



How to Start a Pet Business.

Our complete guide to starting your own business from creating a business plan to top marketing tips.



**At Protectivity, we support
thousands of pet businesses
in the UK every year.**

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Introduction

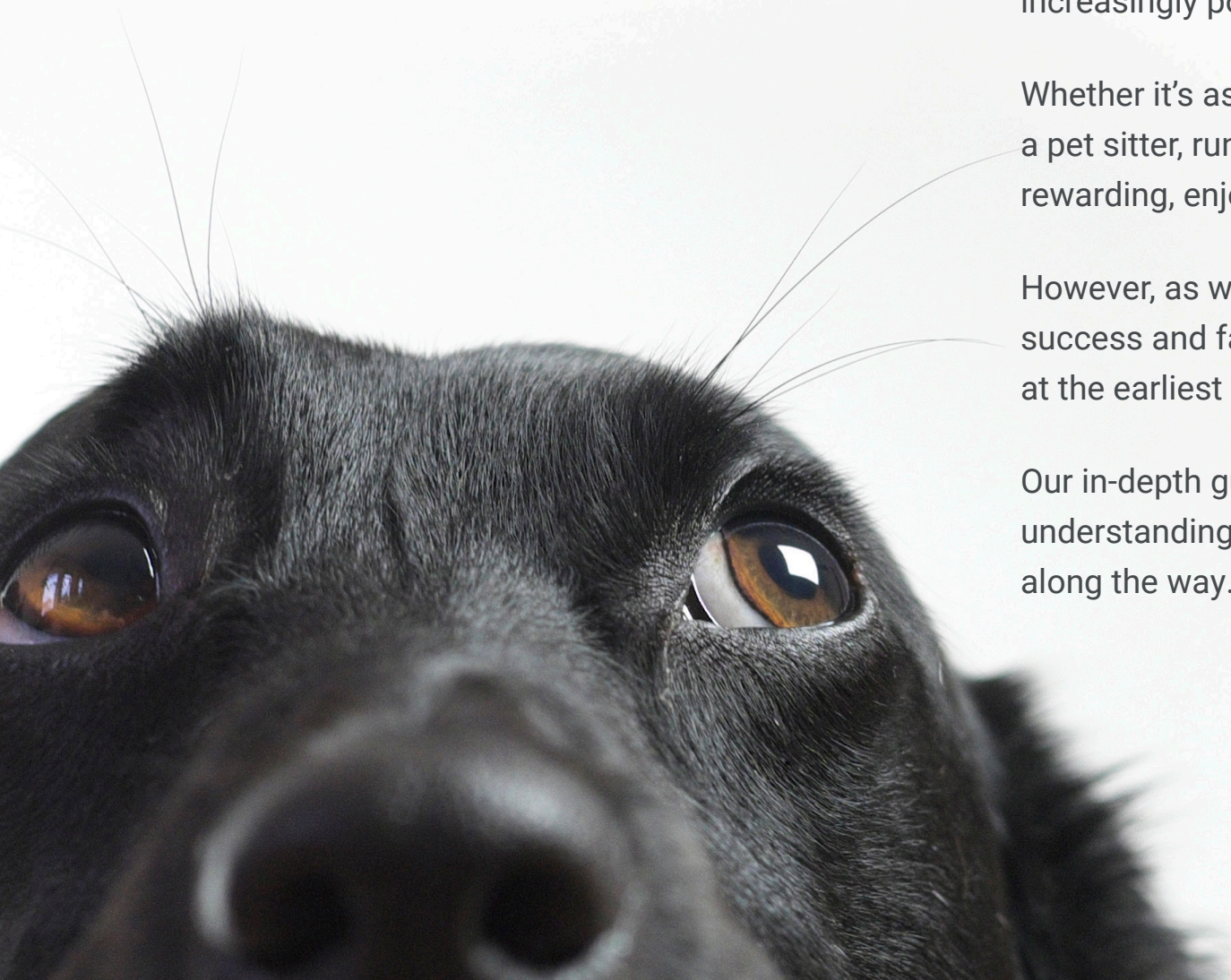
Starting your own business can be a daunting challenge, but with the correct planning and outlook you can give yourself the best chance of succeeding.

As a nation of dog lovers, it's no surprise that a career working with dogs and other domestic animals is an increasingly popular one.

Whether it's as a professional dog walker, groomer or a pet sitter, running your own pet business can be a rewarding, enjoyable, and ultimately, profitable enterprise.

However, as with many things the difference between success and failure can stem from the steps you take at the earliest stages of your business journey.

Our in-depth guide aims to give you a basic understanding of the considerations you need to make along the way.



Benefits of Starting a Pet Business

In the UK, over 660,000 people start their very own business every year. Some will go on to be a success, others won't. With careful planning and consideration of the potential bumps in the road, you can put yourself in a good spot to succeed.

Pet businesses, such as professional dog walking services or pet grooming enterprises are particularly simple to set up. But it's not just the ease of getting off the ground that makes this such an attractive proposition.

There are a range of other benefits to setting up your own pet business



Become your own boss

25% of Protectivity pet business customers stated that the opportunity to become their own boss was the main driving force behind them starting their business.



