

Niche Building

Go Your Own Way

Whether you're a seasoned real estate veteran or a newly licensed practitioner, you cannot be all things to all people. A narrowly defined market will help you craft a niche where you can shine.

BY LESLIE C. STONE

Find a Need and Fill It

When Rhona Sutter came to Florida from England 18 years ago, she was dismayed by how difficult it was to find a pet-friendly rental. "Coming from London, where I was used to letting my dog run wild in Hyde Park, I couldn't understand it," says the sales associate with Downing Frye Realty in Naples. "I knew there

must be people like myself who had problems finding not just rentals but also houses for their dogs, cats or other pets. I thought an incredible niche would be to put pet friendly together with real estate. Sixty-five percent of U.S. households own a pet," Sutter explains, citing a recent survey from the American Pet Products Association. "And U.S. pet owners spent approximately \$60 billion on their pets last year. So this is no small market."

Sutter targets pet owners who typically spare no expense when it comes to their furry or feathered friends. "I keep two cages in the back of my SUV when I'm showing property in case a buyer wants to bring a pet. It's always a good idea to walk the neighborhood with your dog." Sutter doesn't bring the pets into the home unless the owner is amenable. "Obviously, you ask ahead of time," she says. Before showings, she checks with HOAs to see if there are restrictions on pets in the community.

To help market her niche, Sutter has created several pet-oriented websites, including *PetFriendlyNaplesRealEstate.com* and *PetRealtyNetwork.com*, as well as *PetFriendlyResourceDirectory.com*, *PetHealthAlert.com* and *MyPetsYearBook.com*, which she describes as "Facebook for pets."