5 Tips for Starting a Successful Pet Sitting and Dog Walking Business

It's the perfect time to start a pet sitting and dog walking business.

Why?

Pet owners will happily spend money on their pets (who they often refer to as their 'children') and according to my Internet research, in many cities across the country dogs are outnumbering children!

In 2006, United States pet lovers spent $38.5 billion on their animals up from $21 billion a decade earlier.

That number is now up to 41 billion.

Here are 5 tips to get you started in creating your own successful pet sitting business:

1) Don't quit your day job before starting your pet sitting business.

Why? A new pet sitting business is like an infant—it cannot support you in the beginning. Not having another means of supporting yourself while you are building your pet sitting business puts a lot of financial pressure on your fledgling pet sitting business—and upon you—to succeed. That pressure can cause new business owners to quit before they've even had a chance to succeed in creating their new pet sitting business.

Decide what hours you can devote to starting your new business. If you can cut your current work hours down to part-time that will give you extra time and energy to devote to creating a firm foundation for what will eventually be your new livelihood—your pet sitting business!

2) Decide what services you will offer before you get your business up and running.

How do you do this? Look at your current work schedule and other time commitments. See how your available hours fit in with the most common pet sitting service business hours. Most pet sitters offer the following 3 services: dog walking, pet visits for cats and dogs, and overnight pet sitting.

- Dog walking days and hours are generally Monday through Friday between the hours of 11-2 (mid-day hours when clients are at work).
- Pet sitting vacation visits for dog and cats are typically when clients are away on vacation for anywhere between 2-14 days and the hours are generally between the hours of 7-9am and 7-9pm for the duration of the client's vacation.
- Some clients who request vacation visits may need 3x daily visits (one would be a mid-day visit) Vacation visits for dogs generally require a minimum of at least 2 visits a day while cat vacation visits are usually (but not always) one visit a day at whatever time works best for the sitter.
- Overnight pet sitting for dogs and cats require the sitter to spend the night at the client's home. The hours generally are between the hours of 7pm and 7am. Some pets may require a mid-day visit as well.

3) Choose your pet sitting business name.

Be sure pick a name that will allow you to expand your business if you decide to do that in a few years. Let's say you live in a town called “Martinville”. Don't call your business “Martinville Pet Sitting Service” if you have even the slightest inklings to perhaps expand to the surrounding areas in the future. You'll be stuck in Martinville!

However, if you are really clear that you want to stay small, then go ahead and choose the name that best represents your city. Be sure to do proper investigation before choosing your business name. Check the Internet to make sure you are not using someone's business name to avoid dealing with legal trouble down the road.

4) Apply for a “Fictitious Business Name” license and get a business license for your pet sitting business.

If your pet sitting business name does not have your personal name in it (you don't have either first or last name in your business name) then you will need to get a “Fictitious Business Name” license (also sometimes called a DBA) from your local city or county hall. Most cities and counties will allow you to also get your business license wherever you purchase your fictitious business name license. Call your local city/county hall or look on the Internet as many counties are set up to accept your business license applications online.

5) Complete the pet sitting business basics in order to help your first client.

Setting up your pet sitting business correctly in the very beginning will help ensure its success over the course of the life of your business.

Some of the pet sitting business basics include:

- Getting a business phone number
- Creating promotional materials for your business (including business cards, website and logo creation)
- Listing your business on Internet directory sites that come up high on the search engines: Petsitting.com gets 12,000 'hits' a month, PetSitUSA.com gets 7,000 'hits' a month.
- Setting your business up on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn
- Car logo to advertise your business
- Become a member of the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters (NAPPS)
- Purchase business insurance and bonding (NAPPS members get a discount on insurance/bonding)
- Set up a business bank account (so you can accept your first payment from your first pet sitting client!)
- Pricing: determine how much you will charge for each service you offer

Enjoy starting your pet sitting business!