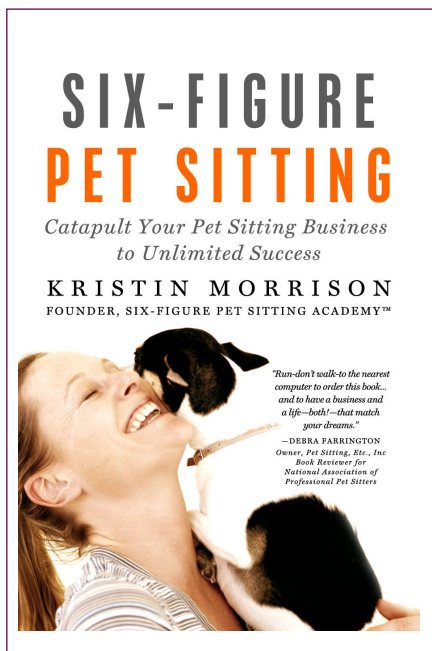




Success@SFPSA.com

Getting Started: Pet Sitting and Dog Walking as a Lucrative Business



This start-up handbook is an excerpt from

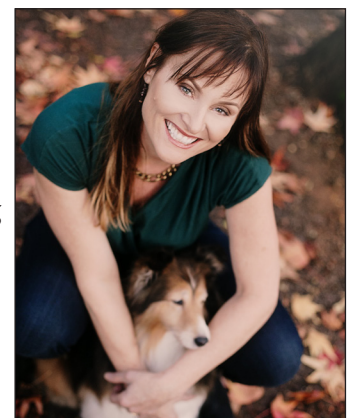
Kristin Morrison's book for pet sitters:

*Six-Figure Pet Sitting: Catapult your Pet Sitting
Business to Unlimited Success.*

You can purchase the eBook online at: www.SFPSA.com

This resource is for pet sitters, dog trainers, pet groomers, dog walkers and other pet business owners. It may be shared **FREE** without alteration. After all, the more pet business owners who know what they want in life and business, the better for us all!

Kristin Morrison started her pet sitting and dog walking company in 1995, and it grew to be one of the largest pet sitting companies in California before she sold it in 2013. Kristin provides business coaching for thousands of pet sitters, dog walkers, dog trainers, and pet groomers across the United States, Canada, the UK and Australia. In 2008, she founded Six-Figure Pet Sitting Academy™ and Six-Figure Pet Business Academy™ providing coaching, webinars, and business products for pet business owners. Kristin wrote the books *Six-Figure Pet Sitting* and *Six-Figure Pet Business* which can be found in print on Amazon and in eBook format on her websites: www.SFPSA.com and www.SFPBacademy.com. Kristin Morrison can be contacted at: Success@SFPSA.com.



Kristin Morrison,
Founder of Six-Figure Pet
Business Academy™

Getting Started:

Pet Sitting and Dog Walking as a Lucrative Business®

First and foremost, it's important to understand that pet sitting is a real business and provides you with a real opportunity to earn six-figures. A lot of people think of pet sitting as a hobby-type business, and while it can start that way, if you follow the advice I share in this book, it can become a powerful, sustainable business. And if you're struggling like I was, feeling like the leash is around your neck, you'll find if you change the way you run your business, you will change your life as well.

Secondly, a new business is like an infant. It needs your nurturing and attention at the beginning in order to stand on its own and to grow. Just as an infant grows and becomes more independent each week, month and year, so will your business if you nurture it. The information I'm going to share with you will help expedite that process. Remember, I want you to avoid all the mistakes I made in the beginning.

5 Reasons to Start a Pet Sitting Business

It's an exciting time to start a pet sitting business. Even when consumers fret over the economy, the pet industry continues to thrive. Pet owners do not hesitate to spend money on their pets.

