The number of new marketing avenues on the Internet these days is enough to make a pet sitter's head spin! As a pet sitter, how do you know where to spend your time to get the most out of your online marketing efforts? Twitter? Facebook? Yelp? YouTube? In this article, we attempt to demystify the Social Networking landscape on the Web today and give you some help promoting your pet sitting business on the largest social networking site of them all: Facebook.

What is Social Networking?
Social Networking is the process by which people connect with one another on the Internet. Much as people build relationships and interact in the real world, the same thing is going on online! You can think of your e-mail contact list as the most basic social networking mechanism. You have a list of people with whom you are 'connected' via e-mail. There are, however, more sophisticated ways of connecting online socially.

Social Networking sites exist for pretty much any niche you can think of, connecting groups of people with common interests. These sites focus on building online communities of people who share interests and/or activities. Social Networking has encouraged new ways to communicate and share information and can be a great way for small businesses to stay in touch with existing customers as well as find new ones.

As a pet sitter, you may be wondering how you can take advantage of online social networks. Let's take a closer look at one of the most popular sites in this category, Facebook, and see how we can tap into it to promote your business online.

Overview of Facebook
With more than 300 million active users, Facebook is the 300 lb. gorilla in the room. Facebook has been around for more than five years and is currently the most popular social networking Web site today. This would be the first place to start with your social networking efforts and likely where you want to spend most of your time.

'How to' Tutorial
The first step in your Facebook adventure is to create a profile for yourself. You can start the profile creation process by visiting www.facebook.com and completing the signup form on the homepage. Creating a page just for yourself allows you to generate a network of friends, clients and colleagues to be your friends. Use this first profile for your personal life, not related to your business.

Secondly, create a business page for your pet sitting business. By creating a separate page for your business, you can generate a network around your business by inviting your colleagues and clients to be fans of your business. This page will be strictly for your pet sitting business so always keep your business page professional. In order to create your business page, click on the 'Create a Page' link. You'll want to choose a local business, probably in the 'Pets' category. Make sure to complete your profile by providing the following:

- Your business name
- A short description of your business
- Location and contact information
- The URL of your Web site
- Upload your logo
- Add pictures of yourself, your facilities and your clients

On Facebook, people sign up for an account and then make connections with friends. You can add co-workers, old classmates, family and clients as your friends. Each connection made builds your social network. The bigger your network of connections, the bigger your reach is. Each connection you make is a pair of eyes reading what you have to write about your business, special deals and more. The great news here is with that more than 300 million members, there is great potential to acquire clients, promote your business and drive traffic to your Web site. Let's jump into some of the details here with a tutorial.

Social networking has encouraged new ways to communicate and share information and can be a great way for small businesses to stay in touch with existing customers as well as find new ones.
Once your business profile is created, make sure to become the first ‘fan’ of it!

Having a business page on Facebook is not as simple as creating a profile with some information and then being done. There are daily/weekly activities you should make sure to maintain on your Facebook page. The most important of these is keeping your Wall up to date with new items. Your Wall is where you post what you are doing or any news. Those messages then appear so that friends and fans can see them. Some Wall post ideas might include:

- What have you been up to lately?
- Specials event you may have conducted related to your business
- Pet related news/tips
- Products relevant to your business, product reviews
- Pictures of you with your clients pets

Now that your Wall is up to date with the latest information, you need to keep building new connections. If you meet someone in person, make sure to see if you can connect on Facebook with them. When you have friends on Facebook, try and connect with friends of friends or ask for referrals. The more friends you have the louder your voice is and the farther your reach is.

Benefits of Marketing on Facebook

The benefits of creating and maintaining a Facebook profile for your business are abundant:

- Keeping in touch with existing clients
- Finding new clients
- Driving traffic to your Web site
- Appearing more professional
- Showing your dedication
- Building lasting relationships
- Giving you the online edge over the competition

Using all that Facebook has to offer can greatly boost your pet sitting opportunities. Many pet sitters have found Facebook to be an essential addition to their business. It is important to remember however, that while your Facebook page is a great avenue to drive business, you should still have a dedicated Web site just for your business.

In Conclusion

More and more people are making connections via social networks on the Internet. As a small business owner, you are missing out on those connections if you are not participating on sites like Facebook. So get your Facebook profile created and start making some connections, because your competition is.

Mike Schmidt is the owner of 401 Labs, which created the myNAPPS Web site program for NAPPS members. NAPPS knows how difficult it can be to find a Web designer for your pet sitter Web site, which is why we created myNAPPS, an all-in-one specialized tool for Pet Sitters. myNAPPS lets you create your own Pet Sitter Web site with no technical knowledge, starting at just $9.99/month. myNAPPS allows your pet sitting business to get online with a Web site, domain name and e-mail accounts without the hassle and costs of trying to do everything yourself. You can read more about myNAPPS at mynapps.com.

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