



40 years of Pet – Business

- retrospect and prospects

On 12.07.1982 Fritz Gerke entered a pet store for the first time. This was the beginning of an unexpected, exciting time - a journey through diverse sectors of the pet business: starting at a small pet store, moving on to working at a 900 square meter "Fressnapf-store" as a franchise-partner and ending up as an international active export director.

Now Fritz Gerke bundles all his knowledge and experiences into consulting companies in the pet – business.

„ When I entered the pet store on Hansaplatz in Soest for the first time on July 12th, 1982 (the year Helmut Kohl became Chancellor, Nicole won the Eurovision Song Contest with "ein bisschen Frieden" and when the Walkman was invented), I had already completed a two-and-a-half-year apprenticeship as a retail salesman and was in the fourth semester of my business administration studies.

Now a whole new world opened up to me: strange and unfamiliar smells, twittering birds, chirping crickets, screeching parrots. Dozens of algae-covered aquariums with colorful fish from all over the world, tiny terrariums with scorpions, tarantulas, snakes, geckos and mealworms. You would see rusty cages with budgies, canaries and various parrots, golden hamsters, rabbits, mice, playing kittens in the shop window and of course many other small animals! In addition to that the store would be totally overcrowded with shelves full of various accessories and food for all kinds of pets and have countless bird cages hanging on chains from the 4,20 meters high ceiling. Four employees were bustling with caring for the animals, cashing up and serving the hectic costumers. All this on just under 60 square meters of sales area without an office or a staff room.

All they had was a tiny toilet and a small sink in the back corner.

This was the place where I was going to spend the first four weeks of my semester break.

A promise made must be a promise kept - so there was no turning back.

For some reason this strange bazaar – like - atmosphere fascinated me and I quickly started to develop my own ideas on how to turn this chaos into a

modern and organized retail store, especially since I had been given the opportunity to take over the business.

So this ended up not only being a job during my summer break, but the early end of my university degree in business administration, even though I later continued my degree in marketing at the distance-learning university in Hagen, Germany.

The location of the store could not have been better: very affordable rent and the building was right behind a huge bus stop for the entire area. We had an average of more than 160 paying customers a day who, however, also caused a constant hustle and bustle, always worrying that they might miss their bus.

It was the beginning of now 40 years in Pet Business, which I enjoyed more and more over the years. I was also allowed to gain a lot of new professional experiences in our nationwide "community-of practice-group" from 1983 onwards.

After remodeling and a complete reorganization, my store in Soest achieved sales of over DM 630,000 in 1985 - same location and the same floor space. The highlight of that year were 312 paying customers on Christmas Eve with a 30 meter long queue waiting outside the store.

For all those who did not experience those past times, my opening description of pet stores back then may seem unbelievable and absurd.

From my current point of view I'd definitely agree: it was absurd!

Animal procurement and animal husbandry in pet stores and at home has fortunately changed and improved significantly for the benefit of animals. A special promotion like a "Timneh - gray parrot with a cage" for 375 DM or "Greek land tortoises" for 9.90 DM is luckily a thing of the past. Many new animal protection laws were introduced and present ones improved. Many imports were completely stopped and strict rules with official controls are now the standards for the welfare of the animals. Associations and organizations are constantly working to keep and further improve standards.

The expertise of employees is increasingly being improved and new media helps to inform customers more comprehensively to educate on how to be species-appropriate and respectful pet owners.

Product ranges have made an almost unbelievable large progress in the nutrition range as well as pet accessories. Many of today's pet services are being taken for granted but did not even exist back then when I started

working. Veterinarians are far more specialized and are capable of improved treatments and early diagnosis of diseases, as well as taking preventive measures.

In this way, the entire "person-to-pet-relationship" has changed to become a respectful friendship, based on an understanding of individual needs. People have realized that they need the animals to feel, preserve and develop their humanity.

There have been economic and other crisis throughout the last four decades. The pet industry has always managed to see these as opportunities and to take advantage of them. Consistent developments, foresight and courage, were investments into a positive future. In addition to all the changes and the burdening social and political circumstances, we must also face the new challenges of the market and courageously search for and find solutions.

Some of our current topics are sustainability, individualization and personalization, subscription models for everyday products, digitization and the combination of online and in-store business, but also the increasing new demands and lifestyles of our customers. The customer wants to be cared for and not only provided with goods. The products must be brought to life!

Where customers shop should be a multi-functional place, a place not only to purchase items but rather enjoy the experience, have fun, learn and discover: a "best-in-class-retail-experience" is the goal...

My journey through time continues and I am looking forward to it... “

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