That Puppy in the Window

By Amy MacMillan

Man’s best friend was the topic a group of MBA students researched recently in Drazen Prelec’s Listening to the Customer class (15.812B). Calvin Cheung, Deirdre Hatfield, Divya Jani, John Curry, and Lauren Ready, all MBA ’10s, set out to learn how households acquire dogs as pets. They were interested in learning the thought processes behind how families and individuals decide which dogs are best for them.

Worth a thousand words

The team used a method known as the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET), an interview process that encourages participants to use images to highlight the subconscious thoughts behind their decisions. Following that, they asked each of their interview subjects detailed questions about how they obtained their dogs.

What they found was that most people do not take the decision to purchase a dog lightly. It’s often understood that the dog will be a family member who will “improve the dynamics in the familial household,” according to the students’ findings. The study looked at three categories: why people get pets? What criteria do people look for in obtaining pets, and finally, where do they obtain those pets?

Deirdre, who holds a BA in mathematics from Boston University, said, “I’ve always seen two groups of people. Those who see it as buying a washing machine…like it’s something you have to do. And, they go through the process much in the same way for a non-living item. I kind of wanted to understand what’s underlying people’s decisions…whether it’s a breeder, a store, or if they believe in rescuing animals from overcrowded shelters.”

After interviewing the volunteer subjects who agreed to bring in photos for the ZMET method, the students transcribed the 45-minute interviews and culled the quotes that seemingly held emotions. Calvin, who worked as an attorney before coming to MIT Sloan, said the students then identified common denominators...
Continued from page 1

and mapped out a flow chart to discover the thought process someone goes through when acquiring a dog.

The ZMET technique proved valuable, according to John. “ZMET allowed us to use images, visualization, and stories to understand dog owners’ underlying choices and behaviors,” he said. “Since dogs are inherently a personal topic, ZMET was ideal for this study. For example, if someone says, ‘I like dogs with powerful looks,’ they likely have deeper feelings that drive that affinity,” he said.

The process was enlightening, said Calvin, who admitted that he was skeptical of the ZMET process when he first heard about it in class. “I just expected people to bring in pictures of dogs that they wanted. Instead, we got pictures of beaches, porches, and even graveyards…that process brought out the underlying emotions in the pictures. When you saw it play out, it definitely proved its worth,” he added. The interviewee who brought in the cemetery picture noted that she purchased her second dog almost on impulse after her father passed away. Her father’s “best friend” during her childhood was the family Labrador Retriever. The woman, prompted by her daughter, quickly obtained a lab to help ease the pain of losing a parent.

“People attach a lot of emotional value…even to past pets,” Deirdre said. “It’s literally a member of the family.”

“I was also surprised by how vivid memories about a dog or even a specific breed can heavily influence purchasing behavior,” John added.

Part of the family
One of the themes the team uncovered was that dogs add value to families. One interviewee revealed that she wanted to get a dog to teach her young daughter responsibility. But, the dog acquisition process also brought out issues of compromise. This same interviewee’s husband “didn’t want a tiny dog or one of those dogs that you dress up.” Therefore, the husband was heavily involved in choosing the dog the family obtained.

The students were somewhat surprised to learn that considering the magnitude of the purchase, price was not an issue. One interviewee reported that, “No, price was definitely not a concern…not that we had thousands of dollars to [spend] on a dog, but once we had decided, we were willing to pay the money for the right dog.”

Divya, who has a bachelor’s and a master’s in electrical engineering, pointed out that the study showed contrasts in how people do things. “One of the things we learned is that there are people who will spend years researching what kind of dog they want before they are ready to buy one. Then, when they are ready to buy one, they get their family involved in the decision process, and it’s very well thought out.” However, that same subject may proceed differently the second time around. “We interviewed one person, who picked a dog at a breeder, and the breeder was two hours away, but they went and visited the dog every week until it was time to take the dog home. That same person, the second time [getting a dog] just decided to take a dog home,” she said.

“I was surprised at the tremendous amount of research and effort that goes into purchasing a dog,” Lauren admitted. “In
Continued from page 2

some cases, the people we interviewed spent time researching the family tree of the dog in order to understand the roots of the dog."

