

DOG LOVERS



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 dog Chloe to daycare every day because Chloe suffers from severe separation anxiety. She 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's goal is to have Skye so well socialized that she will not need daycare anymore.

Zach & Finn

Zach is a young professional living with his partner. 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 so Kevin 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 having 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 community. We spoke to several of Bark Avenue's current clients, spent some time at dog parks in their neighborhood, and observed their current operations.

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 fuzzier 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, and the friends who petsit when you're out of town, the groomer, the pet supply retailer, the daycare, and all the backups. Sometimes these services are connected, but often they are completely separate businesses with whom owners deal individually.

It takes two

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 said they heard of doggy daycare through a friend, but before checking it out, they verified the business's reviews on Yelp. In addition to Yelp, potential customers look at websites, social media, and driving around their neighborhoods.

"When our other daycare closed, I called every service in the area to see if they could accommodate her special needs." Martha

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 particularities 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 doggy daycare and that employees know who their dog is and care for her specifically. They also spoke of their appreciation for notes and photos. This makes dog owners feel as though service providers share their values, know their dogs, and will give specialized care to their furry friends.

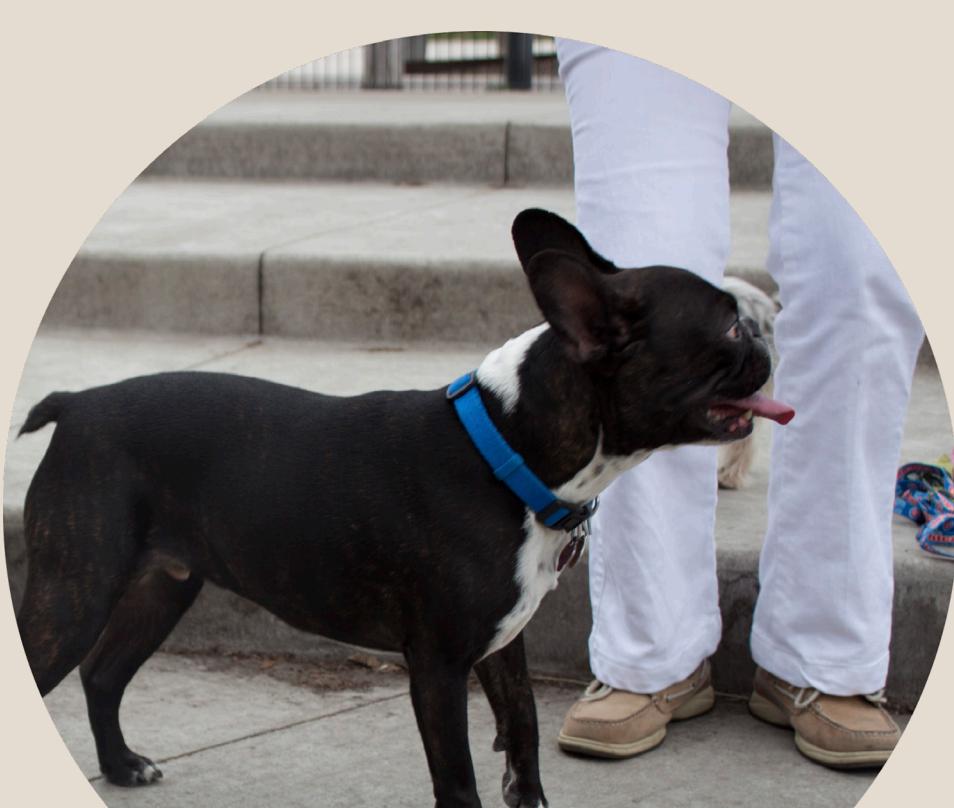
The Convenience Equation

Dog owners use a variety of factors to calculate what convenience means for them.

When talking about selecting a doggy daycare, we heard the word "convenience" over and over. Some might assume 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 close proximity, but to what? For an owner who drives to work, convenient 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 touted as the number 1 priority, 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.



Cutting out the leg work

Recognizing and supporting dog-owners throughout their decision-making process



Partnering for a lifetime of specialty care

Consulting with owners to create specialized plans and goals for life beyond puppyhood.



Taking care off-site

Offering a la carte, pop-up services that are embedded in the community.