

Pet lovers take blogging to the next level

May 17 2013, by Robert Macpherson

When Dexter the cocker spaniel tore a ligament in his hind leg a few weeks ago, he didn't suffer in silence. Instead, his owner blogged about.

"The vet told me my dog needed surgery, and I thought, 'You know, there's got to be something else'," said Carol Bryant, who writes a "canine-centric online magazine" called A Fidose of Reality.

Responding to her blog entries, readers told Bryant that Dexter didn't have to go under the knife. He had options, like [laser therapy](#) and a leg brace he'll be wearing for the next six months.

So good is his progress that Dexter has come with Bryant from rural Pennsylvania to this Washington suburb for the biggest US gathering ever of pet bloggers—people who embrace social media to rave about pets.

The Fifth Annual BlogPaws Conference, with 500 participants and perhaps as many critters, is a chance to network, swap ideas and maybe win a coveted Nose-to-Nose Pet Blogging and Social Media award (for which The Intrepid Pup, about a peripatetic Vizsla called Tavish, is nominated in three categories).

Workshops include a primer on using [Google](#) Analytics to gauge online readership, building bridges between bloggers and veterinarians, and Schmitty the Weather Dog demonstrating a just-released Sony canine video harness.

In its online community, BlogPaws has 2,200 members, said co-founder Yvonne DiVita, who writes about her cat and three dogs in Colorado on a blog titled Scratchings and Sniffings.

"I would guess we're going to hit close to 3,000 by the end of the year," she told AFP as bloggers (predominantly female) and their pets (predominantly dogs) took over the lobby of the Sheraton hotel on Thursday.

With Americans spending \$53.33 billion on their pets last year, according to the American Pet Products Association, and 62 percent of households owning a pet, the pet care industry is taking the bloggers seriously.

In an exhibition hall, big hitters like pet food maker Nestle Purina rub shoulders with upstarts like the Spoiled Pup Boutique, a New York area canine couturier, wooing bloggers to test and endorse their products.

"The followers and readers of pet blogs are so loyal, and they trust the word of bloggers," said Bridget Evans, a San Diego publicist attending BlogPaws for VetIQ, a newcomer to the pet medication and health supplements business.

It's come to the point, DiVita said, where some popular bloggers with solid track records and substantial followings can give up their day jobs and earn a good middle-class income—or better—through online advertising.

"I know bloggers that are making upwards of six figures," she said, while others are content with just a few hundred dollars.

"We're kind of the rock stars of the pet industry," added Bryant, who cautions that the key to blogging success is finding a unique voice and

then keeping it real: "You need to be yourself when you blog."

Longtime syndicated pet columnist Steve Dale said his blog, which he updates daily, is one of the most popular among 200 blogs hosted by the Chicago Tribune's Chicago Now website, attracting 100,000 visitors a month.

"It's pretty incredible that a pet blog would be among the top 20 ... and here's my secret: I have no idea what I'm doing," Dale, the owner of two mutts, a cat and a northern blue-tongued skink lizard, told AFP.

Actually, he does have an idea: blogging enables Dale to cover breaking pet news ("In the pet world, there is news, believe it or not") like a pet food recall that otherwise wouldn't make his twice-weekly print column My Pet World.

"It can be anything, and bingo! bongo! I can cover it," he said.

A keynote speaker at BlogPaws, Dale is keen to draw fellow bloggers' attention to some worrying [pet](#) health trends: fewer pets getting check-ups at the vets, for instance, and upticks in flea infestations and heartworm.

From San Francisco, Julia Gleason hopes her year-old fashion-meets-Fido blog Canines and Couture, which often features her English bulldog, will grow to a stage where she bid farewell to her day job at a legal consultancy.

"I have lofty goals to turn it into an actual business at some point," she told AFP as Chilly, a white poodle with a dyed purple head and tail, chilled out on the floor by the wine bar.

"Right now, I'm focusing on building my audience and building a

following."

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