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**Dognition gets its bark from “best in show” startup team composed of scientists, entrepreneurs and marketing experts**

*Ad agency McKinney and PR firm French/West/Vaughan join startup Dognition to create revolutionary new service that evaluates how your dog thinks*

**Durham, N.C. (Feb. 21, 2013)** — It has taken just five months for Canines Inc. and ad agency McKinney to conceive, design and launch [Dognition](#), the groundbreaking new service that enriches our understanding of dogs through cognitive science.

McKinney’s incubator the McKinney Ten Percent and its venture partner Red Square Ventures are engaged with Dognition, in exchange for equity, as an integral partner creating the design, look, feel and user experience of the site. McKinney is serving as agency of record providing market research, marketing, social media and brand development. The agency is working alongside Dognition’s stellar board of world-class scientists and technology and marketing leaders headed by Dr. Brian Hare, director of the Duke Canine Cognition Center at Duke University, and serial entrepreneur, Dognition CEO and Founder Kip Frey.

Joining them on the board and as equity partners are French/West/Vaughan, a national public relations agency specializing in consumer marketing; veteran media technology and marketing expert Mark Benerofe, founder and advisor to successful startups Boxbe, Sony Online Entertainment and Match.com; Web innovator Thede Loder, Dognition’s chief product officer and part of the original technology team that created Match.com; and Marshall Brain, nationally renowned entrepreneur, author, speaker and founder of HowStuffWorks.com.

“Many startups come from the minds of technologists who believe building a slick product is a marketing plan,” said Frey, who is also CEO of Canines Inc., Dognition’s parent company. “We took a different approach by forming a one-of-a-kind advisory board and partnering with McKinney from the very beginning. For a company like Dognition where brand is such a critical element to the overall value proposition, the contributions already made by Mark, Thede, Marshall and McKinney have been integral. Their creative genius, passion for innovation and ability to make science approachable and enjoyable for our audience have put us light years ahead of any startup I’ve ever seen.”

“We believed this was a big idea from the start,” said Brad Brinegar, chairman and CEO of McKinney, who offered to house the startup inside the agency’s radically reconfigured warehouse space in Durham. “Dognition is part of an ecosystem of innovation that starts with the McKinney Ten Percent, our incubator that encourages employees to devote 10% of their time on projects unrelated to client business, and extends to our venture partner, Red Square Ventures. In today’s world, where there is a blur between what is product and what is marketing, an opportunity like Dognition gives us ways to explore how to bring brands and people together. It’s why the McKinney Ten Percent has grown to be such a powerful tool for creating talked-about work for our client partners.”

Recognizing the importance of public relations in communicating credibility and establishing consumer awareness, Dognition tapped French/West/Vaughan to generate exposure among science- and technology-centric and consumer media properties. This includes early coverage in USA Today, Scientific American and CBS This Morning.

“Public relations is unique among marketing mediums for its efficacy in creating consumer awareness and share of voice in a way that is authentic and meaningful for a new brand like Dognition,” said Rick French, chairman and CEO of French/West/Vaughan. “Given the overall size of the pet products and services market, a hole that Dognition fills by bringing cognitive science to the average dog owner, FWV jumped at the opportunity to become an equity partner and take this story out to the world.”

Dognition represents the culmination of more than 15 years of research by some of the leading animal cognition scientists in the world. Dr. Hare, a Harvard Ph.D. and associate professor of evolutionary anthropology at Duke, is coauthor of “The Genius of Dogs: How Dogs Are Smarter Than You Think,” which is being

published on February 5 by the Penguin Group.

Working in concert with the book is Dognition's unique, Web-based canine cognition assessment tool, The Dognition Experience, designed for curious dog owners seeking deeper relationships with their dogs. With the Canine Assessment Toolkit (CAT) — fun, science-based games and a personality questionnaire — and the resulting Dognition Profile, subscribers are offered recommendations tied to their dogs' unique cognitive styles.

The Dognition Experience also features a "citizen science" component where individual assessment results are aggregated and analyzed on [dognition.com](http://dognition.com), contributing to research that furthers the study of dog cognition throughout the world.

