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Ross Gays: 'A large part of our job is inspiring confidence in pet owners'

Business diary: Ross Gays

As told to Ian Wylie
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About 8,000 cats, dogs, hamsters and other pets are moved by WorldCare Pet Transport each year on behalf of doting expatriates and relocating executives. Based in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, Ross Gays runs the business along with his two US-based partners.

First thing in the morning, I head out for a brisk walk with Rocco the labrador, Buddy the Lhasa Apso and Blue the Birman cat (Minty, my other Birman likes a lie-in). With two dogs and two cats of my own, I know just how important pets are to their owners.

Home is next to my office, so by 7am I'm looking at e-mail and listening to voicemail to check the status of current pet transports. Modern cargo tracking systems enable us to know exactly where a pet is at any time, and we pride ourselves on communicating with the client.

A large part of our job is inspiring confidence in pet owners. They often think the pet needs sedation, whereas in fact that can be dangerous. But we say that owners are allowed to be sedated, as they're more likely to be the ones that need it. Once the pets are onboard in their special carriers and the lights go out, most of them sleep for 90 per cent of the journey.

Christmas and new year are among our busiest times, as many executives seem to move at this time of year, and at any one time we can have 25 or 30 shipments on the move. Weather events like we've had this Christmas throw up extra challenges, such as picking up pets that have been stranded in different places. Most big airports and airlines have pet handling facilities and they are well looked after. Airlines make good margins on pets – they charge up to \$5,000 to fly a large dog across the Atlantic.

By mid-morning, my team of five office staff and I are introducing ourselves to clients referred to us by relocation companies, and making preparations for shipments. It's mostly cats and dogs, but also hamsters, guinea pigs, goldfish, snakes, rabbits, tortoises, horses – and birds, subject to permits. We don't transport dangerous animals, circus or zoo animals, but we transport pets from anywhere to anywhere.

We have just moved a pet from Vancouver to Outer Mongolia – we don't have an agent in Mongolia, so we sent someone on the flight with the pet.

Next, I check in via IM, Facebook or e-mail with my partners, Don Uyeno and Reece McDonnell, in the US. We started the business when we realised relocation companies didn't want to get involved in pet transport. We conference-call weekly and hold quarterly board meetings. We meet up five or six times a year.

In the afternoon, I talk with various partners, making sure they are keeping to our standards and checking they have the information they need. I also attend to the accounting, making sure moves have been paid for, and checking the P&L account.

Then it's time to sort out some issues with vets, who are this job's biggest challenge. They know a lot about treating pets, but getting them to do paperwork, chipping, blood tests and so on in the correct sequence is not so easy.

After 7pm, I step back home. But we're always on call and I log on to our server from anywhere with my iPad or phone. Other staff might log on before they go to bed, to check that a pet has touched down, and drop the client an e-mail.

Some pets are frequent flyers – one Hong Kong client goes to the US for four months each summer, but sends her West Highland terrier to London to board with a dog sitter. Some pets are quite demanding – such as Harold, a red-cheeked water turtle who would eat only dried shrimp from the Netherlands.

We once transported two Tibetan terriers for a VIP moving from New York to London. The client had a ritual whereby a picture of the Dalai Lama had to be the first item to enter his new home. I got a call from a panicking relocation agent: "I thought they only had two dogs, but they've got another pet. Can you ship a llama too?"

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