

Lessons in how to be a **Sexy Beast**

Like many pet products on the market, a concept is often inspired by someone's love for their pet. Often the product was based on a need that was unfilled because of a hole in the market. For those seeking inspiration to be an entre-pet-neur, we present a couple of examples of start ups that soared.

That's pretty much the story behind a Queensland innovator, Mark Wood, who came up with the portable and lightweight *Hound House. It is a truly Aussie looking product, almost like a tent cabin for a pet, made from a tough material and frame, raised bed platform and sturdy construction. The success of this product owes much to the enthusiasm and drive of the creator as it is to thought and planning in marketing, advertising, evangelising and distribution as well as design.



Renee and Austin

There are some very inviting figures in the pet industry such as the numbers that tell us how much the pet food and pet products market is worth. It's no wonder that we see all sorts of products and ideas cropping up from entrepreneurial folk just buying to get their paw in the pet market door. Some concepts are good, some are not really anything new and others, well let's just say they don't have legs.

Renee Ryan had been a product developer in the beauty industry for years, having launched many big name fragrances for cosmetic giants like Estee Lauder. It was her rescue Boxer named Austin that provided the inspiration behind her business venture. As Renee explains, "When I got Austin from an organization called Boxer Rescue, he was already four years old and he was afraid of everything. It was almost as if he had never left his previous owner's garage. I couldn't take him to a groomer or almost anywhere else. So I started grooming him myself."

Ryan took the time to look at the various products available to her and realised there was a hole in the market. "I kept asking myself if I was crazy but there were no high end grooming lines. You can outfit your dog in high end Coach collar (\$90) or a Burberry dog coat (\$295) but nothing that you could pick up at an upmarket beauty counter."

Ryan's concept was to create products that keep your pooch smelling fresh in-between grooming sessions, yet have safe ingredients without cloying odours. "The pet industry here in the US is not well-regulated. Companies are not even required to list their ingredients on their packaging so you never really know what you're getting in that bottle. All Sexy Beast products are hypo-allergenic, vegan, 100% plant-based and paraben-free. They are safe and they smell delicious, not to mention stylish."

For Ryan, the Sexy Beast line had to be the whole package and that meant top quality ingredients and top-notch packaging. As she had the right connections, she enlisted the talents of famed industrial designer, Karim Rashid, who had created packaging for many well known brands like Prada and Issey Miyake.

Finance was the biggest hurdle in getting Sexy Beast from being a puppy with potential to a more socialised animal. As Ryan explains, "I went to many investors but none were interested in investing in a start-up. Most don't want to get involved until you have already built your brand and are profitable which wasn't very helpful for me! I ended up getting friends and family to buy into the concept and took a business loan in order to get the project off the ground. I truly believed in the concept and nothing was going to stop me from creating my vision".

Sexy Beast article continues...



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