

Familiar furry faces

By Amanda Koehn

Local pups (and their families) find success on Instagram



mojito_rose

95K+
followers



parker.and.sabo

52K+
followers



hopsthebardog

19K+
followers



Kim Soldan



Bre Pogue



Evelyn Holmer



Mojito Rose Soldan, a 4-year-old golden retriever from North Royalton, has a busier schedule than some humans.

One day in April, the therapy hound helped alleviate some stress college students were feeling during finals week, attended a reading program at an elementary school and visited memory care patients in Medina.

And anyone who follows her on Instagram would know those experiences because she also models daily for the more than 95,000 followers of her account, @mojito_rose.

In fact, if her owner/photographer Kim Soldan doesn't post at least one photo a day, she gets messages from concerned followers wondering whether the pup is OK.

"It started as a joke and then it got very serious," Soldan says of Mojito's account.

Mojito and Soldan are among the Northeast Ohio dogs and their families who are gaining strong Instagram followings from users around the world. Outside obvious perks like recognition, sponsorships and receiving free stuff, the pet parents say presence on the app helps them build community with other animal lovers.

@MOJITO_ROSE (AND FRIENDS)

Soldan says her husband, Jeff, initially created Mojito's Instagram

account for fun. However, it took on a life of its own as it gained followers. She's not sure why Mojito became popular, other than she is cute, but acknowledges the therapy aspect of her life may have factored in.

"I know there are bigger accounts that all of their pictures are professionally shot and edited and set up," Soldan says. "Honestly, some of Mojito's highest performing ones are ones that are blurry and dark, and happened at the spur of the moment."

Once Mojito got about 1,000 followers, Soldan says she began getting featured elsewhere. Companies such as The Dodo, a website for animal content, featured Mojito in videos. That website and others then tag her in their Instagram posts, leading to more followers.

Since Mojito is a therapy dog, Soldan says she has ample opportunities to take photos of her doing interesting things, which contributes to an eventful account. Yet some of the best performing photos and videos are of Mojito simply cuddling with one of Soldan's cats or where she's carrying her toys to her bed in the evening.

One of the perks of having a strong following include Mojito being recognized around town – she has been recognized by fans while she's hanging her head out of the car window at a stop light.

As far as advice for others looking to build their pet's social media profile, it's important to post consistently and use good hashtags, Soldan says.

"Post every day, or every other day, don't have weeks in between posts, and definitely utilize hashtags," Soldan says.

@PARKER.AND.SABO

Parker, a 3-year-old red tri Australian shepherd, is the first dog Bre Pogue has had as an adult. The Medina resident says she was posting so much about him on Facebook that she decided to make him his own Instagram account.

"That's when I started going out and really adventuring with him and meeting other local Instagram people," she says, adding she also started an Aussies of Ohio group, which now has almost 500 members on Facebook.

Pogue says using hashtags, posting at least three times a day and engaging with her followers helped her get 10,000 followers in the first year. She saw another jump when she got Sabo, a blue merle Australian shepherd puppy, who is now 1. The dogs' joint account now has almost 53,000 followers.

As a result, Pogue says she gets free pet products, like leashes, toys and beds to review, and the dogs have become influencers for Chewy.com, an online pet shop.

One challenge however, has been to continue growing followers. Pogue says when the dogs were puppies, it was pretty easy to get followers, but since they are now grown, it's a little more difficult to make the account unique and attractive to new followers.

"It gets time-consuming trying to keep things original," Pogue says.

"I try not to post the same things consistently. ... At the same time, I know there are things people like to see."

For example, Pogue says photos where the dogs have goofy looks on their faces or are doing silly things get a lot of likes. However, she says lately they've been out enjoying nature, which is a great activity for the dogs, but those photos aren't always the ones that perform well on Instagram.

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"I'm still going to share it because it's all about their lives and what they're doing," she says.

@HOPSTHEBARDOG (AND PORTER)

The Instagram account of Hops, an 8-year-old

Yorkshire terrier based in the Tremont neighborhood of Cleveland, began as that of her owner. Evelyn Holmer says featuring Hops regularly in her photos stemmed from her desire to photograph people, animals and things other than herself.

"Slowly, it morphed entirely into his account," she says.

Holmer says the jump in followers came when she and her husband, Hansal Patel, visited Austin, Texas, and chronicled their trip mostly through photos of Hops. Soon, Hops' account also had a theme: hanging out in Cleveland-area bars.

Porter, a now 3-year-old Yorkie,

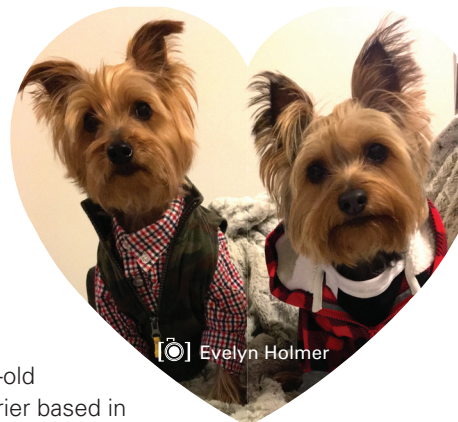
also joined the family, which led to more followers.

"Other than clearly the hope of someday monetization of it, it's just so much fun," Holmer says. "It's such a nice break from your day-to-day, career-focused, serious work life. I do it less for the hope of being an 'Ella Bean' (an Instagram famous dog, @ellabeanthedog) and more because it just makes me happy that my dogs make other people so happy – and I know that sounds totally cheesy."

Holmer says one perk of the account that has more than 19,000 followers is that it engaged her 76-year-old father with Instagram, although she says he still doesn't get why strangers are interested in her dog. She also gets free drinks pretty often, and Terrestrial Brewing Company in Cleveland named a beer after Hops.

However, one of the biggest perks for Holmer is meeting people who appreciate and support one another's dogs. For example, Porter had a serious knee surgery last year that Holmer expressed her concern about on Instagram. She received several supportive messages from followers who had similar experiences.

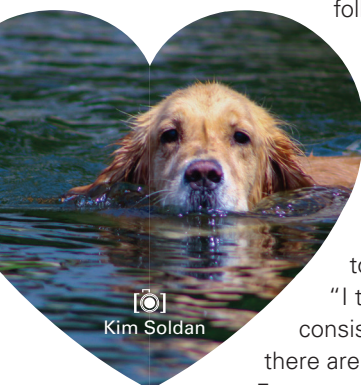
"If you are just in it to get followers and be an Insta-famous dog, it feels ingenuine and you are not going to actually get feedback," she says, adding that to build a following, it's helpful to follow your followers back and engage with them. "But if you are out to connect to people and really be involved in their Instagram lives, if you will, it will come." **BF**



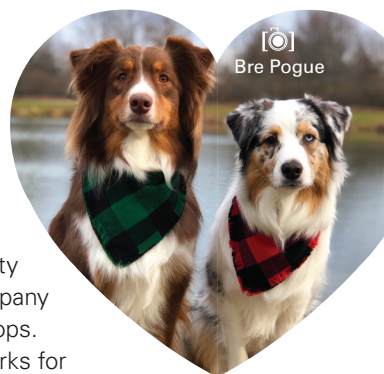
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