

Office dogs

Nine to five – and Fido comes too!

Sara Walker meets six businesses who benefit by allowing pets in the workplace.

Many of us don't like to be separated from our canine buddies during the working day, but conventional offices tend to have a strict 'no pets' policy.

For the owners of some small businesses, though, dogs in the workplace can be an asset, providing companionship, stress relief and often helping to promote the company, as the following examples illustrate.

THE SHOP DOGS

Rebecca Davies runs Auntie Mabel's Seat, an interior design shop in Knutsford, Cheshire. She wouldn't be without her two canine assistants – nine-year-old Husky X Labrador Mabel, and seven-year-old mongrel Tilly.

"Our customers love the dogs. Mabel runs the shop really – she reclines in the window, and we get people coming in just to see her!" explains Rebecca.

Both dogs are sociable and friendly, and although the shop's strewn with expensive fabrics, Rebecca has never had any problems with her furry sales assistants.

"Before I opened the shop

in 2010, friends advised me not to bring the dogs in as it would put people off," she says. "I don't think that's been the case, though – interior design shops have a reputation for being a bit snooty, and the dogs help make us seem more approachable and friendly."

● For more information, visit www.auntymabelsseat.com

Rebecca, Tilly (left) and Mabel take a break during the working day.



THE PUB DOG

Mikey, a seven-year-old Jack Russell Terrier, is the resident pub dog at The Inn at Cranborne in Dorset.

Says the pub's and Mikey's owner, Australian-born Jane Gould: "Mikey's a real people dog – he's an asset to my business, without a doubt.

"I've noticed that the British don't seem comfortable coming into the bar alone. Mikey acts as host, icebreaker and chief topic of conversation, keeping the atmosphere relaxed.

"He's fine with other dogs coming into the pub – the only thing that's a slight worry for me is people feeding him titbits, as he has diabetes, but thankfully it rarely happens.

"If we ever have a guest who's not comfortable around dogs, we take him away, but it's never really an issue – most people love him."

● For more information about The Inn visit www.theinnatcranborne.co.uk

Jane and Mikey welcome customers to The Inn at Cranborne.



THE JOURNALIST'S DOG

Kelly Rose Bradford, a freelance journalist who writes for many national newspapers and magazines, has her own office junior in the shape of two-year-old Matilda Jane, a West Highland White Terrier.

Matilda has been a huge inspiration for Kelly in her work, and has featured in many of her articles.

"She's a great workplace stress reliever," says Kelly. "I often break off for cuddles with her when the words just won't flow, and long walks can be just the thing for relieving writer's block or mulling over an idea.

"She also got me a job on BBC Radio London's Jo Good dog-related radio

show. I went into the studio to discuss dog ownership, and even wore my best dog outfit for the occasion – a red silk Hobbs number with little black Scottie dogs all over it!"

● For more information on Kelly and her work, visit www.krbradford.co.uk

Matilda is Kelly's inspiration.



Dogs in the workplace

A BEHAVIOURIST'S VIEW

Pippa Hutchison MSc CCAB is a clinical animal behaviourist, and press and PR officer for the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors.

Says Pippa: "Dogs are naturally social creatures, so it's much better for them to be involved in your daily life than to be left home alone.

"Research has shown that dogs can help treat depression and improve mental health; they also encourage interaction and communication between humans. For a dog to do this successfully, though, he needs to be robust and well-socialised, so introduce your dog to the type of environment where you work early on so that he learns to settle.

"Also, offer your dog a safe place he can retreat to if necessary – dogs can have off-days too!"

"Remember to give your dog plenty of mental and physical stimulation during the working day – just being with you is not enough. Play a game with him, or give him an interactive toy, and offer him the chance to send his own 'text messages' (urine marking) to other dogs in the community by taking him for a walk."

A LEGAL VIEW

Frances Bennett is a solicitor with Gladstones Solicitors in Knutsford, Cheshire. She's also a dog owner, and foster carer for the RSPCA, and cautions owners about the implications of having dogs at work.

