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Dot.com dog lady chases big bowzer business

Stuart Derdeyn,

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With her trusty purse puppy Chico at her side, Vancouver's Kate Morris is on a dog mission. As publisher of Bowzer Biz (www.bowzer.biz), the 28-year-old North Shore resident hopes to be the first dot-com dog-entrepreneur.

She's on her way.

Since first posting on the web last August, the canine-centric e-zine has acquired more than 15,000 subscribers and turned its dynamic founder into a focus of media attention, from ABC News to *Profit* and *Inc.* magazines.

Blame Morris's parents for her barking up this particular tree for a career.

"The problem was I didn't have dogs growing up, so I was denied," says Morris. "When I finally got to the age where I could have one, that's when the trouble started.

"Now I have one child, Chico, five pounds, who is kind of my inspiration for everything because I take him everywhere I go and wanted to set up some kind of business that kept me close to him all the time."

Morris will go to great lengths to develop dog-related business opportunities. Like Doody Duty (www.doodyduty.biz), a pooper-picker-upper service that literally bags up the backyard for you. A crappy job, to be sure, but one that pays in the \$20-an-hour range and attracts all kinds of employees eager for outdoor work.

Says Morris: "I keep the two businesses as separated as possible because during my research into the e-zine, I found that most of what was out there were actually newsletters posted by

businesses to promote certain products. I wanted something that was independent of that and more fun for subscribers."

Initially, her research didn't turn up any sites like the one she was proposing. That worried her. What if the idea had been tried and failed? No matter, she soldiered on.

"I'm a big fan of e-zines such as *Daily Candy* and *Vitamin V* and wanted something like that for dog lovers. So you could subscribe and get that concise, quick hit of some new information that you can read over morning coffee."

Visit the site and you can read up on daily news, ranging from the European trend of "flex pets" - for people who can't handle the full responsibility of pet ownership - to the very popular daily doggy Q&A.

With no experience in the dot-com biz at all, Morris sent herself to "mini-business school" by picking contacts' brains for every bit of know-how that they had and seeking out an "amazing" web designer to put her conceptual framework online. An admitted "poor salesperson," she nonetheless managed to get some solid advertising involved.

The hardest part? Getting subscribers.

Every product that winds up on Bowzer Biz is quality-tested by a staff of three consumer experts - an Alaskan Malamute handles most of the fur and coat-related goods, Chico is the small/petite tester and a mutt handles pretty much everything else. The latest test? Says Morris: "Vitamin-infused electrolyte water for the high-octane working dogs."