

# SETTING UP A PET BUSINESS: THINGS TO CONSIDER 1

## Is a Pet Business the right job for you?

Pet care can seem like a good job option because of the low start-up costs needed to begin. You can be your own boss, set your own hours and work with animals, which is likely to be a passion if you are considering this income route. This may not feel like such a romantic choice after a dog has thrown up in your vehicle, you have been walking in the rain for four days straight, and you have 'smooshed' a poop into the doormat at a cat visit because the cat has pooped directly behind the front door.



You must be motivated to find your own work for tomorrow - and this is after completing a full day of work today. Invoicing, chasing payments, scheduling, keeping your vehicle maintained and ready for use, and this is all in your 'down time'.

Many pet care businesses fail because the market is already saturated and there is not enough work for all, others do not realise what it takes to be self-employed, some pet carers realise that they love animals but hate the rain and the mud. If you are still reading, and you haven't run away, well done! Let's move on...

## Do Your Market Research and Business Planning

It is important to carefully research your market to understand which pet care services are in demand. You can use the internet to research your competition and find out where the gaps are. Typical questions to ask when assessing the market and your business costs will include:

- Is there any demand for the services, or is the pet care market already saturated?
- What could I offer as a niche service to set me apart from the competition?
- What size of area could I cover?
- What is the hourly rate of most pet carers in my area?
- What type of walks are needed, and how many dogs can I sensibly manage to walk at once?
- Is my vehicle reliable? Is my vehicle large enough to accommodate dogs? How will I separate them to prevent problems? How will I secure them to avoid accidents?
- Do I need a permit to walk on the local land, and how much will this cost?
- Should I add on pet feeding and pop in services to boost my income?
- What is my earning potential? How would I structure my day?



The best way to find out current information is to speak with local dog walkers and pet sitters. Most pet carers are friendly and open to having a chat, so you can take advantage of their experience and knowledge that may be valuable to your business. Always validate what you are told to be sure that the information is correct. You can do this by asking other pet carers, or carefully using social media to ask questions, but be aware that no one is checking that what is said on social media is true.

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Be realistic about the size of the area that you can cover, it is usually a lot smaller than you think. Consider traffic levels when going to cat feeds during peak hours at each end of the day, and any areas nearby that bottleneck and would make you late for appointments.

## Consider Your Startup Costs

There will be many costs and expenses to consider, here is a list to get you started:

- Pet business insurance
- A mobile phone (calls, emails, messages etc)
- A reliable vehicle
- Business Use cover on your vehicle
- Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (recommended but not essential)
- Canine First Aid training
- Poop bags and wet wipes
- Harnesses & connectors, or crates for the vehicle
- Water and dog cooling kit
- Reward treats (watch for allergies)
- Land access permits (depending on where you live)
- Branding and Advertising
- Spare leads
- Business ID tags
- Long lines and off-lead training kit
- First aid kit
- Dog drying kit
- A key safe
- A PC and printer
- Printer ink and paper
- Good walking boots (waterproof)
- Raincoat and waterproof trousers
- Accountant
- Bookkeeping software
- Schedule Management software

## What is a Pet?



Dogs, cats and small mammals come to mind when caring for pets, but you may be asked to care for fish, pet insects, reptiles and chickens. Think carefully about the boundaries of your skills and consider whether the animal is considered a pet under your business insurance. Alpaca and goats living in a garden come to mind when writing this section, as some insurers will consider them as pets and others as livestock.

Horses, cows and sheep are livestock, and you may need different business insurance if you wish to offer care for them.

Consider the recent changes to the banned dog breeds listed on the official government website. If you wish to offer services for any of the banned breeds or breed types, make sure you clearly understand your responsibility and liability while caring for these dogs, as you cannot waive your liability onto a customer while caring for them. Some insurers do not cover these breeds and types (even if exempted) so do additional insurance research when considering services including these dogs.

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## Skills and Qualifications

You need to be an animal lover to excel at offering pet care services, but formal training can also be helpful. Formal qualifications are not necessary, but they do show potential clients that you take your job seriously. It can also help you to expand the knowledge and the range of animals that you offer care for.



Formal qualifications will be marked with an OFQUAL Level, as will NCFE courses. Courses marked as 'CPD' are recognised as part of Continuing Professional Development, but do not offer you a recognised qualification.

If you are already a pet owner and have experience of handling and caring for animals, you may choose to look at courses that improve your knowledge of

animal psychology and behaviour. These courses will help you to assess whether a pet is unhappy, anxious or stressed while the owner is away, allowing you to contact the owner and talk about what might be done to help the animal become more settled in their absence.

## Register Your Business, Protect Your Brand or Company Name

You must with HMRC either as a sole trader, a company, or a partnership when starting out. If you register as a sole trader, you will be personally responsible for the debts incurred by your business. A limited company protects you from being personally responsible for the liabilities of your business, but setting up as a limited company comes with additional costs.

As a sole trader you can trade under your own name, you do not need to choose a business name if you do not wish to have one. If you are uncertain about your options when starting a business, visit the official UK government website to learn more.

If you wish to prevent others from using the same business name as you, this is done through a trademark and comes at a cost. Visit the official UK government website to learn more about trademarks.

**Continue reading, download [Setting Up a Pet Business: Things to Consider 2](#)**

## Further Information

For further details, support, and to purchase document templates mentioned in this Help Sheet please go to [www.support4petbusiness.co.uk](http://www.support4petbusiness.co.uk).