

ADDRESS

ESSEC BUSINESS SCHOOL
5 Nepal Park
Singapore, 139408
Singapore

CONTACT

Prof. Jan Ondrus
E : ondrus@essec.edu
P : +65 6413 9752
www.essec.edu



CASE STUDY

DOGSHARE

COMPANION

CHAIR OF NETWORKED BUSINESS MODELS

CONTACTS

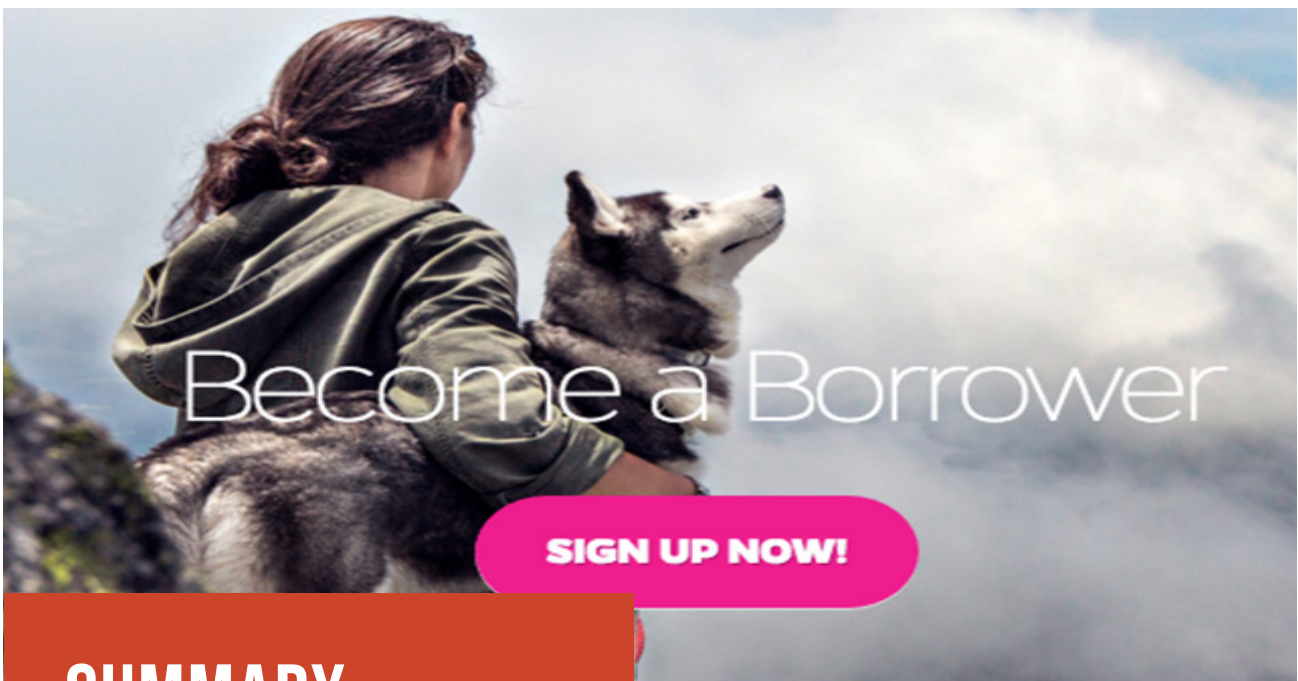
Julie Kolokotsa
E : kolokosta@essec.edu
Felix Ter Chian Tan
E : f.tan@unsw.edu.au



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Content for this case study comes from a thesis and journal-in-review (Saito and Tan, 2018). This thesis is based on interviews with the organization's founder and other highly-involved individuals. The transcript data were then contextualized with further interviews.

AUSTRALIA'S DOGSHARE COMPANION ECOSYSTEM



SUMMARY

Dogshare is a free platform in Australia enabling dog sharing (connecting dog owners with dog “borrowers” who are not owners) to alleviate common concerns in the dog-owning community. Pain points are primarily dog-owners’ inability to commit more time to care for their pets and the high premiums charged by professional service providers. The platform’s primary aim is to bring like-minded dog-lovers together locally to meet the common goal of caring for dogs. The creator, Jessica Thomas, also highlights the platform’s wider

aim as building a community of trust between participants. Carrying out this aim, the platform offers four types of activities from lower-required trust park playdates to higher-required trust weekender stays. To help pay for the automated matching platform, Thomas features dog services on the platform, including grooming and retreat services.

BUSINESS ECOSYSTEM STRATEGY

Dogshare was launched by Melbourne-based Jessica Thomas in an effort to find additional exercise and companionship for her dog. She formed a reciprocal dog-caring arrangement with her neighbor who owned a dog with similar needs and initiated the platform when her neighbor moved. Her Dogshare platform sprung from the belief that others share the same concerns and could benefit from a similar arrangement. She established a free Australian platform matching dog owners and dog “borrowers” or dog-lovers who do not currently own dogs. The platform was launched in 2014 with the philosophy that a free matching platform could alleviate common concerns in the dog-loving community and build a community at the same time. Building a community requires trust, so Thomas offered four types of activities involving progressive levels of trust-building: park playdates, reciprocal dog walking, backyard sharing and weekender/vacation stays. She also filled the site with best-practice training information.

CONTEXT

Top common concerns of dog owners in Australia include high premiums charged by professional service providers like dog-walkers and dog-sitters (Cutt, Giles-Corti, Knuiiman, & Burke, 2007) and owners’ inability to commit more time to care for their dogs (Cite Saito 2018). Dogshare is a free platform in Australia that is designed to alleviate these common concerns in the dog-owning community by enabling dog sharing.

