



GUIDELINES FOR ONLINE PLATFORMS SELLING DOGS

HOW TO DO IT RESPONSIBLY?



It is becoming more and more common to offer pets for sale via advertisements on online platforms. It is therefore important that trade is done in a regulated and responsible way, considering that animals are sentient beings and not inanimate goods.

Online platforms can and should regulate trade in order to guarantee that the animals offered via their channels are sold in a responsible way. This is essential to prevent animal suffering and to protect consumers from buying an unsocialized, sick or even dying dog from an unscrupulous breeder using online platforms.

Online platforms should as far as possible validate the information a seller provides to advertise online, especially in regard to the identity of the seller and the identity of the animal. Both can be checked through ID verification and back-end checks against the pet registration database, provided that the latter holds reliable data. Online platforms should differentiate between private and commercial sellers. Currently, in a lot of EU countries, commercial breeders need to have a breeder registration number, according to EU or national legislation (by 2021 this will be obligatory for all commercial breeders in all EU countries). You should validate this breeder registration number against the national registry (if available). If a commercial breeder/seller is not registered, they shouldn't be allowed to sell online.

Classified ad sites should be encouraged to limit the number of user accounts to one per person.

Ideally, online animal sales should only be allowed in specialized and reputable journals or websites (e.g. in some countries sites recognized by the local/national veterinary authority). A specialized magazine or a specialized website is one whose announcements relate exclusively to the marketing of animals or related goods and services and has special provisions for the offering of pets.

When trade is done via an online selling platform, at least some minimum requirements should be respected to ensure it is done in a regulated and responsible way.

Several organisations provide a complete set of guidelines for online platforms to help them promote a safe and regulated online pet trade.

Minimum information vendors/advertisers should include about the animal:

- A recent dated photograph of the advertised animal.
- The date of birth and country of origin (where the animal was born), sex, breed etc.
- The price for the animal and the rights of the buyer/consumer e.g. warranty.



- The animal microchip identification code and database wherein the animal is registered. If available also the parent's microchip number and registration database.
- The vaccination and anti-parasitic records, and other health-related information (sterilisation status etc.)
- Breed-specific information and general information for responsible care, e.g. advice related to feeding, housing, handling, husbandry, life expectancy, suitable accessories and veterinary provisions.
- Detailed description of the animal additionally to the breed-specific characteristics, such as the character and preferences (e.g. enjoys company, suitable for children, etc.)
- Additional support documents: vaccination certificates, health records, breeder registration number, EU passport number, etc.

Minimum information vendors/advertisers should include about themselves:

- Contact details of the seller/advertiser: phone number, real name and surname (no pseudonyms), email, region where the animal is located, etc.
- Status of the seller: hobby or commercial breeder, trader, shelter, charity, rescue group, etc.
- Breeder registration number: In most EU countries, commercial breeders will need to have a breeder registration number. In this case classified ad sites should be required to verify the registration number via the breeder registration database before an ad goes live. If a commercial breeder/seller is not registered, they shouldn't be allowed to advertise or sell online.

What more could you do?

- Provide all sellers with a copy of their responsibilities and/or national government codes of practice relating to the listing and sale of animals.
- Clearly list in your policy the rules regarding the advertisement and sale of live animals.
- Ensure a highly visible 'report animal welfare concern' button is on the same page as the ads to allow users to contact website administrators.
- The minimum age of puppies offered for sale should be eight weeks old. Dogs imported from abroad usually should be older (i.e. to be able to enter most EU countries the age threshold 15 weeks old). The veterinary certification should be able to assess this.
- Verify the information provided by the advertiser:
 - Verify the advertiser's identity
 - Verify the advertiser's status (hobby/commercial breeder; how many ads per advertiser)*
- Verify the microchip identification number provided in the advertisement with the regional or national registration database or with EuroPetNet.
- Online platforms should always:
 - Actively monitor, ban, remove and report adverts offering sick, injured, diseased and pregnant animals or where there is a reasonable concern for the health and/or welfare of the animal(s) advertised;

* or implement automated checks as suggested by FOUR PAWS Model Solution.