Calvin, Divya, and Deirdre all agreed that one thing they learned from the study was that there is currently no central location to exchange information about dog breeds, breeders, and other dog resources. “One of the ways this information can be used is to create a central location, like a website, sort of like Yelp is for restaurants, where people can post reviews for breeds and breeders, and maybe even toys,” Divya said.

“There’s a big opportunity here to consolidate the information, and if you are a breeder yourself, it makes a lot of sense to create brand associations for high quality dogs,” Calvin said.

The topic of dog acquisition is clearly something that could benefit from further research, according to the students’ study. This includes focus groups, a competitive landscape of the dog website industry, and revenue models and potential partnerships with large pet stores.

In the meantime, the students themselves are focusing on their own post-graduation plans and potential pet ownerships. John and his wife recently purchased a “Goldendoodle” dog; Deirdre owns several cats (“I’m an avid adopter”); Calvin, Lauren, and Divya have long-term goals to eventually own pets once they settle into their future careers.

Switzer Environmental Fellowship Program

*Deadline for Applications: February 1, 2010*

The Robert and Patricia Switzer Foundation invites applications from highly talented graduate students in New England and California for Switzer Environmental Fellowships for the academic year 2010-2011. The award amount is $15,000. At least 20 fellowships will be awarded to assist graduate students in a broad range of environmental science and related fields. Guidelines and instructions are available on the website at [http://www.switzernetwork.org/fellowship-guidelines.html](http://www.switzernetwork.org/fellowship-guidelines.html). Only completed and qualified applications will be considered. All applications must be submitted online per the instructions.

The Switzer Fellowship Program

The Switzer Environmental Fellowship awards are extremely competitive. At least 20 Fellowships are awarded each year to students who are enrolled in graduate programs at accredited institutions in the six New England states and California. Ten Fellowships are awarded in New England and 10 in California. The program typically receives well over 150 applications for the 10 Fellowships in each region. A full description of our program is found on our website.

Continued on page 4
Continued from page 3

The goal of the Switzer Foundation is to mobilize leaders from diverse disciplines who focus on integrated solutions to environmental issues. In addition to receiving financial assistance, Switzer Fellows become part of an alumni network (the Switzer Fellowship Network) of over 450 environmental professionals and past Fellows dedicated to environmental protection and improvement. The Switzer Fellowship Network is a highly respected resource locally, nationally and internationally for non-profit organizations, government agencies, and other entities. Bolstered by the Foundation’s long-term support, Switzer Fellows are using their expertise in natural and social sciences, business, law, and policy fields to sustain, restore, and steward our life support systems and create sustainable communities. In addition to the Fellowship award, Switzer Fellows gain access to other Switzer Foundation grant programs designed to advance their career development.

Candidate Profile
Candidates for the Fellowship should demonstrate leadership potential, be able to clearly communicate their objectives for applying their technical or professional expertise to environmental issues after graduation and convey a clarity and sense of purpose about their work. Candidates for the Switzer Fellowship are chosen not only for their excellence in academic and scientific work, but also on their true dedication to aggressively pursue practical solutions to environmental problems. The Fellowships are not restricted to a specific field, but a good foundation in basic sciences is considered a plus. Past Fellows have studied in a range of fields including environmental law, public policy, natural resources management, architecture, business and journalism as well as in more traditional sciences of chemistry, biology and engineering. More detailed information about the Switzer Foundation, the Environmental Fellowship Program, and the network of Switzer Fellows can be found at the Switzer website at www.switzernetwork.org.

How to Apply
The online application form and instructions are available on the website at: http://www.switzernetwork.org/fellowship-guidelines.html. They no longer accept paper applications. All applications must be submitted by February 1, 2010, with all required documentation. Paper applications, incomplete applications, or late submissions will not be considered.

If you have any questions contact Foundation staff by phone at 207-338-5654 or by e-mail as follows: Lissa Widoff, Executive Director, lissa@switzernetwork.org; Erin Lloyd, Program Officer, erin@switzernetwork.org; Don Brackett, Administrative Officer, don@switzernetwork.org.

Fellowships Available

The Eben Tisdale Fellowship, which includes a $5,000 grant, is a summer internship available to undergraduate and graduate students where the high tech sector meets the government. The program offers outstanding opportunities for students to learn about high tech public policy issues with hands-on experience in Washington, D.C. Tisdale Fellowships are open to students from colleges and universities all over the country.