Thomas believes users of the platform will develop increasingly trusting attachments between them. Literature does speak to the relationship between dog-caring and social capital facilitation including enhancing the sense of community (see Cutt et al 2007 for details). To accomplish this community building objective, the platform offers four types of activities from lowest-required trust park playdates to highest-required trust weekender stays. The platform also features stories of dog walker members.

EARLY STAGE

When Jessica Thomas established the Dogshare platform in 2014, she invited friends and neighbors to join and spread the word (stakeholder selection and securing buy-in on the purpose). The local feel of the platform, featuring updates to a local dog-park database and Thomas’ personal involvement to match dog owners and dog borrowers, was an initial advantage.

Local media agencies also broadcast Dogshare’s appeal, often with endorsements from pet rescue organizations. As soon as dog owners or dog borrowers joined the platform, they would be checked for suitability and matched.

As the community grew, the creator turned to automate matching functions and transfer decision-rights to the platform user. Since then, the platform services customers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through a needs-based matching of dogs. The criteria are location, the four service activities and dog age/energy levels.

To help pay for the automated matching, Thomas features dog services on the platform, including grooming and retreat services.

The purpose of the platform is to bring dog-lovers together locally to meet the common goal of caring for dogs. The platform publishes articles discussing dog walking and the benefits of dog ownership to convey messages about responsible pet ownership, an important human capital activity. The medium-term objective of the platform is community-building by enhancing trust between dog owners and borrowers. Articles on the platform feature personal stories of dog walkers (getting to know stakeholders) who have climbed the activities toward progressively more trusting arrangements (initiatives to address pain points). The stories build awareness of the purpose and objective of the ecosystem and are designed to be publicized virally on social media for maximum impact.

CHALLENGES

The Dogshare platform is a social and human capital companion ecosystem story. Prior to its launch, most local dog owners and borrowers would only meet by chance. Very few of them shared the responsibilities of dog caring.

Dog matching initially was done by Thomas, until its membership required an automated system. At that point, the challenge was how to transfer rights and responsibilities to the platform users. This was done through terms and conditions of do's and don'ts, news items, as well as members' stories, all of which champion responsible pet ownership.

Recently the challenge has been to cover the costs for the platform's operations, to keep the ecosystem membership free of charge. Thomas facilitated sponsorship in the form of listing local pet businesses and events that would strengthen dog-caring community bonds.

STRENGTHS OF THE CASE

This ecosystem of dog owners, dog borrowers, service providers and the platform operator stresses social and human capital. Dogshare is a good case study in building social and human capital through collective action. Natural capital is not a focus of this ecosystem, neither is financial capital, apart from covering the costs of the platform.



S

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Thomas stresses the social capital element of her ecosystem, as dog carers and their dogs slowly form bonds of friendship with others in the local network. This is also very important for the dog borrower members, who for one reason or another cannot own a dog; yet crave dog companionship. Closer relationships benefit the dogs too with greater physical exercise and mental stimulation. In time, Thomas hopes the ecosystem will blossom into a trusting community of responsible dog owners throughout the country.

H

HUMAN CAPITAL

Dogshare's contribution to human capital emanates from its championing responsible dog ownership in feature stories, events and updating local databases with dog-parks. The platform stresses social and human capital; yet it touches on natural capital too through its dog-park database and responsible animal treatment. With parks, members are freely encouraged to rate the parks, upload photos to inform responsible local councils if facilities need to be maintained.

F

FINANCIAL CAPITAL

In terms of financial capital, Thomas insists on keeping the Dogshare ecosystem membership free of charge. Surviving on a \$10,000 prize in 2016 has been a challenge; therefore, Thomas introduced a business model to include listings of local dog-related business services and to feature articles about dog events they sponsor.

PERFORMANCE BEYOND PROFIT

Performance toward the ecosystem's purpose is not measured nor tested. The same applies for **financial capital** measures as the platform is provided free-of-charge to members. Thomas' focus is on the **social capital** angle of the ecosystem, by building up a trusting community of dog-lovers. An indicator to measure the growth of social capital could be the number of members who graduate to the highest-trust activity, or who share onto their personal social media profiles any feature story from the platform's website. Another could be the number of individuals or organizations a member recommends to join the ecosystem.

In **human capital**, the platform champions responsible dog ownership out in the community as well as on its website. If needed, this engagement could be measured by numbers of hits on the website pages discussing responsibility or number of members participating in community-building events.

Natural capital relates to responsible animal husbandry (people treating animals responsibly and also securing companionship benefits) and management of parks used by dogs. If needed, this could be measured by number of hits on website pages describing responsibility and therapeutic companionship benefits and/or before and after surveys measuring self-rating.

REFERENCES

Cutt, H., Giles-Corti, B., Knuiman, M., & Burke, V. (2007). Dog ownership, health and physical activity: A critical review of the literature. *Health & Place*, 13, 261-272.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Location:

Australia

Year created:

2014

Sector of activity:

Petcare

Purpose & Mission:

Bringing like-minded dog-lovers together within small local networks

Size:

1 permanent staff, with a growing network of dog owners and dog "borrowers" (currently 6000), and 150 related businesses

Stakeholders in the ecosystem:

Platform operator (founder), dog owners, dog-borrowers, dog service organizations

Key Financial Performance Indicators:

For Best IT Pitch, Dogshare founder won \$10,000 prize and mentoring advice from an angel investor of the Melbourne Innovation Centre