

The high-design life of doggy app development

 By Leigh Andrews 1 Feb 2016

Started on a shoestring budget, the local DoggyDo app shows that if there's a will, there's a way - a strong design-centric way, if you're anything like Shani Judes, who founded and developed the app...

Design is a funny thing. It means different things to different people and can incorporate a way of thinking, a way of working, and ultimately a way of life.

For Judes, it's just that. She's a Cape-based connector, curator and art facilitator with a keen interest in technology. Suffice it to say DoggyDo is by no means the only thing on her design plate, as she also founded an artists' management agency, director of 1,000 Drawings Cape Town, manages Art54 (an outdoor public art project in Cape Town), and photographs the Sea Point Pavilion Public Swimming Pool.

She carved a few minutes out of her busy schedule to explain how the doggy-centric app came about and how it fits into the rest of her design-centric life...



1. What's your average design day like?

Judes: I work on a couple of projects and businesses throughout the year. DoggyDo is my baby at the moment, so I am devoting most of my time and energy to developing a quality service for users. I also run an artist management agency, So, artists, which connects graffiti artists, photographers and illustrators to business and public sector clients; co-run Township Art Tours; and manage the Wavescape Surf Festival. I thrive on being plugged in to multiple and different projects and peoples and I enjoy my days being full and busy.

2. That's the design way! When did you realise there was a need for an SA dog-owner centric app?

Judes: When we got Bennett at the end of 2014, we decided that he would not be a stay-at-home-by-himself dog. We wanted him to join us on as much of our missions as possible, for our sakes as well as his! We soon realised that there were many dog friendly options for eating out and going away on weekends but the information was difficult and time-consuming to find. To make our life (and the lives of other dog owners) easier, I decided to gather all the information into one easy to navigate place.

So, in March 2015, I decided to make an app for my fellow dog owners. I had a look around and couldn't find one for South

Africa, so I figured I could make it happen. I then spent three months developing it, designing it and adding content to it. I launched the first version in June 2015 and promoted it through Facebook. This release was to test the market, to see how users interact with the application and to identify and iron out glitches. By getting feedback from the app users - both the parents and the listed businesses - I am able to constantly improve the functioning of the app to evolve the best service platform for users. After a few months of beta operation and learning, the app is now at a critical growth point and I will be pushing it hard over the next few months.

The name 'DoggyDo' captures what our app is all about - doing things with your dog! It's also intended to make people chuckle, as dog parents can't escape the inevitable shovelling of sh!t that comes with having a dog.



Judes with Bennett, the Welsh Terrier that inspired her to design the app.

3. How do you curate the various dog-friendly restaurants, accommodation, camping, food brands, vets, trainers, and rescue organisations listed in the app?

Judes: In the beginning, I spent a lot of time Googling and asking people what their favourite places were. Then dog-friendly establishments started contacting me to have their business listed on the app. I add content daily. I will often spend time focusing on just one category, like when I asked [DoggyDo's Facebook community](#) for the names of their favourite local rescue organisation and received a bunch of comments with many different names. I then emailed each of the rescue organisations and asked them to fill out the form, which gives me all the information I need. There's a small fee to be listed in the app, and companies can decide which payment method they would like to go with.

It is free for NGOs, parks, trails, beaches and the like and really is a great place for business to be showcased. With the direction technology is moving, businesses will need to change the way they promote themselves. I'm hoping that this provides the platform for this new era of technology we find ourselves in.

4. What's feedback been like so far?

Judes: Dog owners and businesses alike have been lapping it up! The app has had just short of 2,000 downloads, and from the stats I can see people are using it regularly. Owners of businesses listed on the app have called us, very chuffed by the fact that they have had new clients and customers who found them through the app. Equally, users of the app (dog parents) have shared their adventures triggered by DoggyDo and reported how DoggyDo has been useful for people relocating to Mother City in search of dog friendly spots, dog health care and products, trainers, pet sitting and more.

5. Let us in on your exciting future business plans.

Judes: With the app concept proving itself as in-demand, it is opportunity to invest further in the growth of the platform. I'm investigating add-ons such as bookings directly via the app and receiving coupons when you do so, as well as a 'Tinder for dogs' extension to help owners schedule play dates, and am looking to partner with pet insurance companies in the future, we have experienced great value from having Bennett medically insured.

I want dog-orientated businesses to see DoggyDo as "the" platform for promoting themselves to dog owners. To boost this we be placing a special Trip Advisor/Zomato-like sticker onto dog-friendly places so people can automatically see its dog friendly.

Looking forward to more of Judes' business-boosting design ideas!

For more, visit the official websites for www.shanijudes.co.za and www.doggydo.co.za and join the conversation by tweeting @DesignMonth.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

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