open Rate	Clicks	Click Rate	Donors	\$ Raised	Conversion Rate
Puppy	100,000	22,137	22.14%	3,982	3.98%	123	\$10,233.60	10.23%
Kitten	100,000	24,659	24.66%	4,617	4.62%	254	\$21,132.80	21.13%
	<b>Kitty Margin</b>		<b>5.39%</b>		<b>7.38%</b>			<b>34.75%</b>

## Tips for Puppies and Kittens

**1. Pick a cute puppy. Or kitten.**

Let's be honest, when you're trying to motivate people to take action, nothing turns people off like ugly animals. This isn't the Charlie Brown Christmas Tree – looks matter.

**2. Pick a sad puppy. Or kitten.**

Happy animals are adorable – but sad animals are heartbreaking. I mean, who can resist those puppy dog eyes?

**3. Tell people that there's a picture of a cute, sad puppy. Or kitten.**

Make sure your subject line and alt text tells people they're missing a really cute picture of a puppy. Or kitten. We suggest, "Hey, look at this really cute, sad puppy!" or "This cute puppy is cuter than your cute puppy."

**4. Don't use too many pictures of a cute puppy. Or kitten.**

One cute puppy grabs people's attention. Two is a distraction.

**5. If possible, don't use a cute, sad puppy. Or kitten. Use a seal.**

One thing every nonprofit seems to agree on: if you've got baby seals, use them instead. Furry little seals trump everything.



**Imagine the Possibilities!**