The pet industry encompasses everything from veterinary services and pet food to pet sitting and dog walking. This industry is expected to generate over \$50 billion (yes, that's billion with a B) annually, and it's trending up, according to industry research firm IBISWorld. Trust me; there are enough dogs and cats to go around to keep all of us pet sitters busy... and earning real income.

If you are considering starting a pet sitting business, here are the five top reasons to motivate you to actually take the actions necessary to start your business now:

Reason #1:

A pet sitting business lets you begin while maintaining your current job or career. Remember my analogy of a new business being like a baby? Keeping your day job gives you time to nurture your business the same way you'd nurture your infant. You certainly wouldn't expect an infant to be able to support you, would you? Of course not, and your business won't fully support you at first either.

Because the hours of pet sitting visits can be somewhat flexible (generally 6 to 9 a.m. and 6 to 9 p.m.), you can work your business hours around your current job. This will help you ease your way into your new pet sitting business to see if you would like to make a full-time job of it. Pet sitting is one of the rare businesses that enables you to work a somewhat flexible schedule.

Reason #2:

Pet sitting business start-up costs are as low as \$1,500 or less. Since you will be providing care in the pets' homes, you will not have to rent a place of business, and you can do office work from your own home.

Start-up costs include:

- Marketing materials: logo, business cards, website, and some other forms of advertising.
- Pet sitting forms, contracts, and agreements which you can find at: www.sixfigurepetsittingacademy.com
- Pet supplies: leashes, dog barrier / gate for your car, pet first aid kit in your car, fanny pack, poop bags, mace or pepper spray, dog treats.
- Business phone line.
- Membership in a national pet sitting business association.
- Insurance and bonding.

Reason #3:

You can get paid to exercise. There are very few jobs out there that enable you to get paid to walk in the fresh air and burn calories while making money, but pet sitting is one of them! Walking dogs is a necessary aspect to the pet visits that you will be doing, and most pet sitters really enjoy this aspect of the business: Paid exercise!

Reason #4:

Pet sitting is a lucrative profession. Pet owners love their ‘kids’ and are generally willing to pay their pet sitters well for quality pet care. Though ‘hobby pet sitters’ usually charge substantially lower rates for their pet care services, professional pet sitters with insurance can charge enough to earn a very lucrative income. As I’ve said, pet sitting is a real business and one in which you truly can earn six-figures.

Reason #5:

You get paid to work with animals! Working with dogs, cats and other animals is incredibly rewarding. Day after day, you will receive unconditional love and adoration from loving pets. Where else can you get that kind of adoration at your job?

So now that you understand the top reasons to begin a pet sitting business, let’s look at 12 simple steps to build a solid foundation for a real business. If you’ve already started your business, I strongly suggest a quick review here to make certain you haven’t missed any of these critical steps.

12 Simple Start up Tips for New Pet Sitters

Step #1: Choose a business name that you LOVE.

Naming a business is as important as naming your kid. Maybe even more important! Why? Because your child can change his name eventually if he wants to, but trying to change a business name down the road is a very challenging process. (I changed my business name after a year, so I’m speaking from experience.)

I recommend that you pick a name that you can see yourself using ten or twenty years down the road. Presume you’ll be in business that long.

Don’t call your business “Bakerville Pet Sitting” (or something similar) if you have even the slightest inkling to perhaps expand to the surrounding areas. You’ll be stuck in Bakerville! However, if you are really clear that you want to stay small, then go for it. It’s actually a nice name. But you must understand how that sort of name brands you to a specific location. If you’re uncertain about how you envision the future of your business, I’d avoid such a localized name.

Do describe your service in your business name. I don’t recommend “pet care” – it’s too vague. But “pet sitting and dog walking” are great to add: Bakerville Pet Sitting and Dog Walking

Six-Figure Success Tip:

Do as much online searching as you can before committing to a business name. You want to ensure that you are not ‘taking’ another local company’s name. Check your local phone book and do Internet searches.