Physical well-being

Dog walkers could cover over 70 miles a week through their walking services, improving their own health while doing their job.



The opportunity to work with dogs

27% of our customers cited being able to work with dogs and other pets as the biggest factor in their decision to go down this career path.



Mental health

Not only do dogs induce an increase in the stress-reducing hormone, cortisol, in our body, but the social aspects of meeting up with others while dog walking can improve our mental health.



Which Pet Business is Right for you?

There are a number of options open when setting up a pet business, each with specific advantages and drawbacks.

Deciding on which services you offer will come down to a range of factors, from your expertise level to the amount of competition in the local area.



- **Dog walking**

Probably the easiest enterprise to set up, with next to no overheads or qualifications required. Do bear in mind that while being outside during the warm summer months might sound attractive, dogs still need walking when it's cold, wet and miserable.



- **Pet grooming**

less competitive venture than dog walking, but one that you really need to know what you are doing. Qualifications and other courses will cost you money, but could be the difference between someone using your services or not.



- **Pet boarding**

Licensing is important if you wish to become a pet boarder. There are requirements in place which are neither cheap or a definite when you apply. You will also need to consider that you'll need a premises for the animals to be boarded.



- **Dog training**

If you love working with mischievous mutts, this could be for you. However, like grooming, getting a better understanding of how a dog's mind works will require plenty of study, and more than likely, qualifications.

There is, of course, the option to combine two or more of these activities with your business. In fact, 62% of Protectivity customers currently offer more than one different pet service.

“Quick and easy
application, no fuss.
Great cover at a
great price!”

- Kerry, May 2018



Creating Your Business Plan?

Even before you have chosen exactly what services you are going to offer, it's a good idea to put together a business plan. This will form the backbone of your business and outline what you are going to do, why are you doing it, and how you will execute your ideas.

Having this in place will ensure that each decision you make will be for a reason, rather than taking unnecessary risks and making it up as you go along.

Consider the following:

What are your objectives?

Think about where in the market you see your business sitting? Does it fill a void and answer the needs of consumers? Perhaps you are looking to offer something different to what is already on the market.

Is there a demand?

If no one in your local area is looking for a dog walker or groomer, then why start up a business? You can get idea of the demand near you by creating a Google Adwords account and investigating the number of Google searches in your local area, or by speaking to friends or by asking local groups on Facebook, for example.

What's the competition like?

Who else is out there in your target space? Investigate what is already on offer, both in terms of price and service. You will need to distinguish yourself from existing businesses.

What are your USPs?

Having a Unique Selling Proposition determines why your company is a better option than others. Think about whether you can provide a more personal service, do you want to offer discounts or provide a free gift? Maybe you will be price-driven and aim to deliver the cheapest service on the market.

Having a clear idea about the direction your business will go can help to plan for the future.

Types of Business Set-ups

There are a number of different ways you can operate your business, each with different responsibilities and considerations for the owner.

The taxes you have to pay, and the financial overheads associated can vary depending on how you are set up, making it an important decision to make.



The Two Main Options:

Sole trader:

You are operating on a self-employed basis, working for yourself and no one else, with no members of staff. You take care of everything from walking, grooming or boarding, marketing, taxes and administration. A good option if you want to retain complete control of your business, but the responsibilities can add up.

Limited company:

As a limited company, the business is treated as a separate entity to yourself. Therefore any legal liability that the business faces, will be on the company itself, rather than it's directors as individuals.

It is worth bearing in mind that it is possible that your business could change from one type of set-up to another in its lifetime.



Thinking About Finances

Essentially the vast majority of businesses are set up with the sole aim to make money. Running your own pet business may have other benefits, but it is likely that the provision of revenue is to be your main concern.

Here are a number of things to consider when it comes to finances.



What will you charge?

Deciding on how much you will charge potential clients comes back to your business plan and the market research you carried out. The amount people will pay for their dog to be walked, for example, will vary wherever you are in the country. In general though, expect to be able to command between £10 and £15 per dog per walk.

Consider your outgoings

If you're a dog walker then the likelihood is that your outgoings will be limited to leads, waste bags and the odd treat. But if you are starting a dog grooming business, for example, the cost of equipment can soon add up. Licences that are required for services such as dog boarding can also run into the hundreds of pounds.

Contingency plans

Even the most organised business owner can come unstuck sometimes. It is worth dedicating some money to go into a contingency fund. That way, if something unexpected were to go wrong, a sudden downturn in business perhaps, your business finances may not suffer too much.

Qualifications and Learning

Although the majority of pet businesses won't require you to undertake any formal training or study, it can be a major benefit to your business.

Dog grooming and training are two of the pet-specific businesses where taking the time and effort to earn a formal qualification could benefit you.



Range of courses available

Centres such as GroomArts or Compass Training are able to offer courses for potential groomers, while the ADPT and The Kennel Club are two of the more well-known providers of courses for would-be dog trainers.

A new Professional Dog Walkers Certificate was launched by the British College of Canine Studies in 2017, providing walking professionals with the opportunity to further their knowledge and to stand out from the crowd. More general courses in pet care and first aid or canine behavioural studies will benefit anyone looking to further their business in the industry.

