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PET ENTREPRENEUR publicity

by Dave Szymanski | Tampa Bay Editor

It is no surprise that Kristen Levine developed a love for animals while working for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for 15 years on the Gulf Coast.

Levine took that love and used it to become an entrepreneur in 2003. She created Fetching Communications, a public relations firm in Tarpon Springs focused on serving only the pet industry.

The firm has taken hold and has been adding employees and new clients in the past few years. Among the clients are Bark Busters Home Dog Training, Florida Veterinary Specialists and Cancer Treatment Center and Pet Partners LLC.

"To my knowledge, we're the only PR firm focused on the pet industry," says Levine, 42, a former Tampa Bay Buccaneer cheerleader in 2000 and 2001 who has a dog, cat, two donkeys and two goats on her three-acre home.

"Some Madison Avenue firms have taken a renewed focus on the pet industry," she adds. "I'm pretty sure we're the only boutique firm."

The firm has five employees, most of whom have media experience, and two more will be joining this month. Fetching outsources its accounting work and staff work from home. But because of the amount of growth, Levine is looking at renting or buying office space next year.

She has projected revenue growth of 20% this year.

"It looks like we'll hit it," Levine says.

Veterinarians, traditionally slower in adopting marketing strategies, represent about 60% of Fetching's client base. "They will have to step it up, because there is more and more competition," Levine says.

Fetching's growth comes from the trend in increasing pet ownership and pet spending, Levine says.

"From the pet owner's side, pets are more important to us than ever before because we need a tangible connection," she says. "You can't email a pet. You need to interact physically. We're all so busy. We're interacting less with humans. We're getting that tangible need from pets."

Levine's biggest lesson learned as an entrepreneur is seeking information from peers. About two years after she started the business, she joined a businesswomen's roundtable.

"I learned so much from this group," Levine says. "I didn't have a business plan. I had no vision of where to take the company. Now I have a strategic plan and vision. If you don't have an ultimate vision, it's never too late to start. I get really excited now, because I can see the goals for this year and it's easier to project the following year."



Kristen Levine, chief executive officer of Fetching Communications in Tarpon Springs, has parlayed her love of animals into a boutique PR firm focusing solely on the pet industry. Courtesy