If you find that no one in your county is using the name that you’ve selected, then it may be yours to use in your area. If you discover that the business name is being used in another city or state, contact your local city hall to ask about the laws regarding name usage.

If you think that you may want to create more branches of your company in other counties, I highly recommend that you do a name search at the U.S. Patent and Trademark website at: www.uspto.gov.

Make certain there is no trademark on the name you are interested in. If there is, it’s best to pick another name, so that you are not ‘stealing’ someone else’s name and facing possible legal action from that same-named company in the future. Doing your homework now will save you a lot of time, money, and frustration in the future.

Service. Some may find it's a bit long, but, in my opinion, better too long than not descriptive enough. This way, clients will know exactly what you do. And with a descriptive name, you're already on your way to optimizing for search engines. (More on that in another chapter.)

Step #2: Get a Business License / Fictitious Business Name (DBA)

Now that you have your name, the next step on the agenda is getting a business license.

Before you get your business license, you'll have to decide if you want to be a sole proprietor, an LLC (Limited Liability Corporation) or a Corporation. This is an important decision. Check with your accountant to find out which type of business structure is best for you.

A sole proprietorship is a business formation in which you own all of the assets of your business as well as all of the profits it generates. It is the least expensive to organize, and you retain complete control. However, you also assume all the business risk, liabilities and debts. There is no separation between your personal and business funds.

A corporation, on the other hand, is its own legal entity. Shareholders (in this case, you) have limited liability for debts and judgments against the company. Your personal bank account remains separate from the company's money. The downside is that corporations are cumbersome and expensive to form, and they may result in higher taxes overall.

An LLC, or limited liability corporation, is a bit of a hybrid between the first two. It combines the ability to control your fiscal liabilities in the company (i.e. creating a protective firewall between the company's money and your personal savings) while maintaining more flexibility and control like a sole proprietorship. It's more expensive to create than a sole proprietorship, and LLCs are not permissible in all states.

With the help of your accountant, once you've decided what category of business you'd like to create, you are now ready to get a business license.

In some cities, you may have to get a county business license and a city business license if you are providing pet sitting for different cities within your county while also working from your home office. Call your local City Hall to find out how and where to get your business license.

A fictitious business name, sometimes called fictitious title or DBA, may be required. If you are named Jerry and your business is called Jerry's Pet Sitting Service, you will not need to get a fictitious business name. However, if your name is Amanda and you want to name your business "Jerry's Pet Sitting" or if you want to do business as "Bakerville Pet Sitting and Dog Walking," then you will need to get a fictitious business name. Why? Because your name is not part of your legal business name, and city and state laws require that all businesses that don't have the owner's name in them get this special fictitious title, so that the city and state can determine exactly who the owner is. Once again, your accountant and/or your local government can offer some advice about whether or not you will need to apply for and obtain a fictitious title.

Step #3: Purchase necessary forms and contracts for your business

Next you'll want to get forms and contracts for your business. You'll find many to choose from online. I've also developed a Business Start-up Kit for Pet Sitters as well as individual forms and contracts that you can purchase. You can find them at: www.sixfigurepetsittingacademy.com

Here are all the forms you'll want to have ready before you take on your first client:

- Client Interview/Intake Form for Pet Sit Clients (for Overnights and Visits)
- Client Interview/Intake Form for Dog Walk Clients
- Client Questionnaire for Feedback from Clients
- Checklist for Overnight Pet Sitting Jobs

- Checklist for Pet Visit Jobs
- Contract for Pet Sitting Clients
- Contract for Dog Walking Clients
- Veterinary Release Agreement
- Key Release Agreement

Step #4: Get a business-only phone number.

Do NOT give out your cell phone to clients! I know that when you are starting out, you don't want to miss a call or an opportunity; however, I have worked with so many coaching clients who made that mistake and now, years later, are stressed out because their pet sitting clients call them at all hours. Now they are struggling to have a life! Giving clients your cell phone number now is the same as putting a leash around YOUR neck and keeping it on... and then your clients get to pull it whenever they want. Don't do it. It's inexpensive to get a separate business number, so there are no excuses for you to put that leash around your neck.

