

## NEW ENTREPRENEURS

PHOTO/COURTESY HOLLY SHERBURNE



Holly Sherburne

# Paw print

A chat with Holly Sherburne, founder of **Downeast Dog News** in Rockland.

**Founded:** May 2006

**Startup costs:** \$20,000

**Employees:** Sherburne, plus four part-time freelancers (bookkeeper, ad sales representative, editor and graphic designer)

**Revenue, year one:** \$60,000

**Projected revenue, year two:** \$110,000

**Contact:** 273-6248

PO Box 945, Rockland 04841

[www.downeastdognews.com](http://www.downeastdognews.com)

### How did you get the idea for the paper?

Although I grew up here in Maine, part-way through college I went out West and lived in Oregon for about 13 years. And when I was in the Portland, Oregon, area I came across a free, monthly dog newspaper and I looked forward to reading it every month. And so I always knew I wanted to move back to Maine, and I had it in the back of my mind that [the paper] would be fun to start and could be successful here. So once I did move back [in 2004 for a job at Bowdoin College as a Web content producer] I did some research and it took me about a year and a half, but I finally put a business plan together and that's when I started it.

### How did you learn to write a business plan?

Research on the Web primarily. There's really good small-business resources out there. There's a lot of stuff from the state of Maine. And Coastal Enterprises Inc. in Wiscasset is where I received my small-business loan. They had some information as well. I received a loan from them for \$16,500.

### What topics do you cover?

I always have a section called Hot Dog News. It's news blurbs about who's opening a business or who's relocated or gotten an award. I always have at least two or three educational articles — we've covered heartworm, ear infections, canine bloat. I write a dog-jobs profile, where I talk with somebody who works in a dog-related field. There's always a calendar of events to let people know what's going on in terms of dog-related events in the state. And then I have a section [about] dogs for adoption from either an animal shelter or a rescue group.

### Do you have a background in the dog-care industry?

I don't specifically have a background related to the dog business. But I have two dogs of my own. I have a 10-year-old

black lab mix and a 10-year-old Australian cattle dog. The way I view my role is I'm providing a vehicle for information about dogs to be shared around the state. I really look to the experts like trainers and veterinarians to write the articles because they are the experts.

### How do you land advertisers?

I started out by hitting the road. I had a mock-up of what the newspaper would look like and I talked to people to find out if they'd be interested in carrying this free newspaper in their store or office. And I broached the topic of advertising and a lot of people asked about it as well. I mailed out several hundred postcards to dog businesses announcing this new paper. It was an unfilled niche and people in the dog business arena realized they could use this as a vehicle to capture their target audience. In the August issue I counted 68 different advertisers.

### You publish Downeast Dog News monthly, how many copies do you print per issue?

The first issue was May 2006. I printed 10,000. I've been printing 14,000, for example, in July, and most of those issues ended up being gone after about two weeks. I think a lot of it's due to a lot of tourists in the state, so for August, I'm printing 15,000 copies.

### What are your main expenses?

The biggest expense is definitely printing. I print at Lincoln County Publishing in Newcastle. Distributing the paper is another significant expense. I have family members who help. I also have some volunteers, and advertisers who I'm able to trade some advertising with to help me get it distributed. When you talk about expenses, a lot of my time and energy is spent on the content and making sure that it's high quality. Finding writers is challenging. I have a wonderful base of writers, but I'm always looking for more.

### Did you consider doing an online-only publication?

That's always crossed my mind given the cost of printing the paper and distributing the paper. But I think there's something to being able to pick up the paper and hold it in your hands and spend time flipping the pages.

*Interview by Kerry Elson*

**New Entrepreneurs profiles young businesses, 6-18 months old. Send your suggestions and contact information to [kelson@mainebiz.biz](mailto:kelson@mainebiz.biz).**