

# Microchip databases – the facts

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Beverley graduated from Leeds Metropolitan University with a BA(Hons) Business Studies Degree and, following a brief role with a PR agency, has worked in product marketing roles for the last nine years. She has been working with Animalcare Ltd as Product Manager for idENTICHIP and Anibase since February 2012.

**ABSTRACT:** With compulsory microchipping fast approaching, more and more of your clients will have questions to ask regarding microchips, databases and just how they are of benefit should their pet get lost or stolen. Are you confident you can answer all these questions?

Research shows that the 'reunification' process is perceived to be a complicated issue for both pet owners and veterinary professionals. This article is designed to give you the facts to help you guide your clients through the process.

## What is a microchip?

While there are a number of different microchips out there in the market today, with slightly different characteristics and features, the basic premise is always the same – a microchip is an inert object and is completely useless without the correct data securely stored on one of the approved microchip databases.

Despite popular belief, it is not a GPS tracking device that can locate 'Poppy' at the push of a button; neither is owner information stored within a microchip for all to see when 'Poppy' is scanned!

A pet microchip has three components: an antenna to transmit a signal; a capacitor that boosts the signal so that it can be detected by the scanner; and a microchip with a unique 15-digit number programmed into it. They remain completely inactive until scanned. Then the microchip transmits its unique number to the scanner and this number is displayed on the scanner screen.

One of the biggest problems faced by microchip suppliers and databases when trying to reunite lost pets with their owners is inaccuracy of the data they hold. Returning a lost pet to its owner is virtually impossible if we cannot get in touch with them. Out-of-date phone numbers, addresses and even owner names, combined with the fact that many pets were never initially registered, completely negates the effort of microchipping in the first place.

## What is Backtrack?

All UK microchips have a 'backtrack' system in place; but some processes vary so it is extremely important that you understand how it works on the particular microchips you use in order to ensure the system works to full effect.

Animalcare runs the Anibase Pet Database and also supplies idENTICHIP microchips. These have 'visibility' of the process right from the warehouse to the pet owner registering the microchipped pet (**Figure 1**).

All idENTICHIP microchips are scanned and allocated to a veterinary practice before they leave the company. This means that as soon as your order is despatched, the microchips contained in that order are registered on the Anibase Database to your practice.

This gives you and your clients the extra reassurance that a microchipped pet can be traced back to you even before the database registration is complete. So should the worst happen, lost pets can be traced to their veterinary practice and their owner's details provided from your own systems.

## Registration – the importance and the options

As well as the misunderstandings surrounding how a microchip works, many pet owners feel they have done their job once the microchip is

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implanted. They simply don't realise their responsibility has only just begun – the microchip needs to be registered and the registration needs to be maintained.

Phone numbers and addresses must be kept up to date for the best possible chance to reunite pets with their owners. If the pet moves on to a new owner, the registration on the database needs to move with it.

Additional options, such as holiday addresses, should they take their pet away with them, or leave it with a relative, are also extremely valuable and give us the best possible chance of reuniting lost pets quickly and easily.

There are a number of ways to register a microchip:

- practice online registration
- owner online registration
- paper registration form (by Post)

Many practices choose to use the paper registration forms rather than registering pets online; and while this system is still extremely effective, it does carry a couple of disadvantages – the first being the time taken between a microchip being implanted and the form reaching the database and being registered.

The second issue is that many of your clients will leave your practice clutching the registration form, firmly believing that it is the microchip certificate and the process is complete. Either that, or they will head off with every intention of registering the microchip – but finally getting round to it can take any number of days, weeks or months. That is, if they remember to register the microchip at all!

The 'instant' online registration option is a great service to offer clients if you can do this yourselves in practice; but in some cases, the time involved or the systems you use can mean it simply isn't possible.

Most of the database providers now offer registration through your practice management system, which is quick, easy and familiar to you. Remember to check though, that you have correct and up-to-date details for your client before you complete the registration!

Anibase also offers owner online registration, giving the option for owners to register their pets online themselves – thereby reducing the risk of inaccurate