You DO want to answer your business phone directly as often as possible, especially when you are starting out. Your clients and prospects will have more confidence in you if you're truly available rather than being directed to voice mail. It's good customer service. You can have your business line forwarded to your cell phone to help ensure you can field as many calls as possible. However, if you do this, make sure that you have a blocked or private number on your cell phone. Otherwise, clients will see your number on their Caller ID and inevitably call you back on your cell phone, and you've lost your ability to have a break from your business when you need it.

Google Voice is another great option. It's free, and you can direct calls to your cell, your home and to voice mail. In fact, you can route all of your phone numbers through Google Voice, and you establish the rules regarding how each call is directed.

Step #5: Decide what services to offer.

Here are the standard services that most pet sitters offer:

- Private or small group dog walking
- Group dog hiking, dog park adventures, or beach playtime
- Vacation pet visits
- Overnight pet sitting in client's home
- Dog boarding in pet sitter's home
- Pet taxi

Here's a breakdown of the service description, typical time commitment and time of day the service usually takes place:

Private or Group Dog Walking

What the service is: Neighborhood dog walking

Time commitment: 30/45/60 minutes

Time of day service takes place: usually mid-day hours of 11-2

Group dog hiking, dog park adventure, or beach playtime:

What service is: Social and active playtime for dogs

Time commitment: play/walk time of 45/60 minutes plus drive time to and from beach or trail (2-4 hours total)

Time of day service takes place: usually mid-day hours of 11-2

Vacation Pet Visits

What the service is: For pets: feeding, walking, administering medication if necessary, scooping the litter box and cleaning up any messes pets may have made while human clients are away. For home: watering plants, retrieving mail and newspaper, adjusting blinds and turning on lights at night to give a “lived-in” appearance to home.

Time commitment: 30/45/60 minutes, 2 or 3 times a day

Time of day service takes place: 7-9am, 11am-2pm, 7-9pm (Every 12 hours if 2x daily visits, every 8 hours if 3x a day visits)

Overnight Pet Sitting in Client’s Home

What the service is: For pets: feeding and walking, administering medication if necessary, scooping the litter box and cleaning up any messes pets may have made while human clients are away. For home: watering plants and retrieving mail and newspaper, adjusting blinds and turning on lights at night to give a “lived-in” appearance to home, and staying overnight in the home.

Time commitment: usually 12 hours overnight with mid-day visits if needed

Time of day service takes place: usually 7pm-7am with a 30 or 45 minute mid-day visit/walk between 11am-2pm if needed

Dog Boarding in Pet Sitter’s Home

What the service is: Keeping the dog at your home or at one of your staff member’s homes.

Time commitment: Depends upon dogs’ and clients’ needs. With some dogs, you may need to take them with you wherever you go due to separation anxiety.

Time of day service takes place: 24-hour care

Pet Taxi

What the service is: Transporting the animal(s) to and from their homes to the specified destination, usually the veterinarian or dog groomer.

Time Commitment: Depends upon dogs’ and clients’ needs, usually a minimum of an hour to and from the destination.

Time of day service takes place: Whatever time client specifies

Step #6: Figure out your pricing for each pet service you offer.

Are you confused about how to price your various pet services? Do an online search for the various pet sitting services in your area. You’ll read more about pricing in a further chapter, but when you’re starting out, I recommend positioning yourself in the middle of the average rates in your area – not the highest, not the lowest, but right in the middle. If you’ve been pet sitting for a year or longer, then go with the high-medium to low-high pricing for your locale.

Create a pricing spreadsheet for all of your various services. Post it where you can see it, so that when clients call, you will know immediately how to respond. Do role-playing sessions with friends and have them call you to ask for pricing for different assortments of animals. Have them rate you on how confident, trustworthy and personable you came across on the phone.

