

What I learned from searching for my lost dog.

Even though we couldn't bring Pinner home in the way we wanted, I learned a lot about searching for lost dogs during the process. We were searching 24/7 for two weeks until we found his body. During that time, we tried a lot of things pretty much everything we (us and helpful volunteers) could think of.

A lot of people...A LOT...offered advice and sometimes it was overwhelming and/or conflicting to the point that there were several moments during those two weeks when I really doubted myself and the approach we were taking in the search.

Looking back, I truly believe we did everything we could have; and, in a series of future short posts, I would like to share my take everything in case it is of use or interest to others in the future. I did NOT come up with any of this on my own, it came from people who volunteered their time to help me including the people here on this page, [Lara Shaw from Angels Among Us Pet Rescue](#), members of [Southeast GSP Rescue](#) ..and more...you know who you are. Some of these people had lost pets in the past and this was their way of paying it forward, some of them are involved with animal rescue. Some of them were friends and some were strangers.. but they are all friends for life now.

While I work on this small project, remember to update your pet's microchip registration and info, ID on his/her collar; and, if you use an e-collar, pony up for the GPS-enabled collar. I just purchased the Dogtra GPS/training collar since I only had the Garmin training collar (no-GPS) before.

I'm going to try to organize the tips into a logical timeline, of what you may want to do early on and then go from there. A lot of the steps can be done simultaneously if you have a group of people who can help you. Also, if you are putting up signs and flyers during the day, you can do a lot of the internet stuff at night. For us, it was a 24-hour job to search for our dog - there was always something that could be done. Luckily, we had an incredible network of people willing to help us.

- Alert your microchip service of your lost dog. We used Homeagain and they put out a lost pet alert and created a flyer that we could distribute. They also send out this lost pet alert and flyer to all the veterinarians and shelters within a defined radius of the zip code you give them. *Note: You will still want to follow up with these clinics and shelters on your own because many of them were not actually aware of our lost dog even though the alert system had contacted them.*
- Flyers.
 - The flyer Homeagain created for the lost pet alert was great to distribute to vets but it was too heavy on the text for a general flyer. A flyer that has LOST DOG, the name, photo, and phone number to call is what I would recommend as essential information. Make sure the font is large, bold, and visible. You can also

include a reward if you are offering one. Some options are just "REWARD", "\$\$\$ REWARD \$\$\$" or a specific dollar amount for the reward.

- People will argue one side or the other as whether to put a specific dollar amount on the reward. We had flyers out with all of the above but did not find that people would call specifically about the reward. Most people who called us were genuinely wanting to help and not concerned with the reward that was on the flyer. That being said, my personal opinion would be to include "\$\$\$ REWARD \$\$\$" but not include a specific amount.
 - We printed the flyers in color and had FedEx Office hold them at their location so when a volunteer would contact me wanting to help, they could simply swing by FedEx and pick up some flyers to hang.
 - You can laminate the flyers but placing them in plastic sheet protectors and then using thumb tacks, strong double sided tape, or a staple gun to hang them is more affordable. When you use the sheet protectors for flyers put them upside down so the rain does not enter the top of the sheet protector.
 - We hung flyers on telephone poles (with staple gun) near stop signs and strategic intersections near neighborhoods, etc. where people would be stopping and waiting. Also in pedestrian-friendly areas where people would walk by and see the flyers. Some park services will not want you stapling flyers to trees so be conscious of that and other rules such as private property etc. If I was hanging a flyer at a business, I would always ask them first.
 - Starbucks has a bulletin board
 - Waffle House was always willing to let us hang a flyer
 - Most gas stations were willing to allow a flyer
 - Neighborhoods often have bulletin boards, mail kiosks, or club house areas where you can hang flyers
 - We hung flyers near the entrance/exit of the local schools because kids notice a lot more than adults do, sometimes! Plus, kids are typically very willing to help keep an eye out for the missing pet.
 - We gave flyers to the security staff at the local offices since they are out and about at all hours
 - We also hung flyers near dumpsters in the area
 - Local businesses seemed very willing to allow flyers on their property, franchises...not so much.
 - You can also had flyers to the mail delivery person, food delivery people in the area, UPS/FedEx/Amazon drivers, etc. We found most of them were happy to help keep an eye out for our dog even if they weren't willing to distribute the flyers. It doesn't hurt to ask.
 - Having two people working together to put up flyers is much more efficient than doing it yourself.
- Signs.
 - Double-sided weatherproof signs work best for busy intersections. Ours were 20"x24" and we worked with a local business who offered a discount for lost pet

signs. They were not exactly timely or convenient, but the price break was worth it. In the meantime, we picked up some single sided 18"x24" signs that were actually more expensive but to put up immediately.

