



# 10 Steps to Starting Your Dog Walking Business



# Want to be a dog walker?

Here's how to do it—and what you should know about starting a career walking dogs

Following the dream of a dog walking career can be tempting—a life of bouncy dogs, grateful clients, the great outdoors.

But walking your own dog is one thing; walking other people's treasured four-legged family members is a different endeavor altogether. A solid understanding of learning theory and canine behavior is a must for keeping dogs safe, and you need a plan for business success, too. "Build it and they will come" makes for a fun movie, but can lead to a great deal of frustration and disappointment as a business strategy.

In short, a profitable, safe, and stable dog walking career or business requires a bit of education and planning. But it's all worth it, because walking dogs really is a great way to make a living.

**If you want to become a dog walker, here's an overview of the steps to success—and what we can do to help you get there.**



# 1

## Get Educated

What? Dog school 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 isn't enough if you want to go pro. 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 group 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 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:

[Personalized Business 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, then think about how to set yourself apart. Is a niche the best route? Many successful dog walking businesses are built on specialization in small groups, types of dogs (smalls, for example, or a specific breed), particular neighborhoods, or, with advanced training, dogs with behavioral challenges like leash reactivity.



### Articles to read:

- [The Magic of Niches](#)



### Services to support you:

[Personalized Business Consulting](#)



### Products to save you time:

The book [The Business of Dog Walking](#)



# 3

## Choose A Name

This task is a lot tougher than it used to be thanks to 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:

[Personalized Business Consulting](#)



### Resources to check out:

- [U.S. Patent and Trademark Office](#) (for trademark searches)
- [Naming Force](#) (crowdsourced naming)



# 4

## Develop a Marketing Plan

If you hope to stay in business, you must market your services. No marketing, no clients. No clients, no dogs to walk.

Putting up a website, though crucial, isn't enough, nor is relying on word of mouth. You need a compelling marketing message. (What are the benefits of your service? How are you different from other local choices?) And you need a plan to get that message in front of the right audience of dog lovers. This doesn't mean you have to spend thousands on advertising. It doesn't mean you have to hard-sell yourself or become a networking guru, either. (Phew, right?)

Instead of spending money or being pushy, get creative. Focus on types of marketing that allow people to get to know you a little without the standard off-putting sales hype. For example, consider walking dogs for your local shelter, partnering with local R+ dog trainers, printing canine trading cards, distributing an informative and entertaining newsletter, and so forth.



### Articles to read:

- [Balance Your Dog Walking Marketing Plan](#)
- [Focus Your Marketing](#)



### Products to save you time:

- The book [The Business of Dog Walking](#)
- [The dogbiz Newsletter Service](#)



### Classes to take:

- [The Dog Walking Academy](#)



# 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, 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 how working with you will make your clients' lives easier.

And no, a DIY effort is not a good idea, despite what TV commercials and online ads might say. 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. The money you spend here will come back to you many times over.



### Articles to read:

- [Constructing the Perfect Dog Pro Website](#)
- [The Professional Bio](#)



### Resources to check out:

Email [info@dogbizsuccess.com](mailto:info@dogbizsuccess.com) for free writer and designer referrals



### Services to support you:

- [Design & Website Services](#)
- [Personalized Business Consulting](#)



# 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.



### Articles to read:

- [Are You Losing Money? Smart Rates & Policies](#)



### Products to save you time:

The book [The Business of Dog Walking](#)



### Services to support you:

[Personalized Business Consulting](#)



### Classes to take:

[The Dog Walking Academy](#)

# 7

## Craft Your Policies

The right policies are every bit as important to your long-term success as the right rates. Too many dog walking businesses suffer from wildly fluctuating monthly revenue due to cancellations, drop-in use, and the like.

Carefully thought-out and firmly enforced policies protect your profitability and business reputation—and thus your business survival. By contrast, the absence of sound policies can mean not only lost income, but also extra admin time and endless frustrations due to cancellations, payment disputes, and scheduling nightmares.

So get to work on a set of policies that will support business growth and actively train your clients from the outset to use your service as intended.



### Articles to read:

- [Dog Walking Policies That Work](#)



### Products to save you time:

The book [The Business of Dog Walking](#)



### Services to support you:

[Personalized Business Consulting](#)



### Classes to take:

[The Dog Walking Academy](#)



# Address Legalities

Up next is legal paperwork, rarely on anyone's list of favorite activities. The good news is that legalizing and protecting your business is easier than you might think. 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, professional, 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. To determine whether this extra step is for you, work with a good CPA who understands the ins and outs of running a dog business and can help you choose the right business structure for your tax needs.



#### 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:

[Paperwork Package](#) (available for Business Consulting clients only), [Personalized Business Consulting](#)



#### Classes to take:

[The Dog Walking Academy](#)



#### 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.

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:**

[Personalized Business Consulting](#)



**Resources to check out:**

[Scout](#), [Better Walker](#), [PocketSuite](#), [Pet Sit Click](#) (dog pro business management software)



# Walk Dogs!

Congratulations! You're now well prepared and on track for business success. What to do now? Walk dogs, of course! 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 face any challenges that come your way, our business is to help yours succeed—we'd love to help.



#### Articles to read:

- [A Successful Attitude = Success](#)
- [Managing Your Schedule](#)



#### Services to support you:

[Personalized Business Consulting](#)