As your business increases (and even if your business is relatively new), you can raise your prices to the high-medium or low-high range as you see fit. Let clients know you have space for more business. Reward them with a free dog walk or pet sit visit if they refer you to new clients.

Step #7: Join a pet sitting association.

You’ll want to become a member of a national pet sitting association. Why? The most important reason I’ve found to join an association is to get a lower rate for business insurance. You can take advantage of the group

policy that associations offer. You'll also have the opportunity to get discounts on other business items as well as use of the association as a valuable resource to answer any questions you might have about pet sitting or general start-up questions.

I've found that all of the pet sitting associations are excellent in their own ways, and my own personal experience is that the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters (NAPPS) offers valuable business information for pet sitting business owners. I'm committed to helping pet sitters become knowledgeable about how to run a business, not just how to take care of pets, and I find NAPPS excels in the area of business and pet care education. Please note that there is a yearly membership fee to join, but this more than pays for itself with the substantial discount that you will receive on business insurance as well as the other perks that that come with being a member.

Here is the NAPPS website: www.petsitters.org

Step #8: Obtain Business Insurance.

You can get pet sitting business insurance on a shoestring. If you don't have enough money in your start-up budget to purchase a membership to an association, yet you still want low-cost business insurance, I recommend Pet Sit, LLC. They offer inexpensive insurance without paying a yearly membership association fee.

You can find Pet Sit, LLC online at: www.petsitllc.com

If you have many staff members or are considering hiring staff members this year, then I recommend that you compare prices and make sure that Pet Sit, LLC is the most cost-effective way of obtaining insurance. You may end up paying more for insurance if you have many staff members than you would if you joined an association and purchased business insurance through your organization's insurance plan. However, if you are a sole proprietor or have just a handful of staff members, then Pet Sit, LLC can definitely get you insured quickly and inexpensively, so you can say "yes" to your first client!

Step #9: Get Bonded.

In addition to being responsible for your clients' pets, you will also be responsible for their property. I get a lot of calls from pet sitters asking me if they should get bonded (anti-theft insurance) since they are a sole proprietor, and they know they will not be stealing from their clients. Yes, you should get it. Why? It's inexpensive, and you can get a policy for as little as \$75 annually. Clients will appreciate knowing you are bonded. Also having Licensed/Bonded/Insured on your business card and on your website really shows your professionalism. Do it!

You can purchase bonding insurance through the same insurance company that is offered by NAPPS or you can get it through Pet Sit, LLC.

Step #10: Issue a press release.

You'll want to send out press releases to your local newspapers. It's a good idea to both e-mail and snail mail it. While you want to toot your own horn, remember that press releases announce news. Stick to the facts, and there's a better chance that your local newspapers will print your release. Don't forget to include some quotations, even if you're quoting yourself. If you get too "salesy," they're bound to ignore it. Here's a sample to give you an idea:

For immediate release:

New Pet Sitting Service Announced

Bakerville, VA, October 25, 2010

Pet-care specialist, Jenny Smith, has announced the opening of the Bakerfield Pet Sitting Service, serving Bakerfield and surrounding communities. Ms Smith has over fifteen years of pet care experience for friends and family.

When asked about the importance of pet sitting services, she explained, "Staying in a kennel is often more stressful to pets than their owners realize. With my service, pets can be cared for in the comfort of their own homes – the surroundings they know best."

Before relocating to Bakerfield, Ms Smith previously lived in Atlanta where she volunteered for the Atlanta Animal Shelter for fifteen years. She decided to launch her business to provide a much-needed service in this community and to pursue her passion for working with animals.