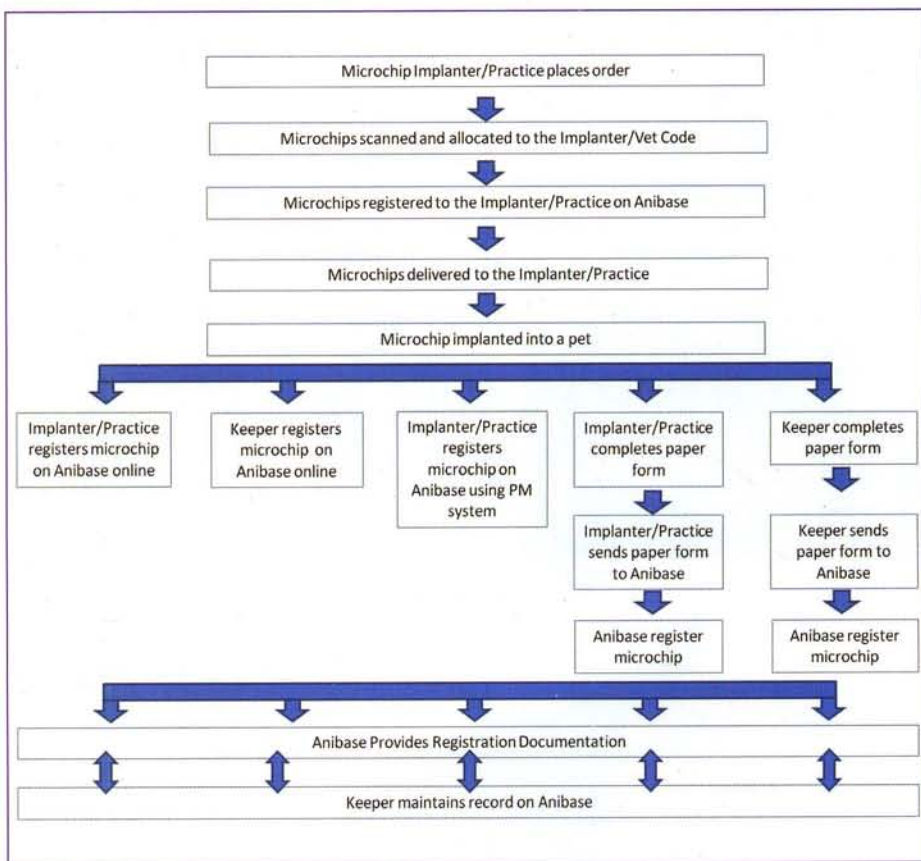


Figure 1. The microchipping process

data capture while also closing the time gap between implantation and registration.

With so many options to register pets there really is no excuse for the large number of records we see on a daily basis where the chip is still registered to the veterinary practice/implanting establishment (charity/groomer) despite having left the premises implanted in an animal sometime ago!

## Education, education, education

Education and full practice involvement is key from the very beginning of the process.

Ensuring your clients leave with full knowledge of how the microchip works and their responsibility regarding the registration and maintenance of the data ultimately helps us to get lost pets home more quickly and easier.

When clients make changes to the records you hold in practice, please take the opportunity to ask if they have also updated their microchip record. If their pet isn't microchipped, this is a great way to introduce the concept to them and provides an additional way for you to

sell the product and the peace of mind it brings.

Capturing correct and up-to-date information on the databases can also stretch far beyond reunification, and we encourage owners of pets suffering from long-term illnesses and requiring ongoing medication to add this to the database record. If the pet goes missing, we can then alert any finder to this treatment requirement should a call be made to us.

You can enhance client experience and give increased value by passing advice such as this on when talking about the benefits of a microchip.

## Databases and working together

There are four databases in the UK managing the registration details of millions of pets and their owners (Figure 2).

All the databases work in a very similar way and are in constant contact with each other to ensure that they are all following the same practices and protocols. This ensures that the service provided to customers is consistent, no matter which database they are registered on.





Figure 2. All four databases and their staff work in a very similar way

Confusion can arise regarding the different microchips and which database each one is registered on. The first three digits of a microchip number are a manufacturer code, so this prefix can generally be used to determine which database will hold the registration.

Most providers have 'crib sheets' available which you can use to identify the microchip supplier and the corresponding database at a glance. If this seems a little complicated, the best solution is to just contact your usual database, give them the microchip number and they will point you in the right direction.

Staff across all four databases are very familiar with the different microchips and where they are all registered; so if in doubt, just pick up the phone and give one of us a call.

## Registration maintenance

Anibase database staff alone receive up to 500 calls every day with queries from members of the public, vet practices, charities, dog wardens and so on. Not only are we dealing with queries and concerns over the telephone, we also receive e-mails and large volumes of day-to-day customer administration to work through. Unfortunately this can sometimes involve lengthy disputes over 'keepership'; with ongoing correspondence and involvement of the database to try and help to resolve such situations.


For the security of our pet owners we operate a strictly 'no amendments over the phone policy' and while this may be frustrating for some customers at the time, it is ultimately beneficial to all parties involved so that we always have a paper trail of requests and changes made should keepership ever come under dispute.

All of the databases in the UK are self-funded, so while the financial charges to make changes to registration details may seem at first glance a little unfair on your clients, they are in fact essential for the ongoing, secure function of the database. Without amendment fees, we simply could not employ the staff and technology investment to run the databases as effectively and efficiently as we do.

The only other option would be to charge an annual fee for registering on the database. This, however, would end up costing the customer much more in the long run and penalising those who, thankfully, don't ever require our reunification services.

For owners who take their pets on holiday or frequently relocate, each database has an upgrade option so that the customers who move more often than others are not forced to pay the fee every single time.

The details of the service may differ slightly across the databases but the premise is the same – a 'one-off' fee gives the member unlimited changes of address for the duration of the membership. The services also offer additional help and advice when pets go missing, giving added value and reassurance.

We all know the stress caused when a pet goes missing, so a helping hand to give advice and help is invaluable to many customers. Reunification help lines are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year – meaning no matter what the day, date or time, lost pets can be reunited with their owners. 

## NEWS REVIEW by Jean Turner

### Breed specific legislation

This continues to cause problems with so-called 'dangerous dogs'. In practice, we all know any dog can be dangerous; in fact, it is often the smaller ones who will nip without warning.

However, because they are small, the injuries they cause are invariably less severe than those resulting from bites from the larger, more powerful breeds.

Most people involved in dog legislation would prefer the law to be amended so that the owners of any dog, out of control, should be subject to prosecution.

We have been advised that in the USA the Obama administration opposes breed specific legislation (BSL).

### Lungworm warning

During wetter weather, there is an increased potential for dogs to be infected with lungworm by ingesting slugs and snails. It is important to educate clients about the risks and to help them take appropriate precautions and preventive action.



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