- On the sign itself, we included "LOST DOG" in large bold print at the top and "\$\$\$ REWARD \$\$\$" in the same print at the bottom. The sign included a large picture of the dog and text near it that had a description, "Name, Gender, Weight, Age, Breed", Collar color/type, microchipped/neutered, "Take photo&text/call #", "Do not chase!!!", and then a location where the dog was lost (intersection, specific area). The phone number was in large bold print at the bottom, just above the \$\$\$ REWARD \$\$\$.
 - Some people like neon signs, we chose to go with a red/black/white approach. While the counties had sign ordinances, we were surprised how many of them were not taken down. I really think this is because they didn't look as tacky as neon signs.
 - We placed the signs at high traffic intersections so they could be seen from all directions. We placed them near shopping centers, gas stations, schools, neighborhoods, office complexes, interstate on/off ramps, long red lights, and churches. Fire stations were also willing to let us put signs up on their property when it was in a strategic location.
 - There are sign ordinances for each county. Some ordinances allow you to place signs 25 ft from a right of way, some cities don't allow any signage at all Monday-Friday at major intersections. Also keep in mind there may be HOAs that don't allow street signs. Find out from neighbors in the area if there are such rules otherwise you may be spending money on signs that get pulled immediately.
 - If we got a believable tip or sighting, we would move some signs to that area if it was further out than where our original signs were placed but we always left signs near where we lost him and where the last confirmed sighting was.
- Lost Pet Amber Alert.
 - There are a few of these including LostmyDoggie.com, FindToto.com, and Pawboost.com - we used LostmyDoggie and Pawboost.
 - On Pawboost, I chose to purchase the premium alert and then once the "featured pet" listing was available, I also purchased this. I'm not sure if the featured pet listing was worth it or not, but definitely utilizing the alert service was. As part of the PawBoost alert, they called all phone numbers within a defined distance radius and created a facebook page listing as part of the service. Anyone who is in their network or "likes" that facebook page sees these posts and can share on facebook.
 - Nextdoor.com
 - I found Nextdoor.com to be just as useful as putting out flyers and signs, plus you reach a very large audience very quickly. Not everyone uses Nextdoor.com, but many people do. You can only create a Nextdoor.com account with a verified address and email account, but if you type up a post with text and photo (and

image of your lost dog flyer), people can very easily copy and paste that to their Nextdoor.com neighborhood community. Make sure to remind people to select all surrounding neighborhoods to reach a wider audience.

- We started a Facebook community page for people to follow the search for our dog. On this page I would post zip codes and neighborhoods where I needed the Nextdoor.com post shared, along with the text and photos for them to easily cut and paste to share.
- Facebook.
 - As mentioned above, we created a Facebook community page where all updates related to our search were posted. I shared this page from my personal Facebook account and asked friends and neighbors do the same to spread the word.
 - On the Facebook page, I included a pinned post at the top that included the latest confirmed sighting information and my contact information. All other posts would be visible if you scroll through the page.
 - I was surprised at how many Facebook pages exist for Lost/Found Dogs in the community by state, county, and city. Be sure to post on each one of these or ask people to help share your post on all these pages. Also, share your lost dog post on the Facebook pages for the local shelters, veterinarians, and Buy/Sell/Trade pages relevant for all the areas in your search.
 - Someone also suggested I run location-targeted Facebook and Instagram Ads and it turned out to be very easy and relatively inexpensive. You can run the ad for a few days per week in the exact zip codes you are searching in. Our add was basically a simple image of the dog with a very limited amount of text. The point of the ad was to direct people to our community Facebook page for more information. The ad ran on both Facebook and Instagram.
 - I will say, I believe most of the bait called I received for the reward \$\$\$ came from people seeing these Facebook and Instagram ads. They would call with possible sightings and some would ask about the reward, some wouldn't. However, just be aware that this can happen and it's up to you on whether you follow up on these leads or how far you engage with these people. Always ask for a photo - if they are not willing to send a photo or can't really provide a description then there's a good chance it's not a real lead.

