Balancing Business and Animal Welfare

A strategic design approach for animal-friendly sale of rodents and rabbits

The service concept

The journey begins in-store, where customers can explore example habitats, consult employees, and register for a workshop. Workshops are positioned as an accessible entry point for first-time small animal owners, supported by an incentive such as a discounted starter pack.

The workshop consists of two consecutive parts. In the first part, customers are introduced to animal housing, required products, and basic care practices. This is followed by a transition to a shelter or breeder, where the second part focuses on the responsibilities of pet ownership, including long-term care, time, and financial commitment. Customers are then guided in selecting an animal that matches their lifestyle, in collaboration with the relevant stakeholder.

After completing the workshop, customers are offered a free trial of the online community. This lowers the barrier to entry and allows them to experience ongoing support, such as expert care tips, habitat inspiration, and special offers. Through continued engagement and personalised incentives, the community encourages repeat store visits and strengthens customer loyalty.

Pet stores

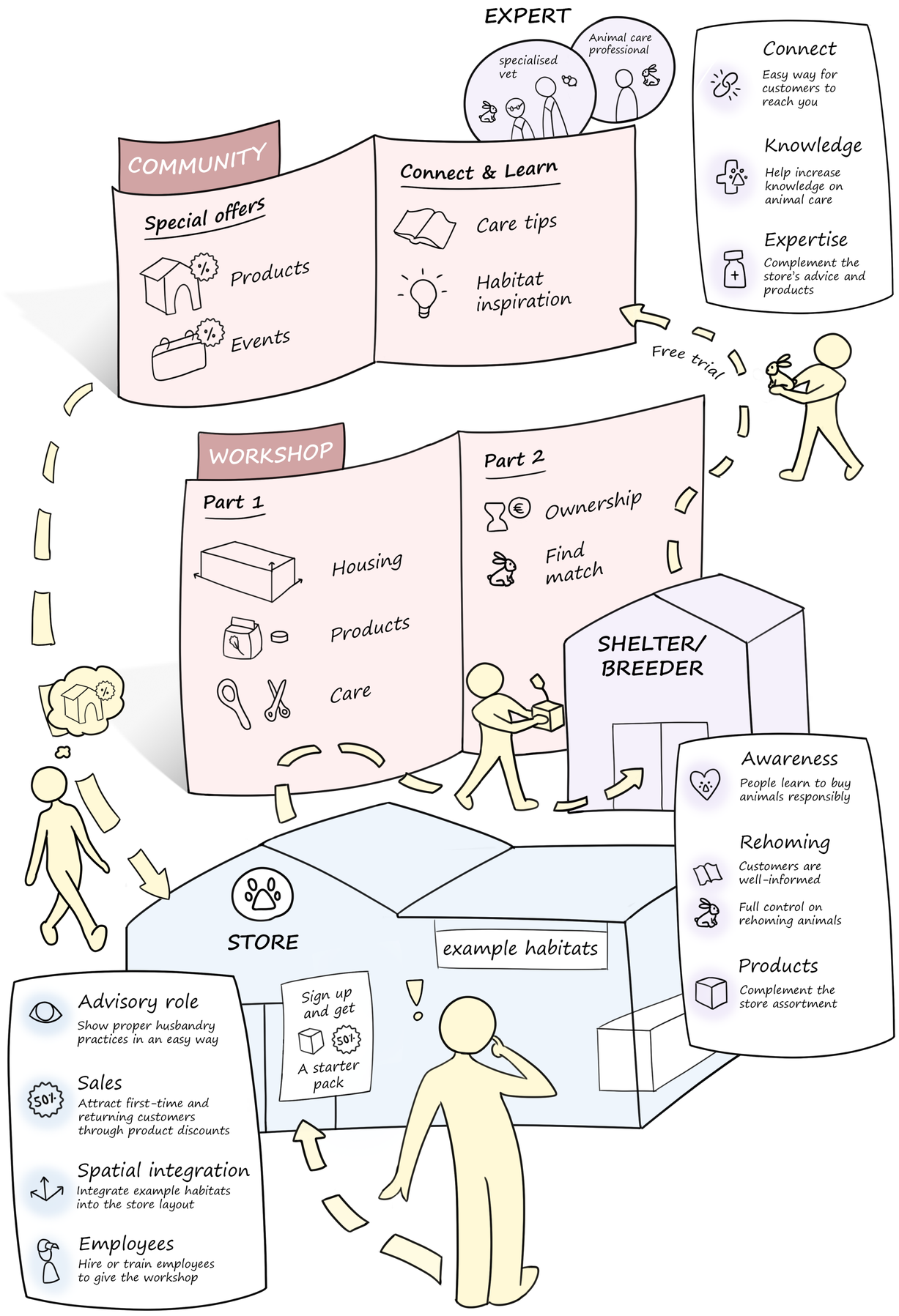
The concept strengthens the advisory role of pet stores through physical demonstrations, workshops, and ongoing support via the online community. It also encourages repeat visits through targeted incentives like the starter pack discount and the special offers of the community.

Animal shelters and breeders

For shelters and breeders, the concept increases awareness of responsible animal acquisition and ensures that customers are better informed prior to adoption or purchase. They retain control over the rehoming process, which aligns with their focus on animal welfare and appropriate owner matching.

