

SETTING UP A PET BUSINESS: THINGS TO CONSIDER 2

Logos, Branding and Advertising

Try to choose a business name that has not been used anywhere else. If you choose a name that another company has protected by trademarking, you will be contacted and asked to change the name of your business. This can damage your brand once you are established, so it is better to do the work up front and select a name that is not already being used.



The
Pet Care
Partnership

Wix has a company name creator that you can use for free to give you inspiration, and there are also others on Google.

Once you have chosen a name, you might want to 'rent' the domain names straight away so that you have them available when you want to build a website. If the domain name has already been taken by someone else, potential customers will end up looking at their website rather than yours, so you might even want to consider this as part of selecting your name and only choose one where the web domain name is also available.

Your logo will represent you and will be the centre of your brand. Colours matter, and although subjective, the choice of business colours can attract likeminded clients, but alienate others. Be true to yourself but be aware that a formal logo may appeal to clients with a serious nature, where a warm or comic look may send them looking for someone more 'professional'. It is a fine balance to choose branding that represents you as a business owner whilst appealing to a wide range of clients.



Note that logos on most social media sites are viewed on a phone and are around 1cm wide. Fine detail is lost at this size, so try and keep your pictures simple. Many social media profile frames are round, and critical details in the corners of a square or rectangular logo will be lost.

Decide On Your Pricing

Pricing is area specific so conduct research in your local area before setting prices. Be clear on what you need to earn to break even, and what you need to earn to make a reasonable living. Regardless of what you might read in the newspapers, professional pet carers do not earn a huge wage!



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At £15 per hour, there is a perception that walking four dogs for an hour earns you £60 an hour, but it does not; it takes 30 minutes to collect the dogs, and another 30 minutes to drop them home, so the £60 is your earning for two hours rather than for one. £30 an hour might appear like a great income, but most clients require their services at the same time, so this is achievable in the middle of the day, but earnings reduce in the early and later periods of the day.



Pet feeding or drop ins are short visits where you leave after the tasks are completed. Pet sitting is paid by time, so you must stay there for the agreed period even if the pet does not wish to interact with you.

Do not put your prices on your service agreement, your business card or your flyers, as this will render them useless if you decide to change your prices, which you may well need to fine tune after a few months of trade to get it just right. Customers will become irritated if they must sign a new service agreement every time you change your prices, it is better to create a separate price list.

Customers need a reasonable period of notice when you plan to increase your prices. It should be aligned with the amount of time that they are required to give notice in your contract. This means that if they do not like the new prices, they can give notice and leave before the new prices come into effect. This means that if you give clients only one month notice of a price change, they only need to give you one month notice that they are leaving, so it is better to work with three months' notice of a price change where possible.

Rules and Regulations

You must know and follow the rules and regulations set by the UK government, and those set by your local council. Some of the rules you will need to know include:

- Ensuring that all dogs wear an ID tag displaying the address and name of the owner
- Picking up dog poop to avoid fines
- Limits on the number of dogs you can walk at a time in your borough (Public Space Protection Orders)
- Protecting customers personal information (GDPR)
- Transport regulations for the movement of animals
- Permit requirements for walking on Ministry of Defence land (through Landmarc)
- Boarding and day care: The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018)

The official government website has several links to guidance and legislation relating to the care of pets in the section 'Animal Welfare Legislation: Protecting Pets'.

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Forms and Service Agreements

It is essential to have good paperwork when running any service business. Pet carers should have service agreements and registration forms that outline the rules and responsibilities of each party, as well as the boundaries and limits of their liability. Many Pet Carers start their business without having robust paperwork, considering their clients as friends and simply not imagining a situation where this may change, but when things go wrong the relationship with the customer can be put under great strain, and this is when it is invaluable to have signed agreements and consents in place.

Historically Pet Carers asked clients to sign consents, a key release, a vet release, plus a variety of other documents. Today, consents and releases are blended into a single registration and consent form, plus a separate service agreement. These can be held on paper, but digital forms are becoming more popular and remove the need for a client to have a printer or access to a PC. Digital forms generally come at an additional cost to your business, but some companies will offer a limited form hosting service for free. Make sure that the free version of the form system allows customers to sign their forms and documents to make them officially binding.



