

Adoption Outreach: The Path to a Faster Adoption By Hal Kaufman

Job seekers who call upon their existing network of friends, family and business associates to enlist their support in their job search are more likely to find work faster than those job seekers who do not. We all know this to be true and many of us have experienced the benefits of networking firsthand. What many families hoping to adopt domestically fail to see, however, is how similar tactics can help them find their future child's birth family more quickly.

Adoption outreach refers to all of the actions that prospective adoptive families can take to find and be found by expectant parents considering adoption. Some families pursue a private adoption and are fully responsible for finding prospective birth families. Sometimes families work with adoption agencies or attorneys that provide matching services. It makes tremendous sense for families to leverage their network and market themselves appropriately.

What does it look like to do adoption outreach? In many ways it looks quite similar to what any of us might do to find a new job. Families send emails to relatives and friends and share their plans to adopt and ask their network to help them spread the word. They may hand out business cards and leverage social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter. Many families create a website with their family profile.

In some ways, adoption outreach differs from what most people do when looking for a job. Some prospective adoptive families create a family profile video and make it available on the Internet. The video is a great way to help expectant parents get to know you better. Depending on state adoption laws, some families advertise on the Internet or in print publications.

Why would a family do their own outreach when they are paying an adoption professional to do the same thing?

1. Because there are likely going to be more families adopting domestically and fewer women making adoption plans. The number of international adoptions was down 27% in 2009 and 44% in the last 5 years. The longer wait times and decrease in the number of healthy, young children who are available for adoption will cause many families to pursue domestic adoption over international adoption. The downward trend in the number of women making adoption plans is also expected to continue. More families hoping to adopt and fewer women making adoption plans means that the traditional adoption practices must change and families need to take a more active role in the process.
2. Because those women making adoption plans are more empowered and technologically savvy. We hear from more and more adoption professionals that expectant parents are learning about adoption and even finding adoptive families BEFORE ever coming to an agency or attorney's office. The Internet and social media specifically, are their tools of choice. Families who put all of their eggs in their

adoption professional's basket will be at a disadvantage to those who choose to complement their adoption professional's matching efforts with their own.

3. It's faster! Doing outreach does not compete with an adoption professional's marketing activities so there is no negative outcome with outreach in terms of speed. In the best case, the outreach results in a successful adoption before the more traditional approach would have done so. The worst case is a neutral outcome – the outreach does not result in a match and the adoption occurs through the more traditional process just as it would have without the family doing outreach.

What prevents families from taking a more active role in their adoption?

1. Awareness. Many families who wait for their adoption professional to find a match for them simply do not know that there are other choices. It is not until they have been waiting a year, two years or even longer before they start to sense that there must be another way.
2. Attitude. Many families fail to see the power and control they have in the adoption process, especially in the area of adoption outreach. Perhaps they experienced years of failed fertility treatments and simply feel disenfranchised about affecting any outcome related to family building. Perhaps they feel like the odds of succeeding with networking and marketing are not worth the effort.
3. Fear. Networking and marketing puts families “out there,” be it with friends and family, acquaintances or on the Internet. Some families fear not being supported in their journey by their network. Others fear that outreach is expensive or technically too difficult. Some families do not want to take calls from prospective birth families (taking calls directly is great to do, but certainly not required to do outreach). The key is for families to educate themselves with the facts and work closely with adoption professionals to alleviate their fears and manage the risks that exist with domestic adoption (outreach or not).

Families who “wait” to adopt are doing exactly that – they are remaining inactive in one place while expecting something. Who waits for a job? People look for a job and they work hard every day to make it happen. Families who are looking to adopt with the same intensity that they showed in finding a job, obtaining a degree, or battling infertility will build their families through adoption more quickly.

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