Experts

External experts, such as specialised veterinarians and animal care professionals, benefit from increased visibility and access to new customers through the online community. The platform also enables them to share knowledge and contribute to improved animal care practices.



Implementation

Collaboration

The concept relies on clearly defined roles within the stakeholder network. Pet stores focus on product provision and long-term customer guidance, while shelters and breeders are responsible for matching animals to suitable owners and managing the rehoming process. This division ensures that each stakeholder contributes their expertise while maintaining a coherent customer experience.

Establishing effective collaboration will require time and deliberate effort. Insights from interviews show that perspectives among stakeholders are not always aligned. For this reason, collaboration (especially with shelters and breeders) should be developed gradually, with a strong focus on building mutual trust. A shared emphasis on improving animal welfare can serve as common ground, helping stakeholders recognise their aligned long-term goals despite differing current practices.

Business model

The value proposition focuses on supporting pet owners by providing high-quality, welfare-oriented care through a combination of physical retail experiences, expert guidance, and an accessible online community. However, to deliver workshops and maintain an online community, several key resources are required, including trained staff, technical infrastructure, and strategic partnerships.

To assess the short-term financial viability of the proposed concept, an estimate of both costs and revenues was developed. This analysis resulted in a projected cash flow and an indicative break-even point for the implementation of the workshops and the associated online community, suggesting that the concept has the potential to become financially viable in the short term.

Recommendations

Top-down approach

Pet stores are unlikely to drive large-scale improvements in animal welfare due to structural and commercial constraints. Instead, meaningful change is more likely to emerge from a top-down dynamic, in which expert-driven information and educational initiatives shape customer expectations and behaviour.

Through channels such as workshops and online platforms, customers become better informed, which in turn increases demand for higher welfare standards. Pet stores are then required to respond to these changing expectations, rather than initiating the shift themselves.

Within this dynamic, the primary role of pet stores remains providing accessible advice and products. More complex educational responsibilities should be led by external experts, such as specialised veterinarians and animal behaviour specialists, who possess the required knowledge and authority. This division of roles allows for broader impact without placing unrealistic demands on retail environments.

Rather than fully redefining their business model, pet stores should position themselves as accessible, experience-based touchpoints within a broader eco-system of animal care and education. This allows them to remain relevant in a changing market while contributing to improved animal welfare in a gradual and feasible way.

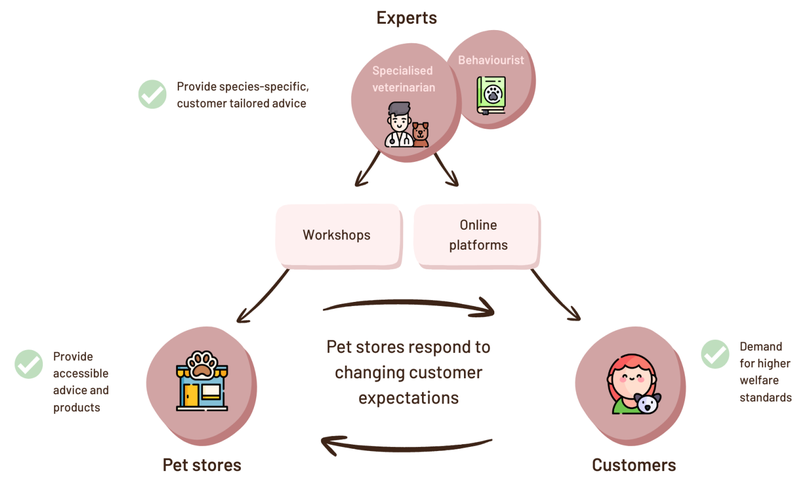
Roadmap

This top-down dynamic should be combined with a phased implementation strategy. The concept was initially designed primarily for independently owned specialty stores. However, chain stores possess greater financial, spatial, and organisational capacity to implement several components more extensively. Therefore, a differentiated implementation roadmap was developed for both store types.

The implementation strategy is divided into three phases. In the first phase, the concept components are introduced in a low-threshold and exploratory manner.

The second phase focuses on deeper integration and evaluation. During this stage, stores assess whether the implemented components positively influence customer behaviour, animal welfare awareness, and long-term commercial performance.

In the third phase, the concept can be further expanded and adapted in response to evolving welfare standards, customer expectations, and evaluation outcomes.



		Develop & Implement	Evaluate	Expand & Adapt
Specialty store	Example habitats	**One single** animal species	Evaluate increase of sales and welfare awareness	Expand to other **species** according to evaluation
	Workshops	**Occasional** expert-led workshops	Evaluate profitability and level of advice	Expand and adapt **content** according to evaluation
Chain store	Example habitats	**Standard habitat set-up** across several locations	Evaluate increase of sales and welfare awareness	Adjust **set-up per location** according to evaluation
	Workshops	**Standard workshop format** across several locations	Evaluate profitability and level of advice	Adjust **content per location** according to evaluation
Both store types	Online community	Implement the community (set up by an NGO)	Evaluate customer's welfare awareness	Expand and adapt content according to evaluation
	Collaboration	Low threshold, non-animal-based initiatives	Get example habitat animals from the shelter/breeder	Introduce workshops at the shelter/breeder

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