

FERRET-ISMS – What a Ferret Would Say If a Ferret Could Talk

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ABSTRACT

Adopt, don't shop! The focus of ferret-isms is to promote adoption of ferrets without going through shops and/or animal shelters (Ferrets are related to wolverines, ermines, minks and weasels in the *Mustela* genus [1]). Animal shelters are usually at max capacity with animals and they are forced to kill old or sick animals to make space for newer ones who are more likely to live a longer life. The goal of this website is to allow users to adopt, surrender or foster ferrets. It is a platform that provides information and connects people with their potential pets or help anyone who must give up their pet. This process increases the odds of successfully providing a home for ferrets. Ferrets have a way of finding people that need them and filling an emptiness that they didn't even know they had. The target audience for this website is people who own or wish to own a ferret. The website will consist of a total of 7 pages – one will highlight the goal of the website, one will provide information about ferrets (what you need in order to adopt or what to consider prior to surrendering your ferret etc.), one will provide ferret facts, one page to surrender ferrets, one page to list ferrets up for adoption (for use by animal shelters, as this will provide them a platform to list their ferrets), one page to adopt ferrets and lastly, one page to foster ferrets. As a user I noticed that most ferret agencies and shelters do not keep their pages up to date, thus making it difficult to learn about and adopt ferrets. This website is intended to be self-sustaining with information from the users as opposed to the admins constantly managing it. However, they would be able to access the information to make any modifications necessary.

Author Keywords

Ferret; adopt; pets; animal shelters; foster; surrender; critter

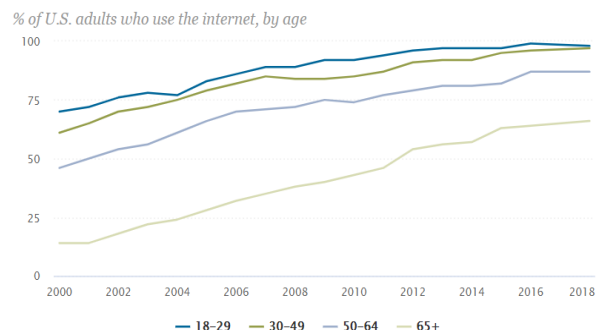
INTRODUCTION – WHY FERRET-ISMS?

Ferret-ism is a slang term indicating what a ferret would say if he/she could talk. "Often, after the novelty of an impulse purchase wears off, ferrets are abandoned to certain death in the wild or to severely crowded animal shelters" [2]. Ferrets can also get extremely stressed out in new environments and this can have a

significant impact on their 6-9 years lifespan [3]. Most government funded animal shelters (animal control/pound) have two jobs, first to enforce animal laws state wide and second to humanely house these animals into appropriate homes. However lately these shelters have been "rounding up unwanted pets and disposing of them, primarily through euthanasia." [4] "PETA's investigation found, in ferret mills, ferrets were kept grouped in small cages with dangerous metal wire floors, deprived of any opportunity to engage in natural behavior such as burrowing or hiding, and often deprived of food and water. Newborn, young, and adult animals were systematically denied basic and veterinary care for even painful, life-threatening injuries and conditions." [5] The goal of Ferret-Isms website is to ensure that we help as many ferrets as we can by helping them find their caring, loving and forever home. It attempts to take "severely crowded animal shelters" out of the equation and provide a platform to surrender, foster and/or adopt a ferret. Shelters can post their ferret listing as well.

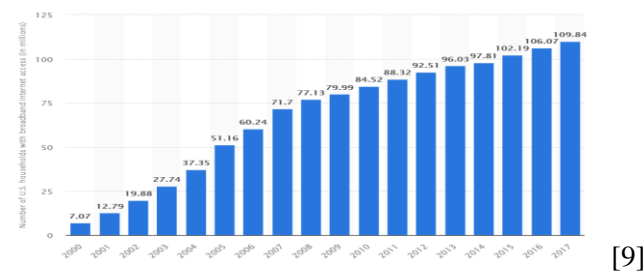
BACKGROUND

"Research shows that simply transposing traditional marketing strategies onto the Internet is not effective. Most marketing researchers agree that the web is at its best when it provides true interactive communication between brand and consumer" [6]. It is important to have interaction between a user and a website to be able to successfully relay information and get the best use out of the site. People tend to trust a website that is user friendly and has no errors. For instance, if a website makes a spelling mistake, one is less likely to trust it.



[7]

Per the data above, people in the US have been increasingly using the internet. “Millennials account for half of the owners of reptiles; small animals such as rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, ferrets, and gerbils; and saltwater fish.” [8]



And as you can see from the data in the graph above, almost a 100% of millennials use the internet. Hence, we can make an informed assumption that connecting to the intended audience will be best done via the internet. As you can see from the data below, more people are likely to adopt pets given that the trend continues as the data suggests.

Fact	2012 AVMA Sourcebook	2015-2016 APPA Survey	2017-2018 APPA Survey
Total number of U.S. households		124.587 million	
Number of households with a pet	66.5 million (year-end 2011)	79.7 million	84.6 million
Percentage of households with a pet	56% (year-end 2011)	65%	68%
Pet-owning households with more than 1 pet	62.2%	42%	
Estimated number of pet dogs and cats	144.1 million	163.6 million	183.9 million

Pet Finder and Adopt-a-pet websites are some of the most commonly used websites to list animals up for adoption. However, Ferret-Isms is like the craigslist [11] of the ferret adoption world. Ferret Club [12] is a ferret focused website however from personal experience, I know that this website is not maintained, and the list of ferrets is not up to date, and there is a shelter in play. Ferret-Isms focuses on mediating between the previous owner to the next owner of the ferret. It also is intended to be self-sustaining and is expected to require little to no maintenance while its up and running.