Ultimately, while specific qualifications may not be required, being able to learn while you earn is always a great idea.

Regulations and Licensing

Although you shouldn't come unstuck when it comes to rules and regulations when running your pet business, there are restrictions that could affect you.

By not following the rules, you could end up in hot water with a fine, or even a custodial sentence.

Boarding businesses require a licence

While dog walkers or groomers do not need a licence to operate, anyone wishing to board animals, either in their own home, or at another business premises does.

Licensing applications are handled by your local council and vary in price. Expect to pay anywhere between £70 and £300 depending on which animals you are boarding, and a delay of up to four weeks before receiving a licence.

If you are caught operating while unlicensed you could be sentenced to up to three months in prison and hit with a fine of £500.

Walking in a Royal Park

Although for most dog walkers, their enterprise can exist and operate licence free, if you intend to walk dogs in one of the London's 11 Royal Parks professionally, you must apply for permission.

Licences cost £300 and again, can take up to four weeks to be granted. Furthermore, to be able to walk dogs for a living in the park, you must display your 'Royal Parks Licensed Operator' armband and have £2 million worth of Public Liability Insurance.



Public Space Protection Orders

Another Local Authority regulation that dog walkers in particular need to be cautious of are Public Space Protection Orders. Generally these rules are put in place to protect local areas against a range of nuisances and anti-social behaviour.

However, some rules do restrict the actions of dog walkers. PSPOs can limit the number of dogs that can be walked.

Common locations for PSPOs to be enforced are beaches, parks and areas where a large number of dogs could be detrimental to the enjoyment of others.

It's always best to check with your local council to see if any of your local areas, and potential dog walking spots, are subject to PSPOs.

Marketing Your Business

Once your business is set up, it's time to market it to your potential customers. 20% of start-ups don't make it through their first year, so having a good plan on how you will attract customers is vital.

There are so many ways to get your business in front of people, so consider a range of potential avenues to go down.

Digital Marketing

Online advertising is a great way to get your name out there. Whether that's by setting up your own website, by creating a dedicated Facebook page or by sharing your services with local groups on social media.

Spending some money advertising on Facebook could be one avenue to investigate. While three-quarters of Protectivity pet business customers say they have online presence, just 6% say they use paid advertising techniques.



Facebook Advertising offers dog walkers, groomers, sitters and boarders the opportunity to specifically target those potential customers in their area who are more likely to be looking for their services.

A nominal spend and some creativity could be all it needs for your business profile to start snowballing.

Please see link:

<https://www.protectivity.com/knowledge-centre/the-professional-dog-walkers-guide-to-facebook-advertising/>

Traditional Methods

Although it is wise to investigate the power of online media, sometimes the more traditional methods are the best.

Not all businesses will thrive off the back of more modern marketing techniques, so classical approaches are worth investigating.



Hand out flyers in your town centre, ask to display some leaflets in your local vets or pet shop, or simply ask your current customers to recommend you.

Most people will trust a business more if they are recommended to them by an acquaintance, so encouraging them to spread the word is definitely in your interest.

A 'Refer A Friend' discount or scheme is well worth investigating. If a current customer recommends you to a friend, and they sign up, consider running a monthly prize draw or give them discounts for their help in spreading the word.

Public Liability

Insurance cover is a hugely important aspect of running a business. Operate while unprotected and you could find yourself in a tricky situation if things go wrong.

Public Liability and Care, Custody and Control cover are likely to be the two main insurance benefits you need to consider when setting up a pet business.



What your insurance can cover

Public Liability will protect you if a client, or any other member of the public was to be injured by you or your business's actions. This includes if a dog in your care was to bite or injure that third party.

In the event your business is sued, Public Liability will ensure that the costs associated with defending yourself in court and any subsequent compensation settlement will be covered by your insurance policy.

With the likelihood of a large number of animals coming under your care in your day-to-day business it's important to consider what would happen if they were to be injured.

Veterinary bills can run into the thousands of pounds,

so taking out a policy that includes Care, Custody and Control cover means that if a dog in your care requires treatment, the costs are covered.

Protectivity's Non-Negligent cover means that even if the injury to the animal was not your fault, the bills are covered.

Other aspects to consider when taking out your policy could be Personal Accident protection which will safeguard you and your finances if you were to be seriously injured at work, and Key Cover which protects your costs should you lose a client's key.

Next Steps

Insurance cover is a hugely important aspect of running a business. Operate while unprotected and you could find yourself in a tricky situation if things go wrong.

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Conclusion

- **Conduct some market research**
know what businesses are around and where you can spot a gap in the market.
- **Speak to others in the industry**
while they may eventually be your business rivals, there is no better person to speak to than someone who runs an enterprise similar to yours.
- **Draw up your business plan**
think about the services you want to offer, your USPs and your costings.
- **Take out a Pet Business Insurance policy**
things do go wrong, so protecting yourself and your business is vital.
- **Continue to learn**
investigate the range of courses and qualifications on offer. With every new idea comes a potential way for your business to stand out from the crowd.

