

Finding True Love Can Be Ruff, But This Startup Could Have Your Match

Too many people treat pet adoption like a one-night stand.

“You look at a dog, and see his eyes, and think he’s cute,” says Tama Lundquist, co-president of Houston PetSet, an organization that works with about 70 animal shelters in the Houston area. “But if you’re a couch potato and he likes to run, that’s not going to work out.”

Each year, about 3.3 million of these failed hook-ups result in a dog being surrendered to a shelter nationally, the American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals says. Nearly half of those animals end up euthanized. Getting those animals homes, instead, is why Houston PetSet is working with a New York animal startup.

“We have to start thinking of animals as individuals,” says Jodi Andersen, co-founder of a startup called How I Met My Dog. “There has to be a way with all this technology and all the matching we do with people” to help humans find our canine soulmates.

Andersen, a veteran dog trainer, decided to take a page—or algorithm—out of dating apps designed for people and apply that to pets, creating the How I Met My Dog site, which launched in 2017. “We want to make sure to get these dogs out of shelters and into homes where they’ll stay,” she says.

Together with her two co-founders—all dog people, naturally—she spent a year surveying other dog trainers, veterinarians, and shelter experts about canine behavior and the appropriate corresponding set of human lifestyle characteristics. The results, which were all on paper, were then translated into an

algorithm by a friend who works in the tech industry. “We iterated that about 1,000 times,” Andersen says.

The outcome is a web-based 56-question survey that creates a person’s “ComPETability Match,” which asks potential adopters and rehomers a variety of questions about their household: are there kids and how young are they; how many hours a day would the dog be left at home; and how you would react if the cuddly canine was chewing on one of your shoes? The answers are crunched to provide a “P.E.T. profile” of how a dog would see you, how your hopes and expectations for dog ownership would meet with reality, and your leadership style and comfort level in parenting a dog.

Shelter workers and foster parents know the animals well and answer a canine behavior and demeanor survey on behalf of the potential adoptees.

“We want to get these dogs out of shelters and into homes where they’ll stay,” she says.

Digital match-making is attractive to younger people, who are already comfortable seeking companionship, swipes and all, on their phones, says Lundquist, the co-president of the Houston nonprofit. “This gives the animal a say” in an adoption, she adds.

How I Met My Dog started with three shelters in New England during its seven-month beta until September 2017, and now works with almost 300 shelters in 13 states, including Texas. More than 75,000 adopters have filled out the survey—100 dogs have been placed—and the site has an 80 percent

conversion rate, Andersen says.

“Since we’ve been doing this, we’ve only had one dog returned,” she says. “This woman adopted a dog that had more energy than she had expected. It turned out that her son had filled out the survey, not her.”

As the startup has come out of beta, Andersen says she and her fellow co-founders are focused on shoring up the startup’s business model. They had raised \$800,000 from friends and family to get up and running and now are looking at generating revenue charging rehoming a still-to-be-determined one-time fee to list on the site and white-labeling the matchmaking software for shelters across the country.

“We’re working on an app that has a community attached to it,” Andersen says. The survey “was just the first step in that: how you find the dog. Now, we want to help you reach that relationship nirvana.”

Andersen says she expects to try to raise \$3 million this year to fund the technology development and marketing. She is already thinking about how to use this technology to work with other shelter animals like cats. “We’ll be How I Met My Pet, eventually,” she says.

I took the survey and came out in the middle of the range: organized and willing to get professional behavior training, but also amenable to letting the dog sleep on “my” side of the bed. I’m also susceptible to a sad pair of eyes begging for scraps beside the kitchen table. (I mean, really, how could you say no?)

How I Met My Dog matched me with Dobby, an approximately six months to one-year-old husky heeler mix with yellow eyes and a white patch on his forehead. The site also shares Dobby's "P.E.T. profile," which says that he's a social butterfly (but also happy to chill on the couch), not afraid of thunder, and happy to play.

Users who fill out surveys can also receive e-mails that say "there's a dog who wants to meet you" and include a link to its profile at the shelter. "They can then decide if they want to send an application," Andersen explains.

One question that isn't asked? If there is a breed preference. After all, why be obsessed with finding George Clooney when it turns out that the boy next door is the best fit?

"This breaks down barriers, especially with bully breed dogs," she says. "You think you want a Maltipoo but they match with a pit bull or a Staffordshire terrier. This helps break down stereotypes about breeds."

MORE POSTS

Flexion Co-Founder, Chief Scientific Officer Neil Bodick to Retire

December 10,
2019

Replimune Taps Ex-Merrimack Exec for Chief Financial Officer Post

December 10,
2019

KalVista Pharma Eye Drug Partnered With Merck Flunks Phase 2 Test

December 10,
2019

Zentalis Steps Out With \$147M Raised to Develop “Tried and True” Small Molecules

December
10, 2019

Xconomy

Business, Life Sciences, and Technology News

[Blog](#)

[Events](#)

[About](#)

[Shop](#)

[FAQs](#)

[Patterns](#)

[Authors](#)

[Themes](#)

Twenty Twenty-Five

Designed with [WordPress](#)