Advises Frances: "Dogs can leave their owners and/or handlers liable in civil law for a claim for damages. If your dog injures a person or animal or destroys property you may well be responsible, and have to bear the cost, so it's best to exercise caution at all times.

"If a dog owner brings their dog into the workplace, they'll need to consider the legal obligations of their employer. He or she has a duty of care, and must consider not only the temperament of the dog and the abilities of his handler, but also the logistics involved – for example, a dog may constitute a tripping hazard in a cramped office environment.

"In addition, the employer needs to take into account the views of everyone else in the workplace, and has to be conscious of the fact that some people do not like dogs, while others may be genuinely scared of them or allergic to dogs.

"Owners will also need to check their insurance to make sure that any claims directly or indirectly attributable to a dog's presence are covered."

THE STUDIO DOGS

Rosaria La Pietra and James Arnold run The Klinik, a holistic mind and body fitness centre in London, under the watchful eyes of Ralph and Jay, their two-year-old Miniature Dachshunds.

"They're little dogs with big personalities," says Rosaria. "James strongly believes that the dogs have given the business a boost. We're based in the City and our clients tend to be stressed and serious; the dogs are very therapeutic for people, and some clients

even say that they come a little earlier to enjoy some time with them. In fact if Ralph and Jay are not in the studio, people will ask where they are!

"As we're a total mind and body clinic, offering massage, yoga, pilates and many other services, it's nice to see how the dogs help clients relax."

● For more information about The Klinik visit www.theklinik.co.uk

Ralph (left) and Jay with Rosaria La Pietra.



THE COMPANY SPOKESDOG

Family-run business Wagg Foods was founded in 1923, and its range of pet food

can be found in supermarkets and pet shops nationwide.

Dalton, a six-year-old Flat Coated Retriever, belonging to managing director Richard Page, spends most days in the office, and has been adopted as the company's 'spokesdog'.

Laura Brassington, who's responsible for Wagg's PR and social media, is Dalton's personal assistant, translating

his thoughts onto Twitter, Facebook and his dog blog.

"He's a really cheeky character," says Laura, "and it's great fun pretending to be his voice.

"Dalton's the approachable face of the business, and it makes customers realise that we're not intimidating as a company – we're just normal pet owners."

● For more information on Wagg Foods, or to connect with Dalton on Twitter, visit www.waggfoods.com



Laura Brassington is Dalton's voice on Twitter.

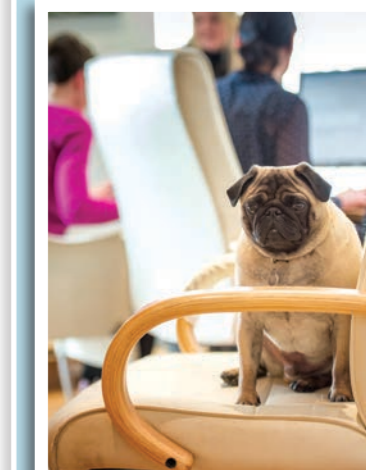
THE OFFICE HOUND

Holiday home company Harrogate Holidays manages over 100 properties in Yorkshire, from business accommodation to holiday cottages. Of the six office staff, several have dogs, and the company prides itself on the way it accommodates dog owners looking for a holiday with their pet.

"Although not all our properties are dog-friendly, we do have a very good selection available, and we're always happy to give information about local walks and dog-friendly pubs and restaurants," says the company's Jo Scott.

"In fact," adds Jo, "we have our own office dog – a gorgeous, three-year-old, Pug called Jack who keeps us all in line! There are lots of photos of Jack on our website – and he helps to show potential guests that we really do understand their needs as dog owners."

● For more information about Harrogate Holidays, visit www.harrogateholidays.co.uk



Jack the Pug's in charge of Harrogate Holidays.

About the author

Sara Walker has owned Springer Spaniels for 20 years. She splits her time between England and France with her current spaniel Monty, a cosmopolitan hound with a nose for travel.