- Suspend advertisers that do not supply all the information requested by the registration form;
 - Review, remove and report within 12 working hours any suspicion of illegal activity (e.g. adverts for puppies and adult dogs with visibly docked tails, dogs with cropped ears, or any reference to dog fighting), obvious illegal puppy trade or concern over the welfare of any animal advertised to the appropriate agency. Ensure that adverts comply with relevant EU and/or national legislation e.g. regarding microchipping and identification and age of imported puppies.
 - Actively monitor advertisements for 'blacklisted' words (e.g. "dog fighting" "four-week-old") and images and remove any misleading or inappropriate ads.
 - Monitor and permanently ban (e.g. three "strikes" to exclude an advertiser from the platform) and report those vendors who attempt to post adverts that do not comply with the minimum standards.
 - Establish a system to monitor and possibly ban advertisers using multiple phone numbers and email accounts.
- Add a warning to each ad; e.g. *"An animal is not a toy. Please be aware that purchasing or adopting an animal is a life changing decision. As the owner of an animal, you are legally obliged to ensure the animal's welfare needs are met; failure to do is a criminal offense and punishable by law."*
 - Introduce a ranking system where sellers get ranked by the community, based on prior sales, to help improve transparency and accountability.

And most importantly, ensure close co-operation and information exchange with your national authority responsible for animal welfare to exclude illegal sellers and traders from the online market. Together you can make sure that illegal activities and unscrupulous dealers get no chance! It is also a way to foresee a ban on whoever has had past criminal convictions for reasons related to animal cruelty or other specific crimes.



Some countries might have additional requirements e.g. all dogs have to be identified and registered before being sold or given away for adoption or any other reason. Check out the national requirements.



Want to find out more, check here:

- [EU dog and cat alliance: publication on online dog sales](#)
- https://www.bva.co.uk/media/2971/bva_pets_in_advertising_2018.pdf (BVA Pets in advertising - A social concern)
- [Campaign of Scottish Government on responsible buying of dogs](#)
- <https://www.pdsa.org.uk/media/4371/paw-2018-full-web-ready.pdf> (PDSA animal wellbeing 2018 report)
- <https://www.dogtrust.org.uk/help-advice/buyer-advice/how-to-get-a-dog-responsibly> (Advice on how to get a dog responsibly)
- <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/dogs/puppy> (More general information about buying a puppy)
- <https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/dogs/puppy/healthy> (Information about choosing a healthy puppy)
- <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/is-there-a-safe-way-to-look-for-a-new-pet-online/> (Information about safely looking for a pet online)
- <https://www.wikihow.com/Buy-a-Puppy-Online-Safely> (Illustrative Wikihow with steps to ensure you can buy a puppy safe online)
- <https://puppycontract.org.uk/> (A free tool kit developed to encourage those buying and breeding puppies to do so responsibly)
- <https://paag.org.uk/selling-a-pet/> (Minimum standards for pet trade websites)
- https://help.four-paws.org/sites/fourpaws/files/20171215_Annex_draft_Three_Measures_for_online_pet_trade_FINAL_WEB_NEW2.pdf (FOUR PAWS standards for classified pet trade ad sites)
- <https://www.four-paws.org/campaigns-topics/topics/companion-animals/model-solution-traceability> (THE FOUR PAWS MODEL SOLUTION For full traceability across the EU online puppy trade)
- <https://www.stop-puppy-mills.org/> (Information about “Puppy mills – no thank you!” Initiative)

More information in other languages:

- <https://www.tierschutzbund.de/information/hintergrund/heimtiere/illegaler-welpenhandel/> (Illegal puppy trade – in German)
- <http://bienetreanimal.wallonie.be/files/documents/sites-internet-specialises-reconnus.pdf> (The list of specialized sites in Belgium, Walloon region – in French)
- <https://www.tierheimhelden.de/> (Classified site – in German)
- <https://leefmilieu.brussels/themas/dierenwelzijn/de-handel-gezelschapsdieren/voorwaarden-voor-verhandeling/publiciteit> (Information on pet advertisement in Belgium, Brussels-Capital region – in Dutch and French)