

*Harness the power of excellent marketing, operational, and support team systems to create an exceptional pet sitting client experience.*

How To  
Create  
*Excellence*  
in Your  
Pet Sitting  
Business



DANIELLE CHONODY

"Danielle has captured the stellar points needed to achieve a successful pet care business. Her years of working with other pet sitters as their mentor, has provided her with the insight to steer pet sitters away from dangerous mistakes which can cost time, money, and enthusiasm. This book has all of the information that I wish I had known when I started my business years ago."

Lisa Sellman, Owner of Aloha Pet Care & Dog Training, Minneapolis, MN

"If you are even just considering starting your own pet sitting business, then *How To Create Excellence* by Danielle Chonody is a wise choice to add to your business arsenal. Danielle has taken the guess work out of setting up, operating, and marketing a pet sitting business. She has put all the vital information you need to succeed in this growing field together in a nice, concise, easy to read and implement book. If you truly want to not only succeed but to excel in this line of work, then *How To Create Excellence* is not optional - get it, read it, and then apply what you learn! Your clients and the pets they love will benefit greatly by the knowledge you gain."

Dr. Kim Bloomer, Veterinary Naturopath, Author, and Radio Show Host

"How to Create Excellence in Your Pet Sitting Business is some of the best information I have read on how to harness the power of excellent marketing, operational, and support team systems to create an exceptional pet sitting client experience. I was unhappy with the current industry groups that focus on teaching people how to start up a new pet sitting business and educating them on the basics of marketing, customer service, and pet care. My company was so far past that and *How to Create Excellence* seems to pick up where they leave off. I was particularly impressed by the information offered on how to create a brand and why that is so important as well as the information that Danielle shares about marketing methods and most of all social media tools. I'm glad I had a sneak peek at this book and plan on using the information I learned from it starting TODAY. It's hard work owning a pet care service, with 3 locations, 40 employees, taxes, insurance and all the headaches and guessing games to work through. *How to Create Excellence* is a mapped out plan for not only newbies, but seasoned professionals, or those that think they are!"

Joseph Giannini, Owner Urban Outsitters, Chicago IL

“How to create excellence is the one book you HAVE to get if you are starting a pet sitting business. Not only does Danielle give all the basic start up facts, but she even teaches you how to market your business once it’s started. How to create excellence is a great book for anyone who has, or is thinking of starting a pet related business. Her ideas are unique, and can help you stand out from your competition. This is a must read, educational book, that can really give you all the knowledge you need to be a success.”

Sheena Diane, Veterinary Technician and Freelance writer

"How to Create Excellence in Your Pet Sitting Business is a no-nonsense book for people who are serious about building a professional and profitable pet sitting business. Danielle's easy to understand procedures, systems, and explanations will help you create a solid foundation on which to build your success. And, with the questions she poses throughout the book, you'll learn to make sound business decisions that will be beneficial for your business as well as your clients."

Therese Kopiwoda - Founder of PetsitUSA.com and Social Media Coach  
Twitter ID @petsitusa

"How to Create Excellence in Your Pet Sitting Business is a vital resource for any pet sitter that is seeking insider tips on how to market their business. I especially like that How to Create Excellence in Your Pet Sitting Business incorporates social media strategies and empowers readers with strategies in both traditional and new media marketing. If you are a pet sitter who wants to get an edge over your competition, I suggest you get your hands on this cutting edge resource"

Diana L Guerrero (Ark Lady) Animal expert and Past President of the Pet Sitters Association of Southern California. <http://www.arkanimals.com>

"Danielle has taken the time to document all stages and operational departments of running a successful pet sitting business. I think this book will be very helpful to those looking to start a pet sitting business or take it to the next level"

Jordan Kaplan, Owner of Petaholics, New York, NY

“Whether you are starting a new pet sitting business or have been in the industry for years Danielle Chonody's book will be an essential resource for you. Danielle clearly establishes the market opportunity, strategies for selecting and marketing to a target market and also outlines the operations side of the business, including staffing - often frustrating topics for many pet care providers. The book provides straight-forward ideas and suggestions for developing a brand that will help you attract, develop and maintain long-term relationships with loyal clients. If you haven't read How To Create Excellence in Your Pet Sitting Business your competitors probably have. This book is focused on EXCELLENCE and will serve you well if you want to be a leader in the pet sitting business - because it was written by one. I highly recommend it.”

