

Surfing For A Good Breeder

How to Decipher Purebred Web Sites

~ Jessica Breinholt, Kaylenberg Siberians ~

Thanks to the Internet, prospective owners have unlimited new sources when looking for a puppy or adult dog. In addition to sites specializing in behavior, care training, and even determining which breed is right for you, many breed-specific clubs now have web sites available, as well, which provide incredible sources of information when researching a pure bred dog. To top it off, there are more individual breeders and organizations available through personal web sites.

When looking for a puppy, searching for a breeder online can be a tricky process; you are exposed to information created by the individual themselves for public consumption. This is why it is important to remember the differences between the ethical, responsible breeder, and the irresponsible breeder; these differences frequently appear in the way their web sites are designed. Typically, there are two kinds of websites developed by breeders of purebred dogs: Those created to showcase the breeder's kennel and accomplishments, and those created to sell puppies. The former type of site belongs to the responsible breeder. The irresponsible breeder creates the latter.

Why Do Ethical Breeders Create Websites?

Ethical breeders (by definition those who screen for genetic problems and prove their dogs' quality through shows and working events) create sites in order to share information. To brag, if you will. For example, I created this site because I wanted to showcase my dogs. I wanted to display their photos, pedigrees and accomplishments, both for other Siberian breeders, as well as those interested in the breed. Plus, after my first crack at website creation, I was hooked!

Why Do Irresponsible Breeders Create Websites?

Irresponsible breeders breed for money. Their primary interest is not to share information about their dogs, but to sell their puppies. For them, a web site is just another way to advertise a litter, not unlike a classified ad.

Okay, So Where Should I Start Looking for My New Puppy?

When using the web to search for breeders, there are a few things you should be aware of. All-breed "puppy finder" websites (i.e. puppyfind.com, nextdaypets.com, etc.) are not the best place to start your search. These sites are primarily used by puppy mills and unethical breeders, who sell puppies with bogus health guarantees and sometimes even lie about the puppies they have for sale. **The best place to start your online search for a breeder is through the breed's Parent Club.** In the case of the Siberian Husky, this would be the Siberian Husky Club of America website (www.shca.org). Nearly every Parent Club website these days has a Breeder Referral section to help people all over the USA find a responsible, ethical breeder close to them; the SHCA is no exception! Many of the breeders listed on the Parent Club's breeder referral pages have websites, as well.

What to Look for When Surfing Siberian Sites

Because of the difference in intent, breeders' sites can have a slightly different feel, depending on what kind of breeder you are dealing with. When you type "Siberian Husky Breeders" into a search engine and start digging through the results, the following questions can help you determine what kind of breeder a site represents:

- **MOST IMPORTANTLY....What do they do with their dogs?**

Does the breeder mention showing or running their dogs? Are there show photos of the dogs winning various prizes? If not, are there photos of the dogs running on a team, perhaps even in a race? Do the activities the breeder participates in with their dogs seem to be of primary importance on the site? If not, what *is* the primary focus of the site? Ethical breeders, without exception, participate in *some* type of activity in order to prove their dogs worthy of breeding. If the primary focus of the site is puppies, you are in the wrong place.

- **When, where, and how often are puppies/litters mentioned on the home page?**

If the site mentions "specializing" in puppies, or discusses latest litter information multiple times within the first several pieces of text, you are dealing with an irresponsible breeder. Certainly, responsible breeders will mention their litters; however they will not be the central issue.

- **Do they mention genetic health clearances?**

Irresponsible breeders don't typically perform health clearances on their dogs, because they aren't educated, don't want to spend the money, or simply don't care. A responsible breeder will mention OFA (**O**rt**H**opedic **F**oundation for **A**nimals) clearances against hip dysplasia, as well as listings with canine eye-health foundations such as CERF (**C**anine **E**ye **R**egistration **F**oundation) or SHOR (**S**iberian **H**usky **O**phthalmic **R**egistry). Certification numbers from these organizations may even be posted on the dog's page. If the breeder makes excuses for *not* having their dogs tested, realize that they are doing just that: making excuses.

- **When discussing puppies, what do they say about coat/eye colors?**

If the site makes claims of "rare" coat colors (such as pure white) or gives common colors an "exotic" name (such as "chocolate" for red and white), go somewhere else. Ethical breeders understand that no one coat color is "better" or "more rare" than any other, and that color does *not* constitute a valid reason to breed. The same can be said for blue eyes.

- **Do they post pedigrees? If so, what do they look like?**

Ethical breeders post pedigrees, typically so that other breeders can see the backgrounds on their dogs. The fact that they do so shows knowledge and interest in their dogs' ancestry. Conversely, a "breeder" who does not include pedigrees either does not know his dogs' background, or doesn't think it's important.

If pedigrees are posted, pay close attention to them. Do the dogs have titles? These

prove that the breeder is somehow active and involved with their dogs. Here are some titles to watch for:

- **Ch. - "Champion"**. This means that the dog has completed its show championship. There may be other initials preceding the "Ch." to designate the country in which it was earned.
- **SD/SDO/SDX - "Sled Dog (Outstanding/Excellent)"**. These titles refer to varying degrees of achievement in sled dog sports.
- **CD/CDX/UD - "Companion Dog/Excellent/Utility Dog"**. These are obedience titles.
- **NA/OA/AX - "Novice/Open Agility/Agility Excellent"**. These are agility titles.