Walking and feeding pets during owner absences is the primary function of her business, and she also provides pet transportation and dog park visits. Additionally, her service is not limited to dogs and cats. "While dogs and cats make up the bulk of our clientele, we also provide care for horses, goats, chickens, bunnies, birds and pocket pets," she added. In addition to providing in-home care for pets, the Bakerfield Pet Service also offers boarding in a home atmosphere.

For additional information, call at 809-421-9567 or visit online at <http://www.bakervillepetsitting.com>.

#

Contact:

Jenny Smith, Owner, Bakerfield Pet Siting

2809 Magnolia Drive

Bakerfield, VA 22901

Phone: 809-421-9567

<http://www.bakervillepetsitting.com>

info@bakervillepetsitting.com

Be certain to end your press release professionally by typing a series of pound signs (# # #) instead of using the phrase “the end” and provide full contact details, so the reporter can contact you with questions or for further information.

In addition to your press release, there are a number of other aspects of marketing that are crucial to operate a successful six-figure pet sitting business. We’ll delve into those later in the book. For now, here’s the list to consider:

- ✓ Professional logo
 - ✓ Business cards
 - ✓ Website domain name (URL)
 - ✓ Website
 - ✓ Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for your website
 - ✓ Pay-per-click advertising
 - ✓ Pet sitting directory listings
 - ✓ Social media sites: Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.
 - ✓ Blogs and articles (creates high SEO for websites)
- Step #11: Develop a business plan.**

Having a business goal is great, but it’s not worth very much if you don’t have a plan to achieve it. Developing a business plan creates the map you need to get where you know you want to go – reaching a six-figure pet sitting business. A business plan is a formal statement about your business goals and how to go about achieving them. It includes a description of your business, your background and experience, a competitive analysis, your marketing plan, and your plans for running your operation.

Some new entrepreneurs see writing a business plan as little more than busywork; however, it forces you to really think about these important aspects of running your business. As you grow, your plan can grow with you. Additionally, when you grow to the point of considering outside funding, a business plan will be required by almost all lenders.

- Step #12: Get administration software.**

One of the keys to running a successful, six-figure pet sitting business is to run the business rather than letting your business run you. One of the most important items for your new business is a software system that allows you to easily invoice clients, keep track of your client, pet, and staff information, and to maintain your pet sitting and dog walking schedule.

With the advances in online security, I highly recommend using an online administration software system rather than a stand-alone one. The reason is simple: It enables you to manage your business from anywhere in the world. Plus it allows your managers (when you eventually grow your business and need them) to control every aspect of the business from their own homes.

This type of system may involve a monthly or annual fee that is usually based on the number of users. The more staff you have, the more expensive it becomes. However, this fee will pay for itself several times over with the level of flexibility you get and the ease with which you can run your business! Before you opt for a particular system, envision what you want your business to become and choose the system that supports that vision. It’s easier to grow into a system that offers more features than you may need when you start than to change administrative systems down the road.

“Getting Started: Pet Sitting and Dog Walking as a Lucrative Business®”

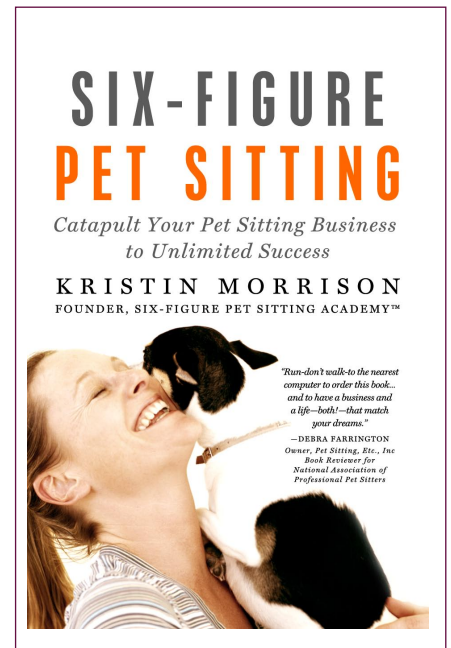
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