

LIFE&TIMES **LIVING**

# Online solution for strays

**Y**OU see a stray puppy at the roadside. It's in a pitiful condition. However, you steel your heart and walk away because you know that if you go near it, you will surely become responsible for it. And your house is already home to 10 dogs and cats.

Furthermore, you've already donated generously to various organisations involved in the welfare of animals and there little left in the kitty.

This was how Melvin Chan Weng Hong felt but he decided to do something about it.

"My sister (Meryl Chan Chui Yeng) and I used to rescue stray dogs all the time," says the 28-year-old, who works as a corporate trainer.

"One day, we were walking up a hill when we saw a group of 10 dogs. I couldn't tell what they were, but I think that they were shih tzus and pekingese. They had been abandoned because they could no longer breed. It was really sad to see them. Some had skin diseases and one was blind. They had been left there to die.

"We contacted a few animal shelters and arranged for transportation.

An animal lover and rescuer turns to e-commerce to solve the problems of strays, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

At the shelters, we paid for the dogs to be taken to the vets. We were lucky because many of the dogs were adopted. But the shelter kept asking for donations. That was the pivotal moment for me. That was when I realised we couldn't go on giving and giving. Something had to change."

**HANDLING CANINES**

Meanwhile, he had acquired a dog of his own, Ruby, a poodle. Melvin shares a tip when approaching strays: Always remain calm and assertive. The father of two young children learnt this tip from watching Cesar Millan in *The Dog Whisperer*. "Looking after Ruby, I've also learnt to recognise when a dog is angry, aggressive or anxious."

As time passed, Melvin's ideas about how to remedy the situation with regard to strays began to take form.

One main problem that has to

be addressed is ensuring that the animals are spayed and neutered to avoid overbreeding.

Whatever the business model that would be eventually developed, Melvin was certain that it had to have what he calls a "recurring value."

This was to ensure the sustainability of resources as opposed to the traditional method of relying heavily on donors and volunteers.

**PET FOOD**

All these ideas were conceptualised in 2011, but it took another two years for his efforts to finally bear fruit. His plan was to set up an online retail shop to sell pet food called Waggy Love ([www.waggylove.com](http://www.waggylove.com)).

He and his partners engaged web developers who used tools like Google Analytics to research the entire concept. After that came the task of choosing the right e-commerce platform.

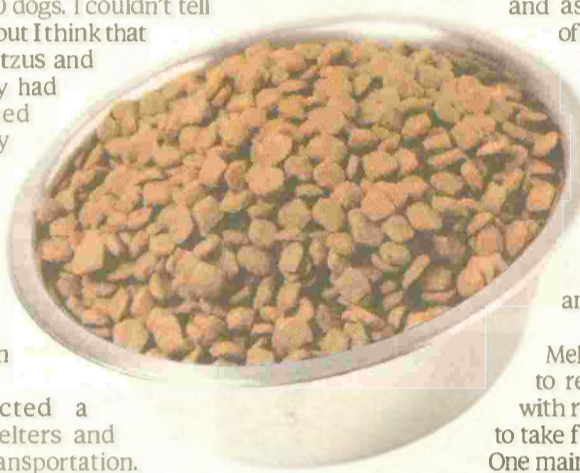
"It's a little pricey, but we're now using shopify," explains Melvin. "It shouldn't have cost us more than RM3,000 to set up the whole business, but we ended up paying close to RM20,000."

Once the online retail store was set up, the next challenge was getting suppliers and customers on board.

Melvin says: "This continues to be a challenge. It's hard to convince suppliers to sign on with us. They assume that because it's an online business, we have no overheads. That is not true. We are a business and naturally, we have overheads. Some suppliers even have a policy of not selling to online pet stores. As for customers, the main problem is that they don't know we exist."

Then, when it comes to payment options, Melvin says that customers tend to be reluctant to use their credit cards or even set up a PayPal account. "So, for these customers, we provide a cash deposit option."

This is how it works: Click on [waggylove.com](http://waggylove.com) and you will be able to choose from various brands of pet food such as Blackwood Pet Food, Annameat, Cesar Canine Cuisine and others. Profits generated from the sale of these products will be channelled to a fund set up to help shelters and rescue groups that are registered with [waggylove.com](http://waggylove.com) to pay for spaying and neutering services. The shelter groups that are currently registered with [waggylove.com](http://waggylove.com)



*"In future, we hope to be able to offer customers more than pet food."*  
Melvin Chan

One of the challenges facing Melvin Chan (left) is getting more people to be aware of the existence of Waggy Love. With him is wife Christine and Ruby, their poodle.

PICTURE BY NIK ROSLI

are Second Chance and Furry Friends Farm. Though [waggylove.com](http://waggylove.com) has low profit margins, Melvin is optimistic that business will pick up over time. In fact, he is confident enough to say that he will be expanding the range of products soon.

Concluding, he says: "In future, we hope to be able to offer customers more than pet food. They will be able to invest in grooming and boarding facilities and, in the process, help shelters registered with us pay for spaying and neutering stray dogs and cats."



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