Rob Nager Founder & Top Dog, Decadent Dog, Needham MA

“How to Create Excellence in Your Pet Sitting Business is an invaluable guide for anyone looking to take their business to the next level. This book unfolds 3 key systems which are the secret weapons to operating a pet sitting business that is financially and personally rewarding. By using the techniques outlined in this book you will discover how to increase your income, make managing your business stress-free & fun, and become recognized as an outstanding professional in your community. A must-read!!!”

Rachel Monroe, The Pet Industry Copywriter [www.rachelmonroe.com](http://www.rachelmonroe.com)

“How to Create Excellence in Your Pet Sitting Business is not only a must read for pet sitters everywhere, it is a brilliant look at how to incorporate true excellence in your business. Danielle takes her readers from the basics of starting a pet sitting business, to creating savvy marketing both on-line and off-line, to developing a business model that allows for both financial and time freedom. Though this book was written for pet sitters, Danielle has provided such valuable insider information that any business owner would benefit from reading her wisdom filled advice.

Dawn Z Bournand, Founder of Fabulously Successful, International Speaker and Author

“Love pets? Want to increase your income? Or do you want to take your existing business to a higher level? This book provides a way for you to combine your entrepreneurial spirit with your love for pets. From marketing to operations to systems to building a team, “How to Create Excellence...” provides all you need to know to be your own boss in a successful business of pet sitting. Danielle Chonody generously shares her knowledge and expertise so that others can benefit and become successful independent business owners.”

Pauline Shirley, Speaker and Coach, Leaders On Fire

# How to Create Excellence in Your Pet Sitting Business

Harness the power of excellent marketing, operational,  
and support team systems to create an exceptional pet  
sitting client experience

Danielle Chonody

*The Pet Sitting Excellence Coach*  
*Co-Founder of the Association of Pet Sitting Excellence*

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Thanks also to my family and friends who have always believed in me, and to all the pet sitters who have shared their experiences and wisdom with me and have helped me to grow and learn.

Special thanks to my best friend, and cat lover, Beth Moreland for her careful editing of this book and to Joshua Cary – my co-founder of the Association of Pet Sitting Excellence - for working with me to make my dream of creating an inspiring new place for pet sitters to learn and grow together to fruition.





## Who is Danielle Chonody?

Danielle Chonody is the owner and operator of Protecting Max – Your Pet Sitting Partners in the Mid-Cities of Dallas Fort Worth. Danielle has over 7 years experience running her own in home pet sitting business. She ran her pet sitting business for several years as a solo pet sitter before successfully expanding her business by hiring contract pet sitters and virtual assistants. Danielle is also a licensed Pet Tech Pet Saver first aid instructor.

In 2007 Danielle created the blog WorkingwithPets.com. For over 2 years Danielle has used her blog to share best practice, marketing, business management, staffing, and customer service tips to help other pet sitters to grow and succeed in their pet sitting businesses. Danielle is also an influential social networker and is known for promoting the sharing of ideas and pet sitting best practices by actively networking with other pet sitters online.

Danielle continues to work as a technical trainer and has transferred her teaching skills to mentor and coach pet sitters through her group coaching program the “Circle of Pet Sitting Excellence”. She also offers one-on-one coaching programs designed for pet sitters on the topics of marketing, operational systems, and staff hiring and management.

It is one of Danielle’s personal goals to raise the awareness of the importance of creating a systemized and scalable pet sitting business based on pet sitting excellence principles and to recognize and promote business role models that demonstrate pet sitting excellence. It is her desire that this will improve the credibility and recognition given to the pet sitting industry and promote pet care excellence to both pet sitting business owners and pet owners.

To find out more about Danielle’s work to promote pet sitting excellence visit <http://www.PetSittingExcellence.com>.

Get Your Free Companion EBook with  
**100 Insider Tips**  
**From Experienced Pet Sitters**

The Pet Sitters Sharing Excellence Project EBook is full of practical tips that your fellow pet sitters have gathered from years of experience working with pets. Pet Sitters share their tips on providing better customer service, business marketing, hiring and managing employees and contractors, business management, pet care and first aid, and on the job tips that help them run their day to day business smarter.