"From the outset, we wanted to create a service and a brand that would be about nurturing the relationships between dogs and their owners while contributing to the greater good of all dogs," said Becky Minervino, chief marketing officer of Dognition. "That's an ambitious goal — a great 'reason for being' that's much larger than simply purchasing a one-off product. Delivering an experience to pay off that 'why' has been challenging and rewarding."

Minervino added one of the team's fundamental tasks was to deeply understand owners' needs and interests. "The benefit — and the challenge — is that we are crafting an entirely new service, not simply building a replacement for an existing product," she said. "We assembled a team of McKinney's top planners and experience designers coupled with visual designers and developers. They dug into the specific interests and needs of dog owners to actively observe the findings rather than merely ask for opinions. We created our first paper prototype two weeks in, and our first functional prototype two weeks later. We've had dozens of releases since that point, actively measuring and testing elements, thanks to a host of both two-legged and four-legged collaborators, our beta users."

Minervino said the team meshed qualitative findings with a quantitative evaluation fielded by McKinney's Consumer and Business Insights team to find Dognition's target audience. "We confirmed that Dognition appeals to a subset of dog owners, the truly 'dog-attached,' who care deeply about their pet. They have a genuine interest in lifelong learning, are very selective about their buying habits and are good at convincing others to try new things. This detailed portrait will help inform our outreach to owners across relevant touch points of their experiences with dogs."

The positioning set the stage for naming and brand identity. Minervino said the challenge here was to balance the fundamental joy that dog owners feel with the service's science-based foundation. "All of the findings are grounded in rigorous peer-reviewed research — an essential distinction," she said. "We explored a lot of names with our core team and extended collaborators, and honed them concurrently with a logo exploration. Dognition is a play on cognition crossed with our central character: dogs, of course! The logo is inspired by tangram puzzles, which speaks to the intellectual underpinnings while also highlighting how multifaceted and unique each dog is. Just like people, every dog has a particular way of seeing the world, using particular cognitive strategies for memory, reasoning and communication. And just like Dognition, the logo celebrates the unique genius of each and every dog."

### **About Dognition**

Dognition is the champion for enriching the relationships between dogs and their owners through cognitive science. Dedicated to all dogs, the service is for curious owners who treasure a deeper relationship with their dogs and are excited about gaining unique insights into dog behavior. By tailoring fun, science-based games to subscribers and by offering everyday "citizen scientists" a chance to contribute to research that furthers the study of dog cognition, the Dognition Experience helps owners discover what is extraordinary about their dogs, while contributing to the greater good of all dogs.

### **About McKinney**

McKinney was recently named the most effective independent advertising agency in the world by Effie Worldwide and Warc. The agency also took home Best in Show at the 2012 IAB MIXX Awards that honors the best creative digital advertising in the world. Over the past year, McKinney has won 43 major industry awards. Founded in 1969, Durham, NC-based McKinney is recognized for having one of the most innovative business models in the industry, focused on big ideas brought to life in powerful conversations between people and brands. The agency's clients include Nationwide, Nationwide Financial, Travelocity, Samsung, Brown-Forman, Meijer, Sherwin-Williams, Gold's Gym, Mizuno, CenturyLink, Big Boss Brewing and Urban Ministries of Durham. McKinney is part of Cheil Worldwide, one of the world's leading marketing communications networks with 55 offices in 30 countries, and has expanded its East Coast footprint by opening an office in New York.

### **About French West Vaughan**

French/West/Vaughan is one of the nation's largest independently held public relations, public affairs, advertising and digital media agencies, with offices in Raleigh, New York City, Los Angeles and Tampa. FWV also represents lifestyle properties such as the United States Polo Association, the Professional Rodeo

Cowboys Association, the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association and Arena USA. Long-standing corporate clients include Wrangler, Justin Boots, Moe's Southwest Grill, Melitta Coffee and nearly 50 other leading companies and brands. For more information, please visit [www.fwv-us.com](http://www.fwv-us.com).

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