SYSTEM – HOW IT WORKS

Ferret-isms is a 11-page site. Upon first navigating to the site, you will see a landing page with a slider set of images, this is a standalone page (apart for navigation bar) controlled by hard coded content / images. Next, we have “Types of ferrets” – all the information here is attained from the database, which the admin can manage in the backend using the Admin Login section we will discuss later. Next, “Fun facts about ferrets”,

now keep in mind that this is hard coded content as well. Here you have a list of facts that will help you decide if to surrender or rethink the decision, if to adopt a ferret or not and if you can foster a ferret. As stated earlier, the goal of this website it to help surrender, foster or adopt ferrets whilst keeping in mind the welfare of these animals. That brings us to the next page, ‘Shelters list ferrets for adoption’ – here any shelter can list the ferrets they have available for adoption. Any listing put up here will go to the database. We then have ‘Surrender a ferret’ page – here any individual can list their ferret for adoption. Any listing put up here will also go to the database.

‘Looking to adopt a ferret’ page has a list of ferrets available for adoption, this is pulled in from the database. Here we can see a list of ferrets listed by either the animal shelters or the individuals. Each ferret tile is sorted in an ascending order of days to surrender ferret in (an option in the form one must fill out when surrendering their ferret) therefore giving precedence to the ferrets that will likely be homeless soon over all others. After the ferrets listed for surrendering, we will see the list of ferrets put in by the animal shelters. The same sorting system goes for the ‘Looking to foster a ferret’ page. Here we pull in data of ferrets available for fostering via the database. However, if an animal has been fostered, they will no longer appear in the foster list but will remain in the adoption list, but under a new owner (the foster parent). If a ferret is adopted, they will be removed from the database entirely, removing them from both the foster and adoption list.

We then have a contact us page, which is a form one must fill out to contact the site admin. The information is sent over to the hard-coded email address. Next page is the ‘Admin Account’, only the admin can login to this page (this email and its credentials are hard-coded in the site), here we have three separate options, first to update the types of ferrets (as mentioned earlier), since new types of ferrets are being discovered regularly, it was information put in the backend allowing the admin to manage this list. Second, we have foster data, here any foster request can be viewed and approved or rejected by the admin. For instance, if someone puts in a request to foster a ferret and the ferret’s current owner chooses not to handover the ferret, the admin can reject the request. Say the owner does handover the ferret, then the admin can approve the request. Similarly, there is the third option to view Adoption data – this works the same way as the foster data option except it targets the Adoption list.

EVALUATION – TESTING

Surrender, Adopt and Foster are the three main functionalities of Ferret-isms. To test this site, I used linear and non-linear approaches, that is the happy path (what the user should do to reach the end goal) and what a user might do in reality. To start with, I tested the happy paths, here I ensured that the user inputted data when surrendering of a ferret was available in the database and getting pulled in correctly to be displayed in both the adopt and foster section, I then ensure that the same was possible for listing a ferret up for adoption by the animal shelter. Once this was certified, I checked to ensure the tiles with each ferret was populating correctly in the correct order.

As the last part of my user testing phase, I took my laptop to work and had a couple of my coworkers use the website and provide feedback, using their feedback I implemented an admin account site that allows admin to control the site performance and listings. I would like to thank Naresh Ramiseti, Michael DiFilippo, Christopher Cruz and Joseph Harris for providing their feedback and doing a peer review for my code.

DISCUSSION

Ferrets have a way of finding the people that need them, filling an emptiness that we don't even know we have.

As Ferret-isms progresses into the next phase, I want to implement more security measures. I would like to allow users to create their own profile and login to see their ferret adoption/foster/surrender status. I also want to provide functionality to run background checks or maybe call an API to do so, for the people who select an option to foster or adopt a ferret. Another feature I would like to add is image recognition, I would like to check if an image is used more than once to avoid any overlaps, errors or false data listings.

So far there is one bug that still remains and needs to be resolved. Currently users are unable to adopt, or foster ferrets listed by an animal shelter. This isn't a complete blocker since one can view an overview of the ferret and doesn't block the feature completely. Although it is a high priority bug. However, this was a nice to have functionality for this project, as the main goal was to ensure that the surrender a ferret functionality worked.

This is the first time that I have been exposed to working with Python language along with a database, so it took me longer than anticipated to get up to speed causing a slower progress time for my project than I

would have liked. One of the biggest issues I incurred was not being able to host my site on the Drexel sandbox. I didn't have any issue deploying the site, rather was unable to run it as not all the tools that I needed were available on said sandbox. I tried to use remote hosting on GoDaddy [13] but failed due to restricted resources.

I believe this website will help put a lot of people at ease knowing that they were able to rehome their ferrets with people they feel comfortable with and possibly being able to meet or hear about their ferrets even after having to give them up. As a fur-parent of a panda ferret myself (images available on landing page, are all of my ferret – Chewbacca Weezy), I feel closely linked to this project and would personally like to see it being used outside of the classroom. The littlest feet make the biggest footprints in our hearts. My goal is to home as many ferrets as possible by making my site live in the upcoming future and enhancing the functionalities to support a larger set of people and add an additional layer of security to protect and rehome safely our little ferret friends.

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