That brings me to another point on leads/tips/sightings. Some people may just be out for the reward if you are offering one, and some people just genuinely want to help so bad that they will tell you they are SURE they saw your dog and describe the dog so well that even you believe them. The following text is taken from a website regarding eyewitness testimony and memory construction:

*“Because memory is so fragile, witnesses can be easily (and often accidentally) misled due to the problem of suggestibility. **Suggestibility** describes the effects of misinformation from external sources that leads to the creation of false memories....we are vulnerable to the power of suggestion, simply based on something we see on the news. Or we can claim to remember something that in fact is only a suggestion someone made. It is the suggestion that is the cause of the false memory.”*

Believing these tips did lead us down a lot of wild goose chases but it was difficult for me to ignore them altogether. In the end, it turned out ALL of the tips and sightings I received were incorrect. However, I will say, there was an unusual amount of missing dogs that were recovered that week that looked so similar to my dog. So, I really can't blame these eyewitnesses at all! The biggest take home point is that people were aware of my missing dog and they were willing to help and contact me. The more volunteers you have who can help you search an area and/or put up flyers/signs in these areas where you receive sightings/tips, the easier it is to follow up on each one until you have a reason not to.

- Check the local shelters daily - especially if they don't have a mandatory holding period for dogs who are brought in. Also, they may not always pick up the microchip number even if your dog has one. It's best to either go in yourself or ask a trusted friend or volunteer in the area to check in daily.
- Contact veterinarians yourself by phone and/or drop off a flyer - I was surprised how many offices weren't aware of our missing dog in their area even though the Homeagain alert and Pawboost amber alert supposedly went out to them.
- Twitter.
 - I am not a big Twitter user but a lot of media outlets and local newscasters (radio, TV, newspapers) etc. and local businesses use it. Many of these individuals are animal lovers and are willing to help retweet your posts so you can reach a wider local audience.
- Change your voicemail greeting. You don't want to miss any calls, so make sure you change your voicemail greeting so people know to leave a message and/or text you with a photo and as many details as possible so you can follow up with them ASAP.
- Billboards.
 - We did not run a billboard ad but some other people we know in other areas were able to get billboard time donated. It's worth checking into and asking your search network for any contacts in the industry who could help with this.
- Craigslist.

- Search Craigslist daily for any dogs that may have been posted in Lost/Found or For Sale
- You can also post your lost dog on Craigslist with your contact info, but you may get some false leads and people who are digging for the reward. In two weeks, we received two fake texts from people who said they had our dog..but neither of them would provide any detail or a photo. It was pretty obvious to us that these were Craigslist scammers.

The next set of items pertains to the actual physical search.....

- Follow water sources. If a dog has found a water source, he/she will likely stick close to it
- Follow train tracks and power lines.
- The dog should typically make his way to somewhere familiar (e.g. the last place you saw him or home)
- Dogs will be attracted by the smell of food - check restaurants, fast food joints, dumpsters, hotels, etc.
- Don't make assumptions. Don't assume your dog had to have gone a certain way or would do a certain thing. Sure, we know our dogs but making assumptions can be extremely detrimental to the search. Keep your mind open and follow leads as they come.
- Do not chase or follow
 - One of the biggest things for people to know if they see your dog is to not follow them. Dogs can tell if they are being followed and it may cause them to run if they feel pursued or chased.
- To call or not to call?
 - You will know your dog the best. Some dogs, if very social, may come to someone random who is calling their name. However, even social dogs will become frightened and eventually feral the longer they are lost.
 - After 24 hours of our dog being missing, we asked people who were searching to not call his name. At that point, I was unsure if he would even come to his family if he was that scared.
 - As the owners, we would call his name *only in certain locations* - 1) the location where we last had contact with him ourselves and 2) from location where we believed he was likely last sighted.

- We sometimes used a squeaky toy and others did as well if they were searching. This could be a way to entice the dog out of hiding instead of calling his/her name.
- To leave food/treats?
 - Do not scatter food or treats everywhere you are searching.
 - Set up a food station only at the location of where you last saw your dog and/or wherever you have a believable recent sighting.
 - Ask searching volunteers to not trail food everywhere because if your dog is out there, you want him or her to stay in one place, not to be traveling the streets searching out food that he/she knows people are leaving out.
 - If there's dumpsters and/or restaurants and grocery stores in the area, you can set up your own food station there if you think your dog may be visiting the dumpster to find food or if you had a recent sighting near there.
- Take a picture if at all possible and then contact the number on the flyer with the photo and any details of the sighting (location including intersection or address, time of day, day of the week, direction the dog was heading, identifying marks on the dog, demeanor/energy level, etc.)
- What to do if you see the dog very close to you?
 - Do not follow or chase
 - Do not yell or talk loudly
 - In a soft voice, encourage the dog to come as you get low to the ground or even lay flat on the ground
 - Do not reach out to grab the dog too quickly as you may scare him/her away
 - If you have food or treats, that may entice the dog to come closer.
 - If you have another dog with you, or a squeaky toy, that may also entice the dog to come to you
 - Be gentle and leash the dog if/when you have the opportunity.
 - If you are unsuccessful, do not chase or follow. Contact the number on the flyer ASAP and let the owner(s) know about the encounter with as much detail as possible.
- Scent stations.
 - In the same area where you set up a food station, only at the location of where you last saw your dog and/or wherever you have a believable recent sighting, leave some of your belongings that have your scent...t-shirts, sheets/pillowcase, underwear, etc. You can also rub kleenex on your body to get your scent on it and drop them around your scent station because they will biodegrade.
 - Pee around your scent station - others also suggested peeing in a spray bottle and spraying the area around your scent station to attract your dog.
- Trail cameras.