When writing your terms and conditions within your service agreement, make sure that your cancellation policy is fair and reasonable. Terms must be clear and comprehensive, and your contract does not have to be written by a solicitor, you may do this if you prefer. If your terms are unbalanced, your contract could be deemed as invalid if a client takes you to court. It only costs a small amount of money to take a business into small claims court, so this happens more often than you might realise.

Business Planning: Schedule Your Day

Pet Carers work a long day! Set out a schedule for your day and stick to it. At the beginning you find yourself wanting to say yes to every enquiry but take care not to overstretch yourself or you will find yourself letting clients down later in the day by arriving too late.

If you are prepared to live out of your vehicle in the busy periods, working 7am to 7pm you can accommodate four pet pop ins, a solo walk, two 'lunchtime' group walks, another solo walk, and another four pet pop ins.

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Everyone wants 'lunchtime' dog walks, and this simply cannot happen, but keep in mind that lunchtime is a loose term which can cover 11:30am to 2:30pm. You may be able to agree to 'lunchtime' but setting specific times will very much restrict your earning potential so do not commit to times, only to a wide window that allows for traffic and other unavoidable delays. Lunchtime visits seriously damage your group walk earning potential and should be avoided wherever possible.



You will find that when some clients take time off for a holiday and cancel their dog walks, other clients will need cat visits for their holiday, so these things have a way of balancing out overall.

Finding Clients

It can take a while to get established, but cat and small mammal feeding work is always required during the school holidays while people go away, and you may want to consider taking on puppy sitting work if you feel that it will later convert to dog walking work for you (but not at lunchtime).



Carry your business cards in case someone asks you while you are out walking.

Be careful when putting flyers on vehicles as there are rules about this (per council) and some consider this as littering which comes with a fine. Call and ask your council before doing this in the local dog walking car park.



Social media is a good source of clients asking for help, but you need to allocate time to scour the local groups each day and respond to requests. Have a business page or a website up and running with reviews, so that clients have somewhere to check before choosing to contact you. In the first few years you will need to chase leads to fill your diary, but as time goes on your clients are likely to recommend you and work comes in by itself.

You can offer to cover other walkers and sitters while they go on holiday. Expect to sign something promising not to steal their clients. If clients prefer your service and ask to switch to you, refer them back to the current pet carer to discuss this, and make an agreement from there. Trust is critical when covering another business, and one day you may need the other business to cover you.

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Meet and Greet

Yes, you have chosen this job because you are good with animals, but you also need to be good with people. You will be caring for their pet when they cannot, and this means that they must trust you to be in their home when they are not there. You will have access to their belongings and their house keys. It is a big responsibility.



This meeting is your chance to ask about the pets and the services that are needed, but also it is an opportunity for the client to get to know you. Use a checklist so that you do not forget to ask something important.

If either you or the client think that your services are not a good fit, wrap up the meeting and thank them for the opportunity to talk to them. It is not personal; the dynamic must feel right and sometimes it doesn't. Trust your instincts, if something feels 'off' then it probably is. Other work will come along.

Overnight Pet Sitting

Dog Walkers often provide overnight pet sitting in the owner's home, as an added service for when their regular clients go on holiday. You do not need a licence to provide this service but do check that your business insurance covers this option.



You will have other dogs to walk and other pets to visit while providing this service. It is common to remain in the client's home for 19 hours in every 24 hour period, using the other 5 hours to complete dog walks and other services.

You are responsible for the house as well as the pets when providing this service, so make sure that you have a robust service agreement outlining your responsibilities while in the home.

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Consider Adding an Animal Boarding Licence



As you grow, you may decide to add Home Boarding or Day Care to your list of services.

You need an animal boarding license to accommodate dogs for day care or overnight care within your home. This is obtained from your council after passing an inspection. The costs in your borough for obtaining a licence will be shown on the council website.

Make sure that you have read the DEFRA guidance before making an application, and that you have put together all the forms and procedures that are noted within the guidance, as these will be checked as part of the inspection visit.

Further Information

For further details, support, and to purchase document templates mentioned in this Help Sheet please go to www.support4petbusiness.co.uk.