Look also for consistent naming conventions throughout the pedigree. Do the same kennel names continue to appear? This shows evidence of a breeding program. If the pedigree contains *neither* titled dogs *nor* kennel names, the pedigree is more than likely based on generations of irresponsible or even puppy-mill (pet store) breeding...which means that the "breeders" have no idea what health problems may exist in their dogs' ancestry. It is important to beware of breeders who claim their dogs come from "championship lines". Check the pedigree...if those champions do not appear until the 4th + generation back, you are more than likely dealing with someone who is trying to capitalize on the fact that their dogs (eventually) go back to responsible breeders. Who knows what health and temperament problems have been introduced since then?

NOTE: Keep in mind that some Racing Siberian kennels may not have titled dogs; they should, however, have consistent kennel names, and lines that you can follow through the generations.

- **How Are Their Dogs Registered?**

Beware of a breeder who uses an un-established, "alternative" registry to provide "papers" on their dogs. Due to the recent changes on registration made in the AKC (American Kennel Club), many irresponsible breeders and puppy mills in the United States are no longer able to meet registration requirements, and are looking for a cheaper way to make their dogs seem "legitimate". This has led to the use of for-profit registries, which will grant "official registration" to nearly any dog. These registries do not require proof that the dogs they register are purebred...in fact, many of them will register mixed-breeds as "new breeds". When examining a website, it is important to make sure that the breeder uses a well-established, traditional registry, such as the AKC or CKC (Canadian Kennel Club) in North America.

Other Things to Consider:

Details on the individual dogs on a breeder's web site can also offer telling information. When reading information posted on the dogs themselves, pay close attention to items such as age, and the number of times the dog has been bred. If, for example, a female is listed at three years old, and has already been bred twice, it stands to reason that her first litter was whelped before the age of two years. Ethical breeders will not breed a dog before the age of two years

(whether male or female); this is because their hips cannot be properly certified against displaysia until this age, and also because the average dog is not fully physically mature until at least 24 months.

You may also want to take note of how many males there are in the kennel compared to females, and how many litters these males have sired. Unethical breeders very often have one to three males and a "harem" of females, as it is very easy to use one male to impregnate several females. Very often, one male will be the sire of two or more "upcoming", or already-whelped, litters. This is a sign that the "breeder" is paying no attention to how the male will genetically complement their females, but is only concerned with how many puppies they can produce and sell.

Why Should You Pay Attention?

You may be thinking, 'Well, what difference does all of this make? Why should I be concerned if I'm just looking for a pet?' Hopefully, by now, you've gotten a feel for what separates the responsible breeder from the irresponsible breeder. Basically, it is a dedication to the breed itself, rather than a dedication to making puppies. Dedication to the breed results from - and in turn prompts - a desire for knowledge; and knowledge is the best thing you can ask for when looking for a puppy. The knowledge of a good breeder will ensure that your puppy will be well-socialized and healthy throughout its life. It will ensure that if you ever have questions about training, behavior or the breed in general, you know who can answer them – throughout your dog's life. It will also ensure that, for whatever reason, your dog will always have a home to go back to...throughout its life.

A puppy is a big commitment – why wouldn't you ask for the same commitment from the person who bred it?

Last Thoughts: On "Legitimacy"

One of the great things about the Internet is that it provides infinite access to information of all kinds. It allows people to see what other people have to say about, well, anything! As a result, irresponsible breeders developing or advertising through web sites have ample access to information from responsible breeders, and – coupled with the public's growing understanding of ethical breeding practices – this often makes them feel as if they have to "compete" with the more responsible breeders' claims. They have to make themselves seem "legitimate".

Thus, you will often see irresponsible breeder and puppy mill sites who advertise status as "professional breeders". These are, ironically, just the types of breeders you should avoid. Ethical breeders are by no means "professional"; if we could make enough money selling puppies to quit our *real* professions, we would be doing something wrong! I often tell people that showing, running, and breeding dogs sometimes seems like a black hole that I dump all of my money into...it is a passion, a hobby, and a lifestyle...the money is not what drives us.

The same caveat applies to breeders who claim to be "USDA licensed" or "regulated". The United States Department of Agriculture regulates the care and breeding of "stock" - such as cattle, chickens, and puppy mill dogs. If a breeder requires USDA regulation, it simply means that they mass-produce dogs.

Also beware of sites who boast about the fact that their breeding dogs are "our beloved pets"

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or that their puppies are "raised underfoot", as if these things were major 'selling points'. These things are a *given* with an ethical dog breeder, which you will see when you visit them in person (which you certainly should!). For a responsible breeder, however, dogs are *more* than pets. They are show dogs, sled dogs, and companions. They do more than simply hang around the house and have a litter every year; they are a **major** part of our lives.

So, to sum it up:

Irresponsible breeders create websites to sell their puppies.

Responsible breeders create websites to celebrate their devotion!

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