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## Facebook Makes Adoption Easier for Prospective Parents

### Social Media Helps Agencies Place Children More Efficiently

By [Emily Bryson York](#)

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CHICAGO (AdAge.com) -- Here's an intersection of social media and marketing you may not have considered: connecting adoptive parents with birth mothers. Adoption agencies are beginning to use social-media sites to recruit women with unplanned pregnancies, and adoptive parents are getting savvier about using sites to make their case for a child in an open and honest manner.



**BETHANY:** Nation's largest adoption agency used Facebook to place children faster.

"Generally, with people 18 to 28, their Facebook page is open all of the time and it's a place they look for all sorts of information," said Joan Jaeger, VP-marketing, The Cradle, an Evanston, Ill.-based adoption agency. "Families that are connected to Facebook can say, 'Here's what our family is like.' It's a way for women to not just hear about the family, but see the pictures and their story. It can be a really personal way to connect."

The Cradle has focused its marketing efforts on the Yellow Pages and public-service announcements in the past, but in ramping up social-media efforts over the past year, it has found it's able to place more children more quickly through social media. The organization has built an instructional video for creating profile pages that connect with birth mothers. Adoptive parents can also make videos that give a better sense of their personality and home life to birth mothers, who are often single, economically

disadvantaged and may have a hard time relating to a photo and bullet points on a profile page.

Jeremy Nueman and his wife, Christy, were selected by their birth mother within one month of posting a YouTube video in which Mr. Nueman did a dance while making pancakes. "She said it reminded her of something her dad would do," Mr. Nueman said. And so the Nuemans adopted their son Caleb, now 1, within 10 months of beginning the paperwork with their agency, a process they were told could take 18 months to several years.

But, like big marketers, adoption agencies are just getting started in social media. Marc Andreas, VP-marketing and communications for Bethany Christian Services, the nation's largest adoption agency, said his organization set up a Facebook outpost this summer, around the time an adoption organization in China offered them 41 special-needs children to place with adoptive parents. Bethany has traditionally focused its matchmaking efforts on a quarterly magazine with photos and profiles of prospective parents to help women get a sense of what her baby's home life might be like. But the process takes several months. Using the Facebook page, Bethany placed 31 of the children within one month.

Now, the organization, which spends about 5% of its \$65 million budget on marketing, is exploring social media for some of these efforts, though the spending remains small compared to more traditional options. To the parents, domestic newborn adoptions cost between \$10,000 and \$25,000. The federal government often picks up the tab for older children living in the foster-care system. International adoptions, which often require more legal work, cost between \$30,000 and \$40,000. The bulk of costs is for lawyers, and in some cases, reimbursing agencies for a portion of their expenses. Most adoption agencies have to conduct extensive fundraising to make their budgets.

"It's an incredibly useful tool for domestic, open adoption," said Jeff Risley, VP-PR and social media at Barkley. Mr. Risley has adopted three children, two of them from Colombia last summer, and one from Guatemala in 2002. He recalled his attorney's first suggestion at the time: Market yourself. "Call and e-mail friends, anybody who knows somebody who's young and wants to put their baby up for adoption," he said of the first conversation seven years ago. "That's how you get started, but imagine what happens when you use Twitter, Facebook and blogging? It gets much easier to find someone."

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## Prospective parent marketing

Acting natural isn't always easy for first-time adoptive parents, particularly those who don't already have second lives in social media. Adoption agencies like The Cradle work to help clients build honest, informative and empathetic profiles geared toward expectant and sometimes disadvantaged women who would otherwise be unlikely to friend them. Here are some highlights from the agency's 64-slide video.

- **Open up:** Using your own words is the only way to be unique, and profiles only work when they seem real.
- **Find a hook:** Like a resume, each profile may only get a few seconds, so find a way to stand out. Personal anecdotes can be particularly powerful.
- **Consider the audience:** Most birth mothers are 18-28, many already have children and have split with the baby's father. However, know that most birth parents view their adoption decision as a way to demonstrate love for their unborn child.

Most adoptive families are chosen because of a shared interest or common value with their child's birth parent, such as upbringing, entertainment preferences or favorite foods.

Don't alienate them with your job or education; they want to know your job, but don't want to hear much about it. They do want to know what skills you need to do it, and how you'll balance work and family.

- Try brutal honesty: A birth mother referenced in the tutorial chose adoptive parents with alcoholism in the family. Hers had it too, and she thought they could understand if it happened with the child.
- Discuss your status: If you're a couple, how did you meet and fall in love, and what led you to consider adoption? If you're single, explain why you've decided to take this on by yourself, and what other role models the child will have, particularly those of the opposite sex.
- Communicate excitement and empathy: Mothers are looking for enthusiastic parents who can also be understanding of their position. And leave the door open for a continuing relationship. Most adoptions done this way lead to an ongoing relationship with the birth mother.

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