



# Become A Dog Walker

# 1

## Get Educated

What? Dog walking training? In a word, yes. Don't I just grab a leash and go? In a word, no. Loving dogs is an important part of a career in dog walking, but it just isn't enough. Not in today's high liability world, and not if you're looking for a professional dog walking career rather than a hobby business on the side. If you haven't had formal instruction in animal learning theory, dog body language, aggression, canine first aid, leash handling, basic training, and pack management, then finding and attending a course should be the first thing on your to-do list.

Dog walking is as-yet an unregulated industry, so formal education and training will not only give you a proper behavioral grounding for your work, but will elevate you to a professional level in a market still flush with amateurs.

**Articles to read:** [A Dog Walker's Checklist](#), [Going Pro, Dog Walking for a Living](#), [Making a Living With Dogs: 7 Steps to a New Career](#)

**Services to support you:** [Business & Marketing Consulting](#)

**Classes to take:** [The Dog Walking Academy](#)

# 2

## Define Your Services

What services will you offer? Don't make the mistake of leaving this decision to later—it determines your rates and policies, and often affects your brand identity, too. Will you walk individual dogs or small groups, or both? If you live in an area that allows it, will you walk dogs off leash, or keep them on?

Take into account what others in your area are doing. Is a niche the best route? Many successful businesses are built on specialization in small groups, types of dogs (smalls, for example), particular neighborhoods, or, with advanced training, dogs with behavioral challenges like leash reactivity.

**Articles to read:** [The Magic of Niches](#)

**Products to save you time:** The book [The Business of Dog Walking](#)

**Services to support you:** [Business & Marketing Consulting](#)

# 3

## Choose A Name

This task is a lot tougher than it used to be thanks to so-called domain squatters—people who buy up every conceivable domain name and then offer them up for auction, hoping to make a bundle. Don't let that put you off, but be prepared for the naming process to take a little time.

Try to find a name that's simple and memorable, or tie the name to local geography (Localville Dog Walking). Consider your intended audience and let that inform your tone (Dogs On The Loose may not inspire confidence, for example). Check domain name availability for all names and make sure they haven't been trademarked already at the county, state, or national level.

**Products to save you time:** The book [How To Run a Dog Business](#)

**Services to support you:** [Business & Marketing Consulting](#)

**Resources to check out:** [U.S. Patent and Trademark Office](#), [Naming Force](#) (crowdsourced naming)

# 4

## Write A Marketing Plan

If you hope to stay in business, you must market your services. It really is that simple. Putting up a website, though crucial, isn't enough, nor is relying on word of mouth. You need a compelling marketing message and a dog walking business plan to get that message in front of the right audience. This doesn't mean you should spend thousands on advertising or direct mail, which are hard to target, frequently ignored, and offer a miniscule return on investment.

Instead, focus on types of marketing that allow people to get to know you a little without the standard off-putting sales hype. Some ideas might be vet and shelter referrals, partnerships with other businesses, local PR and outreach efforts, informative newsletters, and so forth.

**Articles to read:** [Why Marketing Fails](#), [Focus Your Marketing](#), [Easy Online Marketing](#)

**Products to save you time:** The book [The Business of Dog Walking](#)

**Services to support you:** [Business & Marketing Consulting](#)

**Classes to take:** [Web seminars](#) like Dog Pro Marketing Workshop

# 5

## Get A Logo & Website

This, on the other hand, is an area where you do need to be prepared to spend some money. Not outrageous sums, mind you, but sufficient to get you a professionally designed logo, and a professionally designed and written website with enough content to give people a sense of your walking philosophy and techniques, experience, services, and what it might be like to work with you.

And no, a DIY effort is not a good idea, even if you're nifty with Photoshop. Unless you happen to be a trained copywriter, graphic designer, and web developer—all rolled into one—do the business-like thing and hire pros. Your website is your shop window to the world, and with so many dog walkers in the market, you want yours to stand out for its polished look.

**Articles to read:** [The Professional Bio](#), [Got Website Links?](#)

**Services to support you:** [Design & Website Services](#)

# 6

## Set Your Rates

As simple as this sounds, deciding what to charge can be a stressful process for many people. This is partly because dog walking has yet to attain status as a serious profession whose practitioners deserve to be compensated accordingly, and partly because some walkers, when faced with this prejudice, settle for less than they are worth and thus set an unfortunate precedent in their area.

Don't let that happen to you. Decide up front that as you have valuable education and experience and are operating a fully licensed and legal business, you will indeed charge a professional's fee for your services.

**Products to save you time:** The book [The Business of Dog Walking](#)

**Services to support you:** [Business & Marketing Consulting](#)

**Classes to take:** [Web seminars](#) like Making the Sale

# 7

## Craft Your Policies

Thinking of skipping this one? Not a good idea. A policy manual may not jump out at you as your best friend in business, but your own may well turn out to be. Carefully thought-out and firmly enforced policies protect your business reputation and profitability—and thus your business survival. By contrast, the absence of sound policies can mean lost income, wasted time, and endless frustrations due to cancellations, payment disputes, and scheduling nightmares.

So, buckle down and write a set of policies that will support business growth and actively train your clients from the outset to behave as you wish them to.

**Products to save you time:** The book [The Business of Dog Walking](#)  
**Services to support you:** [Business & Marketing Consulting](#)

# 8

## Address Legalities

Up next is legal paperwork, also rarely on anyone's list of favorite activities. The good news is that legalizing and protecting your business is easier than you might imagine. At a bare minimum, you need a business license from your city and, unless you're doing business under your own name (Joan Smith Dog Walking), you also need to register a fictitious business name (also known as a doing-business-as certificate or an assumed business name) with your county clerk's office.

Now consider how best to protect your business. Liability insurance, while not foolproof, is affordable and adds a level of protection that can make it easier to sleep at night. Your contract or service agreement also should be crafted to spell out clearly what you are and are not responsible for. Finally, for yet another layer of protection, you can set your business up as a limited liability company. Finally, set yourself up with a good CPA who understands the ins and outs of running a dog business.

**Articles to read:** [Sleep Well At Night](#)

**Products to save you time:** The book [How To Run a Dog Business](#), [The Business Toolkit for Walkers & Sitters](#)

**Services to support you:** [Business & Marketing Consulting](#)

**Classes to take:** [The Dog Walking Academy](#), [Web seminars](#) like Tax Do's & Don'ts for Dog Pros

**Resources to check out:** [Mourer-Foster](#) (insurance for dog pros), [Dollars & Scents](#) (CPA for dog pros)

# 9

## Set Up Systems

Nothing can derail a budding business quicker than the absence of easy-to-use systems. Good systems are the framework that holds everything together. Don't give in to the temptation to wait until you have clients; set yourself up for smooth sailing from the beginning with templates for contracts/service agreements, phone screening and initial client intake forms, invoices, etc.

Depending on your services, also consider business software for easy organization and billing, tracking client data, enabling online scheduling, and much more.

**Products to save you time:** [The Business Toolkit for Walkers & Sitters](#)

**Services to support you:** [Business & Marketing Consulting](#)

**Resources to check out:** [Pet Sit Click](#), [Paw Loyalty](#), [Betta Walka](#) (dog pro business management software)

# 10

## Get Going

Congratulations! You're now well prepared and on track for business success. What to do now? Walk dogs. Market your business. Repeat. And should you need advice as you navigate your new career, add to your services, expand your business, hire staff, and deal with competition, we'd love to help.

**Articles to read:** [A Successful Attitude = Success](#), [Add Hours to Your Day](#)

**Services to support you:** [Business & Marketing Consulting](#)

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