Use the book to build your own network of like minded pet sitters who are committed to sharing and excellence. Connect with the Pet Sitters Sharing Excellence contributors on Twitter and Facebook to continue to share experience and seek advice.

**Download your free copy now at**  
**<http://www.PetSittersSharingExcellence.com>**

## Keep Sharing Excellence!

I believe strongly that excellence is something that blossoms through the sharing of information and ideas. To encourage an ongoing discussion of pet sitting excellence I've included both a feedback mechanism and a way for you to get involved real time in the sharing of pet sitting excellence.

Throughout this book you will see my Twitter address @APSEtips. You can search Twitter and find the on-going discussion or just type in @APSEtips when you post a comment and then anybody can search out your post. I'll also include a twitter hash mark after each main section. They look like this #example. These hash marks can help you narrow your search to find discussions just on that chapter.

I'll be reading the comments, answering your questions, and getting involved in the discussions regularly.

If you are new to Twitter or just want to learn some new Twitter marketing tips you can download my free Ebook – Twitter Marketing Secrets at <http://www.PetSittersSharingExcellence.com>

Twitter Marketing Secrets is a basic guide that will show you how to:

- 1) Set up your Twitter account
- 2) Post a tweet
- 3) Use Twitter with your blog
- 4) Jazz up your Twitter site to look great by setting custom backgrounds and adding your photo
- 5) Work with followers
- 6) Use Twitter to market and increase your search engine optimization

It's a great basic book with tips that any level of tweeter can use to improve how they use Twitter.

I hope you'll help me to continue the sharing of pet sitting excellence!



This book is dedicated to our pets. They are our life companions and always there for us when we need comfort and unconditional love. They make us laugh, and sometimes cry, but without them the world would be a darker place. They deserve the best care that we can give them so that they can continue to shine their light and share their uninhibited joy with the world.



## Is This Book for You?

Are you ready to build a pet sitting business that instantly creates community buzz by providing your clients with a unique pet care experience that exceeds expectations?

Do you wish you could build a pet sitting business that runs with ease and gives you more lifestyle freedom?

Do you have an existing pet sitting business that you want to grow to serve more clients because you want to make a difference in the lives of more animals every day?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then this book can help you achieve your goals.

What I do in this book is explain the 3 keys to creating a pet sitting service that provides pet care excellence and runs like a well oiled machine. I will explain the concept of pet sitting excellence and then lead you through a sequential step-by-step process to set up your business to achieve this level of success. I also give you insider tips that will allow you to attract customers quickly and the customer service secrets to guarantee that your new customers can't help but tell all their friends about your service.

I wrote this book because I see a gap in the current knowledge that is available to new pet sitting business owners and pet sitting business owners who want to grow their business and provide first class pet care to a large number of clients. Current industry groups are focused on teaching people how to startup a new pet sitting business and educating them on the basics of marketing, customer service, and pet care.

The aim of this book is to give pet sitters the business know-how required to create marketing, operational, and hiring systems that are needed to create:

- Pet care and customer service excellence
- A pet sitting business that runs smoothly and with ease
- A pet sitting business that can ultimately produce passive income for the owner

This type of business allows the owner to enjoy higher profits, less stress, and more free time to spend with family and friends.



If you are starting a new pet sitting business or are ready to take your existing pet sitting business to a higher level of success, read on to discover a simple step-by-step process to set up your business that will get you on the fast track to attracting new clients, exceeding their pet care expectations, and making an impact on the quality of life of pets in your community.

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## Foreword – Your Business Plan

To create a great pet sitting business you should dedicate time to create a well thought out business plan. The purposes of a business plan are to:

- Define your vision of what you want your pet sitting business to look like in 5 to 10 years from today
- Lay out the direction of your business and give you a path to follow
- Establish standards that you can use to measure your business success

Your plan should define how you want to operate your pet sitting business and include a description of your support team, your marketing strategy, and the methods that you will use to interact with your customers.

A business plan may be:

- A formal document that you use to raise capital to finance your company
- An informal document that is used internally by you and your support staff that helps you to plan out your strategies to make sure that your pet sitting business is successful.

Your plan should be a work-in-progress and a document that you continually update as your business grows. The strategies within this book will help you to prepare a business plan for your business, or to update your existing business plan.