The Dell Thurmond Woodard Fellowship, which includes one $5,000 grant for one student each year, is part of the Tisdale Fellowship program. Any student, undergraduate or graduate, who is interested in diversity and ethics issues, and in learning about high-tech public policy issues, can apply for this Fellowship.

The application for both of these fellowships is the same, except that those applying for the Dell Thurmond Woodard Fellowship should include an additional essay on diversity and ethics.

Continued on page 5
Continued from page 4

The Fellowship has two main elements:

1) **Internship:** Fellows participate in an eight-week internship in the government relations office of a leading high technology company or association. In the recent past, Fellows have interned at such companies as Dell, Hewlett-Packard, Philips Electronics, and Monster Worldwide, as well as associations such as the Business Software Alliance or TechAmerica.

2) **Issues Seminar:** The issues seminar is a weekly lunch hosted by the different sponsoring companies and associations. Expert speakers lead discussions of current public policy issues in Washington, and the methods the high technology industry uses for effective advocacy.

The summer 2010 Fellowship runs from June 14 - August 6, 2010. The goal of the Fellowship is to create a supportive and collegial environment in which a new class of public policy professionals will be mentored to help ensure that the high tech industry continues to have highly capable and well trained individuals in both policy advocacy and senior management positions. The final deadline for all applications is February 15, 2010.

Students may find more information and apply at www.tisdalefellowship.org. If you have questions contact Jonathan Tilley, info@tisdalefellowship.org, or 202-986-0384.

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**Important Note for 2010 Graduates**

For students graduating in June 2010 – the online degree application is now open. Students must fill this out to have their name on the June 2010 degree list. The application is available via Websis: http://student.mit.edu.

If you have questions contact: Geoff Miskinis, gmmiskin@mit.edu, or Scott Alessandro, salessan@mit.edu.

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*A sweet rendering of E62, created by The Faculty Club's pastry chef, Jared Brooks. Jared said the gingerbread and poured sugar creation took him and a couple of assistants nearly 16 hours to make. (Photo by Sarah Foote)*
MIT Sloan Undergrad Honored for Field Hockey Achievements

Anna Teruya, SB ‘12, made all-conference, first team, as well as first team all-region for the MIT Women’s Field Hockey team.

MIT Wins NEWMAC Field Hockey Championship

“Four different goal-scorers lifted the MIT field hockey team to a 4-2 victory over Springfield College in the 2009 New England Women’s and Men’s Athletic Conference (NEWMAC) Tournament Championship held at Wellesley College. The Engineers, the number-two seed, ousted the fourth-seeded Pride, the five-time defending NEWMAC Tournament Champions.”

For the complete story visit: http://www.mitathletics.com/sports/w-fieldh/2009-10/releases/NEWMAC_110809.

Quote of the Week

“When I started out in business, I spent a great deal of time researching every detail that might be pertinent to the deal I was interested in making. I still do the same today. People often comment on how quickly I operate, but the reason I can move quickly is that I’ve done the background work first, which no one usually sees. I prepare myself thoroughly, and then when it is time to move ahead I am ready to sprint.” —Donald Trump
MBA Student Named as a TED Fellow

Nitin Rao, MBA ’11, was recently named as a 2009 TED Fellow, and just returned from the TEDIndia conference in November in Mysore, India. The TED Fellows program looks for trailblazers and young people who have already accomplished much in their lives. It focuses on young people from the Asia/Pacific region, Africa, the Caribbean, Latin, America, and the Middle East, although anyone over the age of 18 from anywhere is welcome to apply.

Nitin was named as one of 103 TED Fellows this past year. The TED Conference started in 1984 as a way to bring together the worlds of Technology, Entertainment, and Design, but today its scope is even broader. People from the business and non-profit worlds alike participate.

Nitin, 23, had been inspired by TED talks, which are available online at www.ted.com. “The TEDIndia Conference had a strong development through enterprise focus, and there was a close fit between the kind of work they were going to talk about and my previous work in microfinance and the rural educational space in India. It was really an opportunity to hear from some of the biggest minds and biggest practitioners in the development space,” he said.