- Trail cameras are useful at your scent/food station. Set up a camera in line of sight where you leave the food.
 - This camera is great, easy to use, and has a date and time stamp on the images: <https://www.dickssportinggoods.com/p/wildgame-innovations-terra-ir-trail-camera-10mp-17wgiutr10mprswrtch/17wgiutr10mprswrtch>
 - You will need to purchase batteries and a memory card up to 32 GB separately.
 - Secure the camera to a nearby tree that is in the line of sight where you set the food bowl to catch the animal eating. It should be set at the appropriate height to capture the animal in the image - not too high, not too low. Secure it with a bungee cord around the tree.
 - In a plastic disposable food bowl in front of the camera, place a combination of dry and wet dog food, hot dogs, rotisserie chicken, etc. Also, scatter a couple milk bones and rawhide bones in the area taking note of where you placed them. You can also sprinkle dog food on the ground around the food bowl to keep the animal in the vicinity of the camera and increase your chance of getting him/her on camera.
 - From a few different directions, you can trail a scent to lead the animal to the food bowl which should not be in plain sight or in a high traffic area. Use dog food, hot dogs, and liquid smoke to create a scent trail to the bowl.
 - Coyotes and raccoons will eat the human food but will typically not eat the dry dog food or milk bones or rawhides. If you see the bones gone and/or the dry food eaten, chances are it was a dog and not another type of animal.
- Humane traps.
 - We never got to the point of putting out a trap because we never had a real sighting on camera. You need to know where to put the trap and then you need to be out there to watch it once it's set up in location with food. In my opinion, you should work with someone who has experience using them...if you can reach out to someone from a local animal rescue organization or animal control, they may be able to help you.
- Drones and security cameras.
 - If you have access to a drone and pilot, this could be very useful. We did not.
 - If there are any office buildings, parking garages, schools, residential communities, etc. that may have security cameras, you can ask to see the footage if you believe your dog may have been in the area.
- Tracking Dog.
 - A tracking dog is not a guarantee to find your missing dog. It's a tool, just like everything else here. Think of it as a possible way to help you narrow down your search area, which can be especially helpful if you have not had any sightings.
 - There are some big-time big-money lost pet tracking services out there. We spoke to one who was going to charge \$2600 just to show up, then you have to

pay them tracking time plus travel expenses. It just wasn't feasible for us given there was no guarantee they would even find our dog.

- We found a local tracking dog and handler who charged approximately \$150. The dog seemed to know what he was doing and didn't waste any time. Unfortunately, it didn't end up helping us. If you want more details about it, I'd be happy to discuss how it played out.
- Pet psychic/dog whisperer/communicator.
 - This is an absolute last resort in my opinion. We worked with two and the first one was pretty harsh and off the mark. The second one was much easier to talk with, she took her time, and even seemed to have enough clues about the situation that I really believed her. Again, unfortunately, she totally missed the mark and it was not helpful to us in the search.
 - Going into this, you have to be OK with whatever they tell you - they may tell you that your dog is dead and will give you the details if you want them. They may tell you that your dog ran away and doesn't want to come home...and possibly even why. Also keep in mind, they could be wrong. This is a hard thing to go through being that you are likely already in a very stressed and emotional state. I know pet psychics have led others to finding their missing pets but, in our case, it was a waste of time and energy and worse yet, an unnecessary added emotional rollercoaster.
- Conducting a thorough and extensive search can be a financial burden. There are never any guarantees, but people are often willing to help with donations, especially if they can't volunteer their time to help you search. If you choose to use GoFundMe.com be very clear about what you are asking for and what you will use the donations for. If the donations exceed your spending, also be clear about what you will do with the leftover donations (i.e. donate them to a specific animal shelter or organization).

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