

CASE STUDY: THE PERSONAL TOUCH



Organisation: Gentian Hill Boarding Kennels
 Location: UK, Devon
 Kennels Type: Semi-outdoor
 Kennels Function: Boarding
 Number of Kennels: 12 originally, extending to 16
 Unit Size Sleep: 5ft x 5ft/1.5m x 1.5m and 6ft x 6ft
 Unit Size Exercise: 7ft 10" x 5ft-9ft/2.4m x 2m-2.9m
 Date Built: 2004

www.gentianhillboardingkennels.co.uk

INSPIRING A NEW GENERATION OF OWNERS, THIS PIONEERING KENNELS SET A HIGHER STANDARD IN DOG BOARDING BY CREATING A CARING, PERSONAL, AND HOMELY BUSINESS ACHIEVING A NEW AND UNPRECEDENTED CLIENT DEMAND

GENTIAN HILL BOARDING KENNELS

Jane Cole lived in a beautiful location with her children and dogs, enjoyed her house, horses, and parrots. Having built an extension to her home, the next dream she wanted to make happen was to turn her hobby into a permanent lifestyle.

Jane will be a familiar figure to many who have visited our websites because she was the first person to build using our kennel blueprints. Having chosen the 12 kennels plans, she started her journey into self-building kennels.

Many of our customers have spoken to her, and she has been an inspiration to a lot of people - particularly regarding the need (and market) for a better quality of kennels building.

In fact, Jane's progress was watched by many on our website from around the world, as she gave us updates and feedback on the impact her kennels were having in the less affluent, but stunning countryside of the South-West of the UK.

Just two months after opening Jane told us: "We were fully booked for Christmas and having to turn people away!". Given that Christmas is a peak season for kennels, where virtually every business probably turns away 2-3 times the customers they normally take, this was perhaps to be expected - but a good sign so early on. Although a very busy time of year to start such a learning curve - it was still a real boost to morale, especially when money is disappearing quickly during the build, and begins to trickle back in as the customer base is built up over time.

Just six months after opening, the news from Jane was even more positive, and she told us "If anyone's in any doubt about the need for good kennels, they needn't be! I've been so busy it's been unbelievable as I'm snowed under with bookings and continually turning people away. It's been full, full, full since Christmas and it's getting busier and busier.

"It's going really, really well and I'm getting 90% of my bookings from www.boardingkennels.org. I've already got bookings for Christmas and next year, from customers who want to be guaranteed their dogs will get in.

"Business is booming! The phone doesn't stop all day and the follow-up paperwork is time-consuming as we are solidly booked up until September, half full for Oct/Nov and almost December, so I can be a little more choosy about clients I take now! I've got to the point where some policies need to be made about opening and phone-answering times. I wasn't prepared for just how busy we would be. I am looking at taking someone on to help. We are also working hard on the new reception building at the moment. We are walking the dogs three times a day now, but for shorter periods than when they were just walked twice - but they love getting out more."

Jane had done it - she had taken the kennels world by storm. A lot of effort had gone into getting herself known on the web, radio and by word of mouth, especially by local veterinarians and dog owners. Customers often asked her "Why aren't all kennels like this?"

"If anyone's in any doubt about the need for good kennels, they needn't be!"





THE CARE DOG OWNERS HAVE BEEN LONGING FOR

Jane's only problems have been how to deal with people who just don't turn up, especially when she turned so many people away - it is very frustrating and is a lot of money to 'lose' - dealing with all the paperwork, and the only other problem is some dogs chewing her beautiful bedding.

One year after opening Jane was averaging 24 dogs a day (50% of customers had two or more dogs), and could have filled another 16 kennels for single dogs!

THE DEMAND INCREASES

Receiving 15-30 messages on the phone each day, Jane referred clients she couldn't accommodate on to other new boarding kennels designed by Kennel & Cattery Design, to ensure clients were referred to someone she knew, and where the standard of accommodation would be just as high. Jane said: "My customers all love the kennels and think it's a beautiful place. There are lots of changes from when you were last here, we've put in lots of flowers and beautiful plants and are now busy building a separate reception. I can't wait for you to see it in its full glory."

"The Environmental Health Officer licensed us for 3 dogs for each giant kennel - and I need more giant kennels! We're already at the point when we're considering whether to build another kennel block, but at the moment I'm happy to stay as we are. I now have my groomer here for 5 days a week and she is getting 6 dogs in a day." Jane had customers with a variety of reasons for boarding their dogs. One customer had a hip replacement, then contracted MRSA so her stay was for 8 weeks. Jane sent digital photos to reassure and comfort her that her 'baby' was well and happy.

Another customer enjoyed a 6-week cruise and Jane emailed her photos too, and was delighted when a large local animal rescue home started recommending her. The Police were considering Gentian Hill for a contract for the police dogs and the handlers were so keen for their dogs to come here they have offered to pay any shortfall from the budget themselves.

EARLY EXPANSION

"I've had people contact me from your website who are interested in building from your Blueprints and in the PetAdmin booking software. I tell them we would have struggled to have been such a huge success that we are today without you. Within such a short time we have already had to expand due to such high demand. We added another 6 giant kennels to give us more flexibility - and customers all want the larger kennels! We are told regularly that our customers refuse to board anywhere else... quite often booking their holidays around my diary. Every customer that has found us online through the website has booked with us so the percentage has increased. They love the website and tell me how informative it is, we have people come to us from hundreds of miles away, and even people returning home from abroad."

Jane says "We strongly support other kennels following the same build and design as ours who have also sought your help and advice with their own builds. We still get lots of calls from the UK and abroad for help in setting up new businesses." Jane loves the fact that her pioneering kennels inspire both dog owners and future kennel owners to seek higher standards of boarding and welfare for their dogs. As well as waking up to such a beautiful location, Jane's greatest satisfaction is doing something she loves every single day.

