



Lara Warn

St. Petersburg, Florida



That Dog Ice Cream

Pup Active

Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Lara Warn:

Lara Warn, owner and founder of That Dog Ice Cream and Pup Active, is driven by the desire to create a fun dog loving community. For the former technical writer and lover of all things dog, in order to create and focus on real human to human connections, it's important to break down the rigid walls we create. Through a line of fun and edgy dog-based apparel and dog-friendly frozen treats, she's doing just that.

When Warn originally launched her first venture in October 2016, it was a dog walking business called Pup Active. She was fed up with the corporate world and wanted to make a change. Warn loves dogs and thought, "What better way to spend my days than to get paid to hang out with dogs." The idea of starting a dog walking business is something she always toyed with.

"When I left my corporate job in Tampa, I didn't really have a plan," she said. "I was in the bar business in the past and a friend of mine owned a local tavern. I was able to pick up a few shifts to make ends meet until the dog walking business took off." It didn't take long for that to happen.

Within two months of launching Pup Active, Warn had a full book of business. Four months later, she launched the apparel line. According to Warn, growth was organic and nearly 100% word-of-mouth driven.

In early 2018, Warn sold the dog walking portion of Pup Active to focus on the apparel line and her newest venture, That Dog Ice Cream. Warn explained the idea behind her dairy-free frozen sweet treat and the process of bringing it to market.

"I can thank Charlie, my soul mate dog, for the dairy-free portion of the treats," she said. "He had an intolerance to dairy, so I played around with different coconut milk recipes. I didn't want preservatives and stabilizers, but couldn't quite figure out how to suspend the ingredients.

Certain ingredients like bacon and peanut butter kept sinking to the bottom. A friend recommended Guar Gum, which helps to thicken the mixture and produces a gummy consistency. I tried it out and it ended up being our secret weapon."

Warn uses a commercial kitchen in St. Pete where she personally mixes up her frozen concoctions. She also handles distribution, marketing, retail relations and pretty much everything else related to running her business. She credits a recent health scare for giving her a boost of strength and courage. "I had a cancer scare in late 2017 and early 2018," she said. "I'm super fearless now because of it."

That Dog Ice Cream is available through select retail locations throughout the Tampa Bay area and Orlando. Warn's expansion and distribution strategy is simple and direct. "I'll cold call and walk in with samples," she said. "I introduce myself, describe our products and talk about how some of the money goes back to dog rescue efforts. Most of the places I go to are dog friendly. For the pet stores, bars and restaurants that say yes, it's like built in advertising to have our products on their shelves. The response has been great."

Looking ahead, Warn would like to see That Dog Ice Cream manufactured in bigger quantities and distributed to large grocery store chains like Publix. She wants to expand to Miami and various locations along the east coast of Florida. She's not exactly sure what that looks like yet, but knows that if they had enough capital, they'd be in Publix by now.

We asked about challenges and competition. "Like a lot of entrepreneurs, I can be impulsive," she said. "I have lots of ideas, but finding money is the biggest challenge right now. As far as competition is concerned, all great ideas have copy cats, but our heart is in it for the right reasons. We donate back to dog rescue and our long term plan is to have a senior dog sanctuary where dogs can run free and enjoy their remaining days."

Warn offers up some great advice for aspiring entrepreneurs. "For the majority of the population, the fear of failure and looking dumb holds them back," she said. "Don't let this happen to you. It doesn't matter what anyone out of your arena thinks about what you're doing. Also, you

don't need to have everything figured out ahead of time. No one has it all figured out. Just start."

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