WHAT WE LEARNED

“People won’t put their animals in hands they don’t trust.”  Cynthia

Daycare is for Puppies

Puppyhood comes with clear goals, but those goals become hazier in later years. Many of our participants spoke of taking their dogs to training classes as a puppy or using a daycare service to get out that “puppy energy” Our dog owners recognized clear goals for puppyhood (sitting, recall, not peeing in the house), but those goals tapered off once their dogs had aged. Even the term “daycare” evokes a sense of childhood. When we asked owners of older dogs about their goals, we heard ambitious visions such as walking off leash, but owners did not have a clear path how to achieve those goals. For older dogs with behavioral issues, our participants described making workarounds instead prioritizing training. ≠

It Takes a Village

Dog owners create ecosystems of care for their dogs. We were struck by the networks of people and services that our participants developed for their dogs: the dog walker, the vet, the friends who potted when you’re out of town, the groomer, the pet supply retailer, the daycare, and all the back up. Sometimes these services are connected, but often they are completely separate businesses with whom owners deal individually.

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Trust is the Gatekeeper

When it comes to choosing a daycare, trust trumps everything. Trust is the gut check that determines whether dog owners will continue to consider or use a service. Our participants spoke about a variety of factors they use to gauge trust. Sometimes it was about staff knowing the particulars of a specific breed. Other times it was through the physical environment of an establishment or the professionalism of the staff.

Not Just a Number

Dog owners want service providers to care for their dogs as much as they do. Our participants spoke of how they loved having a personal connection with their daycare staff, and that employees knew who their dogs and cared for them specifically. They also spoke of their appreciation for notes and photos. The makes dog owners feel as though service providers share their values, know their dogs, and will give specialized care to their furry friends.

The Convenience Equation

Dog owners use a variety of factors to calculate what convenience means for them. When talking about selecting a daycare provider, we heard the word “convenience” over and over. Some might argue that a “convenient location” simply equates to “close by”, but in fact, dog owners use a variety of variables to calculate what is convenient for them. Yes, convenience meant a less commute, but for some! for an owner who drives to work, close by means next to the highway. Another owner takes public transportation, so their most convenient facility is next to the El. And even though “convenience” was often tossed around, we did see that some owners were willing to drive across town in order to use the service that they truly trusted.

OPPORTUNITY AREAS

Helping Bark Ave become the key facilitator of a dog owner’s ecosystem of care.

Meg, Dan & Mac

Meghan and Jordan never took their dog, Mac, to training classes nor do they take him to daycare now. On weekends, they take Mac to the dog park.

Martha & Chloe

Martha is a young married professional living in the city. She takes her 12-year-old pup Chloe to daycare every day because she has separation anxiety. Chloe sits behind the Bark Ave reception desk to keep her anxiety under control.

Vickie & Skye

Vickie is a young married professional living in the city. She takes her Great Dane puppy, Skye, to daycare every day because Skye has separation anxiety. Vickie wants to have Skye so well socialized and under control during her daycare years.

Zach & Finn

Zach is a young professional living in the city. He takes his puppy, Finn, to Bark Ave three times a week. On the other days, a dog walker comes to their home.

Kevin & Cash

Kevin is a young professional who is recently single and who is looking for new dog services. Kevin’s job has very flexible work hours and he often takes Cash to the dog park. He’s training Cash himself.

Jeff & Toby

Jeff is single and who works from home. He does not use any dog services for his older dog Toby. When he goes out of town, Toby stays with Jeff’s friends.

PROJECT

DOGGY DAYCARE

An estimated $5.2 Billion will be spent on pet services in 2015 as more American adults are delaying human kids, leaving space available in their hearts and budgets to treat their dogs to premium services such as doggy daycare. Medical research is also reinforcing the health benefit of owning pets spending on dog services will likely continue to rise. The combination of these trends have created opportunities for local entrepreneurs.

Bark Avenue is one such mom and pop shop, operating in Chicago’s West Loop. Offering daycare, boarding, training and grooming. As Bark Avenue builds on their 15 year legacy of creating responsible canine citizens, owners Dan and Amy are considering an expansion informed by the needs of their users and communities. We spoke to several of Bark Avenue’s current clients, spent some time at dog parks in their neighborhood, and observed their current operations.

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It Takes a Village

When it comes to choosing a service, one source isn’t enough. When looking for a service, our participants heard of companies in various ways, but they always verify what they heard through a second source. For example, many of our participants had heard of doggy daycare through a friend, but before checking it out, they verified the businesses reviews on Yelp. In addition to Yelp, potential customers look at websites, social media, and driving around their neighborhoods.

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