

PRESS RELEASE

Mars Petcare, Michelson Found Animals Foundation, and R/GA Launch the Leap Venture Studio, the First Dedicated Accelerator Program for the \$100B Pet Care Industry

Leap invites founders and startups developing pet products and services to partner with industry leaders to shape the future of pet care.

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Portland, March 7, 2018 - Today, Mars Petcare, global leader in pet nutrition and health care; Michelson Found Animals Foundation, a non-profit dedicated to keeping animals in their homes; and R/GA Ventures announce the launch of the Leap Venture Studio (Leap): the first startup-centric accelerator program built to springboard innovation in the growing pet ecosystem.

Leap is targeting early-stage startups and offers access to strategic, financial, and creative resources to accelerate product development, develop industry partnerships, and refine business plans. Startups in the program will work closely with mentors from R/GA, Mars Petcare, Michelson Found Animals and their extended networks. At the end of the program, they will have the opportunity to pitch to investors and industry leaders.

“Together with Michelson Found Animals and R/GA we’re taking the lead on creating the future of pet care by supporting the startup community,” said Leonid Sudakov, President of Connected Solutions, the global ventures, genetics, data, and analytics division at Mars Petcare. “Mars Petcare has one purpose: ‘Make a Better World for Pets.’ and we will do that by becoming the partner of choice for founders seeking to turn their visions for the future of pet care into reality.”

Leap comes at a time when the pet industry is positioned to experience significant growth and innovation, driven by Millennial pet ownership. According to a 2017 survey, Millennials now account for 35% of pet ownership, recently surpassing Baby Boomers in the market¹. With this shift has come an increase in demand for modern and smart solutions to help them take better care of their pets. Pet spending is estimated to increase by more than 50% over the next five years, and sales in pet care and food exceeded \$100B in 2017², according to Euromonitor International.

“Our lives are enriched by pets, and we use technology and science to obtain real, sustainable results that better the lives of pets and their people,” said Dr. Gary Michelson, Founder of Michelson Found Animals Foundation. “We’re excited about this opportunity to partner with

¹ APPA’s 2017-2018 National Pet Owners Survey

² <https://blog.euromonitor.com/2017/09/state-global-pet-care-trends.html>

other industry leaders to identify and foster meaningful innovations, and support the growing community of startups developing smart solutions for pets.”

The 2018 Leap Venture Studio areas of Interest and Technology include:

- Pet Nutrition and Wellness
- Pet Health and Medical
- Pet Diagnostics
- Solutions/Platforms/Services for Pet Owners/Vets
- AI and Machine Learning
- Advanced Analytics
- Connected Products and Spaces
- Genetics

Participating startups will be split into two cohorts of six companies each. A customized team of R/GA’s award-winning strategists, technologists, designers, and consultants will collaborate with the startups to help execute their business plans and prepare them for future milestones including fundraising, pitching, and business development. The startups will receive mentorship from industry executives and access to world-class partners. The program will conclude with the opportunity to secure funding from investors within Mars Petcare, Michelson Found Animals, and the broader venture capital community.

“R/GA is excited to collaborate with leaders like Mars Petcare and Michelson Found Animals to launch one of the first-ever pet-centric Venture Studios, leveraging our creative capital and network to create value for the participating companies,” said Stephen Plumlee, Global Chief Operating Officer of R/GA and Managing Partner of R/GA Ventures.

Leap will take place in Portland, Oregon which is well-known for its pet-friendly culture. The program will be hosted at R/GA’s office in the heart of the innovation-centric Pearl District.

Applications will open on March 7, 2018, and admissions will roll throughout the year. The first program module will commence at the end of July with a Demo Day scheduled for the fall. Qualified candidates must have developed a Minimum Viable Product. Leap is open to companies at a variety of stages, from pre-seed to seed to Series A, and business models including B2B and B2C.

For more information about Leap or to submit an application, please visit: www.leapventurestudio.com and follow #leapvps on Twitter.

About Mars Petcare

Mars Petcare is the world’s leading pet nutrition and health care business that strives to make A Better World for Pets every day. Mars Petcare believes that pets make our lives better and that pet ownership brings joy and benefits which should be accessible to everyone. Mars Petcare has a total of 41 brands in our portfolio, including billion dollar brands PEDIGREE®,

WHISKAS®, ROYAL CANIN® and BANFIELD®. Other leading brands include: IAMS®, CESAR®, SHEBA®, NUTRO®, DREAMIES®, EUKANUBA®, BLUEPEARL® and PET PARTNERS™ and the WALTHAM Centre for Pet Nutrition, a leading scientific authority on pet nutrition and well-being. Mars Petcare has more than 40,000 Associates worldwide. For more information about Mars Petcare, please visit <http://www.mars.com/global/brands/petcare>. Join us on [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

About the Michelson Found Animals Foundation

Michelson Found Animals Foundation is a leading animal welfare non-profit organization committed to keeping pets safe at home with the pet parents who love them. With a mission of Saving Pets, Enriching Lives, Found Animals is advancing the health and safety of pets through the first free, national microchip registry, solutions-based programs addressing pet adoption, microchipping, low-cost spay neuter services and grants for research into non-surgical spay and neuter methods. The foundation provides educational resources for pet parents and support for a variety of animal welfare organizations. Generously funded by Dr. Gary Michelson and Alya Michelson, Found Animals has helped more than 1.5 million pets since it was founded in 2005. Learn more at foundanimals.org and by following [@foundanimals](#).

About R/GA Ventures

R/GA Ventures helps industry leaders embrace disruption, connecting them with emerging startups, technologies and consumer behaviors to drive their businesses forward. Since 2013, the R/GA Ventures portfolio has grown to include more than 80 companies across a variety of verticals. R/GA Ventures and R/GA are part of the Interpublic Group of Companies (NYSE: IPG), one of the world's largest advertising and marketing services organizations. Learn more at ventures.rga.com and by following [@rgaventures](#).