Before coming to MIT Sloan, Nitin had deferred admission to work for SKS Microfinance, which offers “small-ticket loans” to about 5 million women entrepreneurs in low-income communities across India. “Much of my time involved setting up schools across different parts of the state of Andhra Pradesh,” he said. Nitin has been passionate about education for many years, and earlier worked on an education project with Ayan Sarkar, MBA ’07.

Two years ago, Nitin founded his own project, Let Me Know (www.letmeknow.in), a unique education portal designed to give access to various educational opportunities to youths in India. “I’m deeply passionate about the idea that students, irrespective of where they come from, should have the same access to opportunities,” he said. Nitin is also the founder of Engineers for Social Impact, a fellowship program that connects engineers with for-profit social enterprises.

Nitin is pleased to have been named as a TED Fellow. “As a TED Fellow, you really just join a fairly incredible pool of innovators. You have an incredible network you can tap into when you need help for growing your ventures,” he said.
Ready, Set, Pitch

MarketLab, a sub-group of the Marketing Club, finished their semester long projects recently and presented their findings before judges, students, staff, and their MarketLab bosses. Students gave a one-minute elevator pitch and then answered questions at a poster session following the event. Winners will be announced in February. Look for an announcement in News@MIT Sloan then.

SDM Student Takes Second

SDM student Edoardo Cavalieri d’Oro won second place at a poster session held during the U.S. Department of Energy’s annual meeting on fuel cycle research and development. The award promotes the advancement of research and development in nuclear fuel cycles.

The title of Cavalieri D’Oro’s research is “A Risk-informed and Performance-based Framework to Assess the Proliferation Risk of Nuclear Energy Systems.” He competed against representatives from national labs and universities who are studying nuclear energy fuel cycles.

Cavalieri D’Oro’s prize, which he received on October 22, included a graphite piece from Chicago Pile-1 (CP-1), the first artificial nuclear reactor.
LGO Alum Named VP of GM’s Labor Relations

By Lois Slavin, LGO-SDM Communications Director

On December 4, Denise C. Johnson, LGO ’97, was named Vice President, Labor Relations by Ed Whitacre, Chairman and CEO of General Motors (GM).

Johnson joined GM in 1989 as an Associate Product Engineer. From 1995-1997 the company sponsored her as an LGO Fellow. After graduating from LGO’s dual degree program with an MBA from MIT Sloan and an SM in Mechanical Engineering from the MIT School of Engineering, she subsequently held various positions within GM’s engineering, manufacturing, and planning functions, prior to being named Area Manager at Lansing Car Assembly. She also served as the director of business planning for the North America Strategy Board from 2003 to 2005.

In addition, Johnson was named a recipient of the Automotive Hall of Fame Young Leadership and Excellence Award in 2002. “LGO taught me the value of nurturing relationships and networks as a key success factor,” said Johnson.

The program reinforces the development of a leadership style that embraces teamwork and consideration of diverse solution sets in order to drive results. “I would not trade my time in MIT LGO for any other university program or job experience.”

Toastmasters Club Weekly Meeting

Do you want to improve your presentation skills? Do you want to get better at off-the-cuff speaking? If so, come and join Toastmasters at the Chatter by the Charles Toastmasters Club weekly meeting. Toastmasters are a group of MIT students and professionals around the Kendall Square area interested in improving public speaking skills. The club provides guidance and a supportive environment for practice.

This event will be held Wednesday, December 16, from 12:30 – 1:30 p.m., in E19-306. Everyone is welcome. Please check our website for directions and any last minute changes in schedule and location. For more information contact Mehmet Yunt, info@chatterbythecharles.com or visit: www.chatterbythecharles.com.
Isshinryu Karate Practice

Come learn the basics of Isshinryu karate. The group focuses on individual technique and form, and de-emphasizes sparring and tournament-related activities.

This event takes place Monday, December 21, from 7:00 – 9:00 p.m., in 57-168. Beginners are always welcome and all classes are free! This event is open to MIT community only and occurs on Mondays and Wednesdays through August 10, 2011.

For more information contact: David Leung, isshinryu@mit.edu, or visit the website: http://www.mit.edu/~isshinryu.

