



Creature Comforts

San Francisco's Pet Camp pampers cats and dogs at two seamlessly connected campuses.

Many people love animals, but few take their obsession as far as Mark Klaiman and Virginia Donohue do. The San Francisco couple run Pet Camp, a luxurious home away from home for dogs and cats whose owners are out of town.

Pet Camp is no traditional kennel. It offers a warm welcome to its boarders, lavishing them with such amenities as an artificial-turf outdoor play area for dogs at its main campus in San Francisco's Bayview district, and real tree limbs and bamboo bridges for feline campers at the new Cat Safari, which is located six miles north in Presidio Heights. And with seamless communications services from AT&T, clients enjoy that same generous service no matter which location they call into.

Klaiman and Donohue met as colleagues at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and married in 1994. Because they were pet lovers, the two of them began searching for a business that would allow them to bring Klaiman's Labrador retriever and Donohue's Great Dane to work. The couple opened Pet Camp in 1997. Its distinguishing concept was that dogs needed a place to romp and play, rather than being kept in isolation, which was the standard model for most kennels.

"San Francisco dogs are urban," Donohue says. "Everyone takes their dogs to the park twice a day, once in the morning before work and once in the evening after work. That's pretty much the pattern. We said, 'What if we had a boarding operation where the dogs actually played together twice a day, as they do when their owners take them to the park?' It sounds pretty basic now, but back then it was a radical notion. When you boarded your dog, it was separated from every other dog. In fact, when we opened Pet Camp, the industry trade association almost didn't let us join; it said our concept was dangerous. But we saw it working every day, twice a day, 365 days a year."

Cushy Surroundings

Today the idea of allowing boarded dogs to play together is widely accepted. Barring any behavioral problems, dogs at Pet Camp participate in hour-long play sessions, in groups categorized by size, age and temperament. For an extra fee, dogs can also receive individual playtime with Pet Camp staff or swim in a specially designed pool. Between sessions, the dogs remain in private runs featuring radiant heat and piped-in music. The 20,000-square-foot campground at its main campus can accommodate approximately 150 dogs and 30 cats.

Pet Camp Facts

- **Industry Focus**
Boarding facilities for dogs and cats in San Francisco
- **Size**
26 employees at two locations, one for dogs and cats and another just for cats
- **Business Needs**
Fast, reliable Internet service for real-time access to customer data, plus phones to handle busy calling periods flawlessly
- **Communications Solutions**
A superfast T-1 point-to-point Internet connection from AT&T, providing bandwidth for two locations, plus a customized office phone system for seamless connectivity between each Pet Camp location

San Francisco pet owners responded enthusiastically to Pet Camp's approach. As the business entered its 10th year, Klaiman and Donohue opened a second facility, Cat Safari, catering solely to feline boarders.

Going Green

In addition to reflecting Klaiman and Donohue's love of animals, both facilities show the owners' ongoing commitment to the environment. For example, on-site solar energy systems generate electricity for both facilities. At Pet Camp, ventilation for the dog area is provided by high-volume, low-speed fans that sip less electricity than a 60-watt lightbulb. Pet Camp is also part of an experimental pilot program that recycles dog waste to generate methane gas. While going green isn't costless, Klaiman observes, the long-term returns outweigh the short-term investment. "We clearly think there's a net positive financially," he says. "We look at environmental decisions in many of the same ways we look at other decisions; we have to be able to justify a rate of return on our investment. The good news is, you can be a good businessperson and a good environmental steward."

Klaiman and Donohue brought the same level of planning to their expansion as they did to their environmental efforts. Cat Safari is across the city from Pet Camp, but "we were emphatic that from a client perspective, it had to work like one facility," Klaiman says. That meant no miscommunication between the facilities, no callers kept on hold because information about their pet was being stored at the other location and no unnecessary phone tag between staff and clients. To keep the business client-friendly, Klaiman and Donohue realized, both Pet Camp locations needed real-time access to the same computerized customer database. They also needed a phone system that would allow calls to roll over easily from one location to the other during busy periods.

Purr-fect Communications

Ensuring that kind of seamless communication, Klaiman and Donohue recognized, would require plenty of bandwidth. The pair set their sights on securing a high-speed, point-to-point T-1

line that would connect their main campus directly to Cat Safari. T-1 lines can transmit high volumes of voice and data at a rapid 1.544 mbps, which is faster than the cable and DSL broadband connections used by many home Internet surfers.

"We knew from the outset that we needed this kind of bandwidth, so when we started planning Cat Safari, we began calling vendors we thought might be able to provide it," Klaiman says. "Several said they could set us up with a T-1 connection to the Internet, but they weren't comfortable tying our two locations together with a dedicated point-to-point line. AT&T was and gave us precisely what we needed."

"A lot of this telecommunications stuff is hard for small businesses to understand. AT&T makes it easy."

—Mark Klaiman, Co-owner, Pet Camp and Cat Safari

In addition to the T-1 line, Klaiman and Donohue also turned to AT&T for office phone service. And their AT&T representative recommended a phone system that gives Pet Camp's two locations the seamless communications it needs. Now if a client phones one facility and no one is available to answer, the call automatically rolls over to the other. Display screens on the phones allow staffers to see at a glance which facility callers are trying to reach. "Our consultant was able to set up everything we needed," Klaiman says. "It was nice to have that one point of contact."

As Klaiman and Donohue see it, a telecommunications partner that appreciates and addresses their needs has helped make their business-expansion dream a reality—and without compromising customer service. "A lot of this telecommunications stuff is hard for small businesses to understand," Klaiman says. "AT&T makes it easy."

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