An Interview With the Creator of Pawsibilities

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Abstract

Life after college can be isolating due to the lack of opportunities to meet like-minded people while traversing living in a new city. Meet-up app users are not satisfied with their current offerings, like Bumble BFF, because of its blurred intentions and lack of safety net. Pawsibilities aims to connect a community of dog owners to share a love for their furry friends in a safe and secure environment. By equipping our community members with features like location partnering with nearby dog-friendly spaces, geolocation technology, differentiated profile metrics, and in-app safety measures, we bring owners together so they can build meaningful relationships that last a lifetime.

Can you give an abbreviated version of your pitch for Pawsibilities?

Brooke Muñoz-Halm: Yeah, absolutely. So Pawsibilities aims to connect a community of dog owners who share a love for their furry friends in a safe and secure environment. The intention is to equip community members with features like location partnering with nearby dog friendly spaces, using geolocation technology, differentiated profile metrics, and in app safety measures, to bring those pet owners together so they can build meaningful lifelong friendships.

To break these down, the location partnering refers to someone from Pawsibilities, like a Pawsibilities representative, with boots on the ground going to these places and verifying that they are, in fact, dog-friendly spaces and that they're not just someone's private backyard. And that could look like hiking trails, dog parks, community marks, main street, pet-friendly restaurants, etc.

Secondarily is the geolocation technology. This one isn't groundbreaking new technology as aps like Tinder and Bumble already use it. It's already used to match users based on their proximity to each other, and for Pawsibilities, it matches users based on proximity to a location. So it's just adding a third location to that tech.

Then, there are the differentiated profile metrics. This is based on a proprietary algorithm that builds the "Treaty Scores," which is the individual user score, and the "Unleashed Score," which is the score given to locations, and those are to match users with other users in the most optimal dog-friendly configuration to each other and locations.

The fourth is security, and this is what really sets Pawsibilities apart from different apps. There are two main features that keep it secure. The in-app communication system rewards users for continuing to talk to each other through the app. The women, almost all of the women, who I spoke to said that they felt uncomfortable giving their phone numbers out too soon, too early. So Pawsibilities rewards users for continuing to use that in-app communication. It builds a best friends list. This makes it so users don't have to give out personal information until they're ready and can use it as an excuse of wanting to build their best friend score. Second is a two-strike report system instead of three strikes. If two users say a person was inappropriate with them—for example, if they were trying to flirt or be romantic with unwanted advances etc.—it only takes two people to get someone completely kicked off of the app. This is from my own personal experience with friends apps and the reviews that I found for competitors like Bumble BFF. People feel really uncomfortable with that blurred line of intentions for users. So that one was really important—if you try to make Pawsibilities anything more than a friend-making app, that you are removed.

Going further in differentiating Pawsibilities from other apps, how is this different from similar competitors?

Brooke: Yeah, I really think it is the security aspect and then there are other portions of it. I am still the main creator of Pawsibilities and if it hits the market that it would be woman of color and queer owned which is something I'm always proud of, to be able to put my name and my heritage on something like that.

I also have a background in market research so there's a lot of market research already before this app is made tangible. For the market research process I sent out a five minute survey called a screener. They go through demographic questions: what is your age, what is your income, where are you from, ect. This is done in order to determine if they are the target market for the app, and then I reached out to people from there to have sixty minute IDIs, or in-depth interviews. I sat down with five women that match the target audience and asked them loads of questions.

What inspired the idea for this app? Where do you see this potential app going?

Brooke: I think that my own experience really inspired this app. I think it's hard to make friends. When the intention of making friends is so blurred, it's hard to make friends and know we're both trying to make friends, that there's no trying to be more than that. So, I think that's what mostly inspired it. I wanted to have a space where I could meet new people and have the ice broken. For example, whenever I walk my

dog in the main street in my hometown, everyone's always coming up to me and they ask to pet my dog and then they start a conversation: how is your day, what are you doing around here, do you live here, what's your dog's name? His name is Mochi and he breaks the ice for me.

I was thinking of how I can make this an even safer space, right, because when I'm walking there might be people that are dangerous, there might be people that have bad intentions. So I thought, let's put this in an app. Let's make it so I can sit at my home where it's safe to be able to say yes, I trust this person or yes, I want my dog to meet this dog. This dog is vaccinated. I know because it's on the app. And so the intention was based on my experience and wanting to create a safe space for people to have a virtual version of your dog breaking the ice for you.

What is your experience with designing and performing presentations?