Harvard Square Holiday Fair

Christmas Crafts Co-op

The Harvard Square Holiday Fair, one of the oldest and most popular fairs in Boston, will be open this year December 18-23. The fair is juried and includes a changing mix of New England craftspeople and world traveling importers. Many unique and affordable gift items will be available. This is not your average craft fair; it's more like a party where you can buy presents, where people see old friends, and make new ones, a taste of the old Harvard Square.

Visit the website for times and more information: www.harvardsquareholidayfair.com.

Did You Know...

That you can measure the distance from your house to MIT Sloan in Smoots? Just use Google Earth and pick Smoots from the ruler menu. Don't know what a Smoot is? Visit this website for more information: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smoot.
Connecting with Alumni Online

You may have noticed that MIT Sloan, the biannual alumni magazine, was distributed electronically earlier this month. It’s part of an ongoing sustainability effort at the School, and Editor Tom Witkowski, Director of Alumni Communications and Online Services recently spoke with us about the choice to publish online.

News@MITSloan: When was the decision made to go electronic?
TPW: The decision was made in spring 2009.

NAS: Who made the decision?
TPW: I made the decision in collaboration with Cindy Albert Link, Executive Director of the Office of External Relations, and Senior Associate Dean Alan White.

NAS: Why did you decide to do this?
TPW: At the start, this conversation was economically driven, but analysis showed us that the costs saved by reducing the number of printed magazines were not as significant as one might expect. We still had to create the content and design an electronic version, as well as print a limited number for alumni for whom we have snail mail addresses, but no e-mail addresses.

There are also the internal costs of building the website. These needs represent a major portion of the cost of producing the magazine. But as we analyzed our options, the conversation shifted and the goal became about being innovative and sustainable, rather than just saving money. As a publication of MIT Sloan we need to strive to be on the leading edge of how we engage our alumni and share information with them, and publishing a print product twice a year, while a key part of our strategy, cannot be the only communications vehicle we have.

NAS: You still printed some copies, correct?
TPW: We have printed about one-third of the previous number of magazines, so about 7,500 for each of the last two issues. These are printed for those for whom we have no current email address and in some cases for those who have expressed a preference for receiving a hard copy of the magazine.

NAS: Do you think that eventually the magazine will be completely electronic?
TPW: That is the direction in which we are heading. But for that to work, we must also continue to improve the magazine’s Web presence, and continue to find other ways to engage and share news and information with our alumni. The magazine, however it is produced in the future, is but one piece of a portfolio of ways in which we are telling the stories of MIT Sloan and MIT Sloan alumni.

NAS: Have you received any feedback yet?
TPW: We have. Many people have responded positively to the electronic version of the magazine, while some have also expressed a desire to continue receiving it in print. Their reasons include considering it pleasure reading, or they prefer to take it on the plane to read while traveling. I hope that, as we continue to improve the online version of the magazine, we will receive feedback not just on how we are distributing the magazine, but in the form of online conversations about the topics and news in the magazine.

—Amy MacMillan
This week EF&A

Name: Bridgette Hayes
Department, title: Economics, Finance, and Accounting/Administrative Assistant
Office location: E52-440
I last worked at: MBA Student Affairs Office at MIT Sloan
The last book I read was: The God Delusion.
Starbucks or Dunkin’ Donuts? Both, but I prefer the free coffee in the Dean’s office.
Red Sox, Patriots, Celtics, or Bruins? Or another favorite team: Philadelphia Phillies!
When I’m not at work, I like to: Write, do theatre, yoga, and play the piano.

Name: Krista Johnson
Department, title: Administrative Assistant in EF&A
Office location: E52-430
I last worked at: L.J. Quinn & Associates (an executive recruiter in Pasadena, CA)
The last book I read was: I’m reading Ulysses at the moment.
Starbucks or Dunkin’ Donuts? Whatever is the closest.
Red Sox, Patriots, Celtics, or Bruins? Or another favorite team: Celtics
When I’m not at work, I like to: Paint, take pictures, and cook.

—Sarah Foote

Welcome Krista Johnson (left) and Bridgette Hayes.

This is the last issue of News@MITSloan for the fall 2009 semester. The newsletter will be back in February. Good luck on finals. Happy Holidays, Sarah and Amy.

Safe travels over the holidays and IAP.