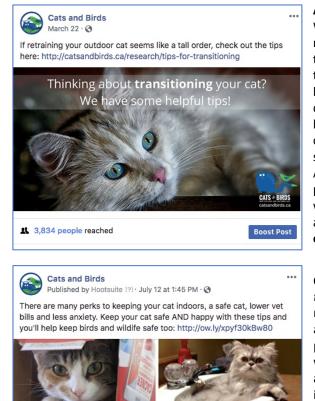## CATS & BIRDS: COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICES

These best practice recommendations are a synthesis of the principles of Conservation Psychology, Diffusion of Innovation and Community-Based Social Marketing.

Analyse the barriers to change for the person you're speaking to. What is holding them back? Barriers might include beliefs about cats needing freedom or belonging outdoors, a lack of confidence in their ability to retrain their cat or a lack of motivation to invest the time and energy. Tailor your communications to address the barrier(s). Beliefs about the cats needing / deserving freedom are difficult to counter: try to gently introduce the contradiction between how they treat their cat and how we treat dogs or small children: "A three-year-old might really want to stick his finger in a socket, but we wouldn't let him no matter how much he screamed." Another approach is to emphasize that we are obliged to keep our pets safe and healthy (the "Five Freedoms"), while our obligation to wildlife is to avoid interfering with them or their habitat. Address any lack of confidence with support to **increase their sense of self-efficacy**, by offering education and resources.

Communicate the benefits. How will the desired behaviour make *their* life better? Their cats? Cat owners are generally more motivated by concern about their cat than they are by concern about birds. Speak to *their* concerns. Citing the estimates of cat predation of birds is rarely an effective approach: many cat owners will react viscerally against what they perceive to be an accusation against their cat. Consider the audience's perspective and their interests foremost. "Loss frames" tend to be more persuasive than "benefit frames", so emphasizing risks to the cats is effective.

Some will respond to messages about birds, especially if it's made clear that cats are not the primary drivers of population declines and the message includes benefits to them and / or enlists their help in limiting human impact on birds.

Communicate the norm: People don't like to be left out. They'll be more likely to join the movement if they believe it represents the majority.

Deep-framing: Deep-seated values frame our perception of facts. Facts need a context. Using universal value words such as "caring" or "humane" will speak to core values within the audience and lead to more trust and collaboration.

Vocabulary note: avoid use of the word "free" (or "free roam") – "free" sends exactly the wrong message, especially to cat owners who believe it's natural for cats to roam. Instead, use a phrase like "roaming unsupervised," which communicates why the behaviour is undesirable.
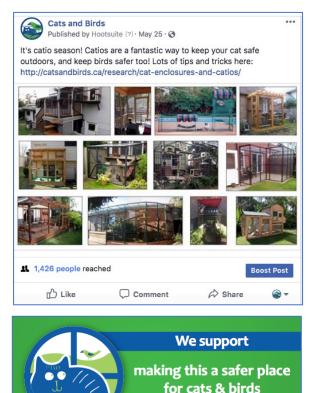
BLOG |
A Crew of Safe, Happy Cats

Over the years many cats have called me Mamma. I hand-raised one when I was 18 from 4 weeks old, Josephine, and she lived to be 22. I haven't stopped since.

A number of years ago, I lost 2 cats to road accidents within days of each other, and now all my cats (5 of them) are safe inside. My oldest two are now 17 and 19, and my younger cats are 7, 6.5 and 6, and have never been outside. They are happy playing indoors and watching my bird feeder from the window. Lots of toys and games keeps them active. We have loads of different birds that come to the feeders year round and we put suet out for them in the winter.

Cats and Birds
Published by Hootsuite [?] · May 25 ·

It's catio season! Catios are a fantastic way to keep your cat safe outdoors, and keep birds safer too! Lots of tips and tricks here: http://catsandbirds.ca/research/cat-enclosures-and-catios/

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We support
making this a safer place
for cats & birds
www.catsandbirds.ca

• **Tell Stories:** Making a change requires energy, and energy more often comes from emotion than reason. People are far less likely to be motivated by a thought than a feeling. Tell a story and use stories to **leverage influencers and early adopters**. **Choosing the right messenger is an important way of building trust.**

BLOG |
Margaret Atwood on Cats & Birds & Angel CatBird

(Keep Cats Safe & Save Bird Lives message testing indicated that the majority cat-owners react very negatively to graphic images of cats predating birds. It largely doesn't work to convince them to keep their cat safe from roaming. They reported finding it manipulative and have a similar reaction to images of cats hit by cars.)

Vocabulary note: Avoid phrases such as "invasive species" or "subsidized predator," as these (albeit scientifically accurate) phrases are more likely to alienate then appeal. Describing cats as 'killers' or 'killing machines' or 'birdurers' has a similar effect: while most cat-owners acknowledge their cats are naturally-skilled hunters, they tend to resent this characterization of them.

Show the desired behaviour: don't publicize undesirable behaviour. Instead, demonstrate the desired behaviour and provide a positive model.

Myth-busting needs to be done carefully to avoid backfiring. Avoid mentioning the myth (e.g. cats need freedom to be happy) first: instead, start with the core fact and immediately follow it up with strong evidence.

Use prompts and commitments: remind people to engage in the desired behaviour. Prompts can also serve as badges of membership in the club, promoting the idea that it's the norm. Ask people to commit or pledge to engage in the desired behaviour. Follow up with people a few months later to see how they're doing: their responses can help inform your evaluation.

For useful stats on the risks to outdoor cats, see http://catsandbirds.ca/blog/keep-cats-safe

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