



Using behavioural insights to increase dog fine payments



Trial increases payment rates by 69%

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Background

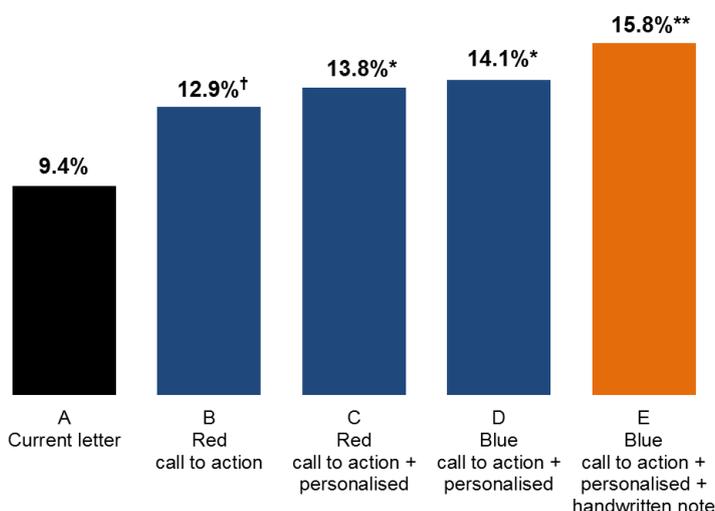
Auckland Council’s Animal Management Unit issues more than 5000 dog infringements per year. Current payment rates are low, resulting in a large number of infringements being referred to a Ministry of Justice court process that imposes additional sanctions on recipients. RIMU partnered with Animal Management to apply behavioural insights to improve infringement letters, with the goal of increasing payment rates.

The trial

Drawing on work undertaken by the Australian Behavioural Insights Team to increase on-time payment of fines¹, we developed four new cover letters to accompany a legally-mandated infringement notice (see the following pages for a description of the different cover letters). The letters drew on a number of behavioural principles to increase comprehension, increase ease of payment, and to motivate action. The effectiveness of each of the four new letters was tested, along with the current letter, using a randomised control trial. A total of 2285 letters were sent between September 2018 and February 2019.

The results show a notable increase in payment rates. The most successful letter was characterised by a blue call to action and softer language (e.g. use of ‘please’ and highlighting the ‘ease of payment’), a high level of personalisation, and a handwritten message on the envelope. This increased payment rates by 69% (reflecting a 6.4 percentage point increase).

Percentage of recipients who paid their fine



Difference from current letter: ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$.

¹ We used (with permission) the general template developed by the NSW BIT, described here: <https://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/programs-and-services/behavioural-insights/projects/increasing-on-time-payment-of-fines/>

Implications

The trial demonstrates how low or no-cost changes to infringement cover letters can significantly increase payment rates.

The results show that:

- There appears to be no benefit of using (relatively) firmer language and a bold red call to action, compared to softer language and a blue call to action.
- Personalisation, in the form of including the recipient's name in the greeting, increased payment rates by 6.7% (reflecting a 0.9 percentage point increase), compared to the same letter without a greeting.
- The addition of a hand-written note on the outside of the envelope increased payment rates by 11.8% (reflecting a 1.7 percentage point increase), compared to the same letter without a hand-written note.

There are still a number of areas for improvement. Payment rates, although improved, are still low and we will be working to further improve the letters over the coming months. Additional improvements are also being trialled in relation to the reminder letter that is sent if payment is not received after the first infringement notice.

The cover letters that were tested

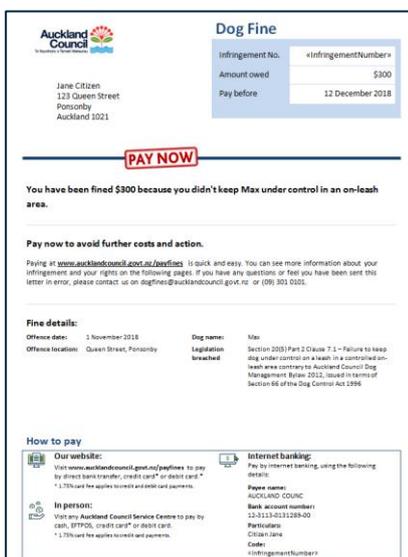


Letter A: Current cover letter

Main characteristics:

- Legalistic and difficult to understand
- No payment deadline included
- Payment information not provided (some payment options provided on the subsequent formal infringement notice under 'remittance advice')

Payment rate: 9.4 per cent

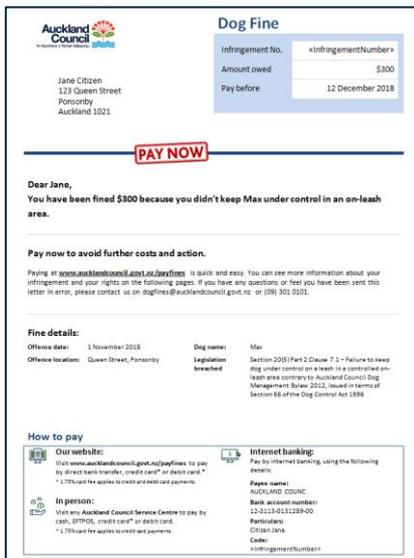


Letter B: Red call to action

Main characteristics:

- Letter clearly titled as a 'Dog Fine'
- Important information in a blue 'call out box'
- Payment deadline provided
- Red 'PAY NOW' stamp acting as a bold call-to-action
- Simplified language, including a plain-language description of the offence
- Use of the dog's name
- Loss avoidance framing to encourage prompt payment
- Inclusion of a direct URL to the fine payment page
- Direct email address provided to facilitate enquiries
- A 'How to pay' section provided with a range of payment options

Improvement over Letter A: 38% (+3.6 percentage points)

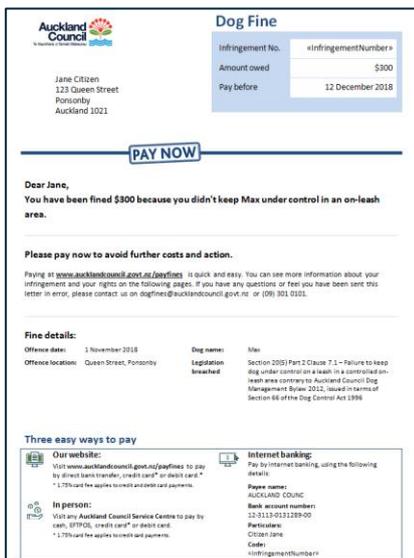


Letter C: Red call to action + personalised

Main characteristics:

- The same as 'Red call to action', with the additional use of the recipient's first name as salutation.

Improvement over Letter A: 47% (+4.4 percentage points)



Letter D: Blue call to action + personalised

Main characteristics:

- As per 'Red call to action + personalised' with the following modifications:
 - Softer blue 'PAY NOW' stamp
 - Softer language, including the use of 'Please' and an emphasis on the ease of paying.

Improvement over Letter A: 51% (+4.8 percentage points)



Letter E: Blue call to action + personalised + handwritten note

Main characteristics:

- The same as 'Blue call to action + personalised', with the addition of a personalised handwritten note on the outside of the envelope stating "[Name], you really need to open this!"

Improvement over Letter A: 69% (+6.4 percentage points)

Find out more:

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