Brooke: I've always excelled at public speaking, even as a kid, and I noticed that in myself and teachers noticed that so it was nurtured internally and externally for sure. And then in highschool I did freelance graphic design, and I always had an eye for art. So I think that really built my ability to create compelling and visually interesting presentations.

In your opinion, what are some of the most important elements of a good presentation?

Brooke: So aside, or second only, to the actual information that is on the slide, I think the most important thing for presentations is data visualization. There's actual science that backs that you have to have x amount of white space on your slides for there to be optimal comprehension from your audience. You know, it's not just an art, it is a science of data visualization.

I think that's something that I always find frustrating when I look at other people's presentations if there's lots of quotes, texts, infographics, etc. It's hard for me to know where to start. I get overwhelmed just looking at it, especially if the presenter is talking, then I'm not even listening to the presenter because I'm trying to figure out what's going on on the screen. So, I think really second only to the actual information on the slide that data visualization is key.

Is there anything you do to prepare for presentations, or this one in particular?

Brooke: Yeah, I practice a lot. I go through presentations back from the start every time so if it's a 10 slide presentation and I screw up slightly on slide 2, I start from the beginning again and I keep going until I go through perfectly and then I do it one more time to make sure it wasn't just a fluke.

So I definitely practice a ton of times and then I think what sets my presentation style apart from other people is that I still have that anxiety, right? My palms are sweating,

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my legs are shaking. I feel stressed and anxious. But I remind myself that I'm stressed about this thing because I'm about to do something that's worth being stressed about so my anxiety turns into adrenaline really quickly and then I step up there and I just become a performer, almost, like an actor. But I can still feel the stress, I'm still anxious, my hands are still sweating, etc. But it feels like this adrenaline and then once everyone claps, it's like this euphoric feeling for me.

So definitely practice and then just telling myself this is worth being stressed about and that's why my body is having this biological reaction. And that's so thrilling to have something exciting to create.

Was there any difference between the first time presenting and the most recent?

Brooke: Yes. By the time I did the GREAT Day presentation it was already my sixth or seventh time presenting the exact data. I did two in-class presentations and then I did two separate presentations at Geneseo's Dragon Den, which is Geneseo's version of Shark Tank, which is wonderful and I would recommend it to literally anyone that is looking to do public speaking or into entrepreneurial anything really great. And then, once for preliminary competition for the New York State Business Plan Competition (NYBPC) and then second the actual performance for the actual presentation at the NYBPC and then GREAT Day.

So by the time I got to GREAT Day, I had already presented it so many times and the data hadn't changed so the information was still there. I knew it. I felt confident still, you know, still anxious at GREAT Day. Anxiety was the same as my first two in-class presentation anxieties, although a lot less stressed for GREAT Day because that was my last one. My parents were there to see me, my friends were there to see me. So I think the most anxiety-inducing presentation for me was the NYBPC. The prep was all the same, I always go through presentations over and over until I get it perfectly through twice. I do the same talking myself up mantra.

I think the difference for Pawsibilities compared to other presentations that I've done is that my entrepreneurial professor, Professor Mark Rider, was so supportive and understanding. He would talk me through everything and would walk me through my anxieties, helped me and worked as a sounding board for me, and was there for me from start to finish. He told me don't sweat the rejections and was there to praise me when I got successes. So I think that was the biggest difference for Pawsibilities to other presentations and then from my GREAT Day presentation to the first ever in-class presentation I think it just paid off that every time I got a little prouder and a little more confident, a little more excited. But yeah, same stress and the same anxieties.

That's wonderful how supportive your professor was during the process.

Brooke: He really was great. And the Dragon's Den is completely his brainchild. He brings in community members. I got job offers on those days and so did others that presented. It's such an amazing experience, I can't praise it enough.

Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

Brooke: I would love to take the space to say to other women, and other women of color at Geneseo, to feel confident and work hard. We have to work twice as hard to be thanked and praised in the way that other non-women of color are and I think that it's really worth the payoff. It's worth sticking together and having people that support you like my professor, like my parents, like other women of color. So, I think Geneseo has been doing a really great job of supporting us. Also, I notice that there's the women's Dragons Den which was really exciting to women in entrepreneurship, which is also exciting.

So yeah, I think keep trying to put yourself out there. Rejections are going to come and they're going to sting a lot and they're going to hurt but just keep working and keep pushing because it's important to get your name out there. I'm always proud to put my last name on things, to put Muñoz on things. It's my mother's last name, I'm very proud of that. And so I think that's the extra thing. I would love to say that you should be proud of our backgrounds and want to put our names and be confident and excited to put our name on things.