You can find additional instructions and formal business plan templates at the US Small Business Administration website:

<http://www.sba.gov/smallbusinessplanner/plan/writeabusinessplan/>

If you need a simple plan for your internal use my One Page Pet Business Plan Toolkit leads you through the steps to create your plan and provides examples from my own pet sitting business plan. It also includes a one page business plan template. This toolkit is a free resource available to all members of the Association of Pet Sitting Excellence.



# What is Pet Sitting Excellence

The primary function of any pet sitting service is to provide in-home vacation or midday pet care and dog walking services. Some pet sitters also offer dog grooming, hiking excursions, and other specialty services to their clients.

Today the job of a pet sitter may take several different forms:

- Visiting a client's home once or several times a day to feed, water, walk and play with pets while clients are at work or out of town. Often pet sitters also perform home services such as mail collection, garbage disposal, and plant watering.
- Staying in a client's home overnight to stay with and care for the client's pets.
- Visiting a client's home to walk or exercise a dog while the client is away from the home during the day.

In-home pet sitting is an alternative to boarding or dog day care and offers the benefit of keeping pets in a familiar environment and maintaining their regular routine. This means that pets are less stressed and avoid coming in contact with other animals from which they can pick up disease. Pet sitting also offers more convenience to pet owners, as they do not have to drop and pick up pets from a boarding or day care facility.

To grow a successful pet sitting business you must offer your clients a consistent, reliable, and caring pet care service that provides for the basic needs of the pets in your care such as food, exercise, and affection.

Pet sitting excellence goes far beyond just providing excellent pet care. A business that creates pet sitting excellence also excels at exceeding the pet owners needs and expectations by creating an exceptional pet sitting experience.

Pet owners want to hire a pet sitter who will give quality, caring and consistent care for their pets while they are vacationing or at work, but just as importantly

pet owners are also looking for convenience, which means that your pet sitting service needs to make it easy for them to:

- find you
- trust you
- understand how the service works
- hire you and schedule services
- make payments

You can provide this ease by ensuring that you do a great job at marketing your business and have carefully planned operational business systems that are managed by a strong support team.

Great marketing makes sure that:

- potential clients can easily find your service
- you build immediate trust by identifying your experience and credentials and by providing super customer testimonials

Good operational systems make certain that:

- your policies and pricing are obvious
- communication with clients on your website, over the phone, or in person is consistent and clear
- your business makes every effort to protect the health and safety of the pets in your care

To successfully grow a pet sitting business that creates an experience of pet sitting excellence the business must also be easy for you to run and manage. The more smoothly your day to day business runs, the more clients you will be able to connect with and provide excellent service, and the more pleasure and profits you will gain from your business. Operational systems make running your business more efficient and allow you to hand off tasks to a support team as your business grows.

# The Characteristics of Pet Sitting Excellence

To demonstrate pet sitting excellence your business should:

- Build a partnership with the client to maintain the pets health and normal routine
- Act with honesty and integrity
- Have operational processes that ensure consistent and reliable quality pet care
- Make customer convenience a priority
- Display transparent pricing and policies
- Keep regular office hours and return client enquiries promptly
- Provide consistent service availability given reasonable notice by clients
- Have written contingency plans and emergency procedures
- Have a thorough screening process for pet sitters and staff
- Encourage and provide opportunities for staff to grow their pet care knowledge
- Be bonded and insured to protect yourself and your clients
- Work to quickly identify and resolve client problems
- Educate pet owners and raise community awareness of pet health and safety
- Maintain confidentiality of client and pet information
- Give back to your local community



## Why Is Pet Sitting Excellence Important?

In our culture pets are fast becoming more than just companion animals. They are now valuable members of the family. As such the role of the pet sitter takes on even greater responsibility.

As a pet sitter you are the temporary custodian of your client's pets. It is your job to protect their health, safety, and emotional wellbeing while the pet's owners cannot be there to do this important job. It is vitally important that your pet sitting business is set up so that you have systems in place that both guarantee the pet's wellbeing as well as take care of your client's emotional needs by making them feel safe leaving the pets in your care.

In the past two years the pet sitting industry has seen an average of 7% annual growth. This means that the number of pet sitting services available to pet owners in your area is expanding and to make sure that your business continues to attract new clients you must become more competitive by offering superior services. Creating a business designed to embody pet sitting excellence allows you to build a reputation as the pet sitting services leader in your area.

The improved customer satisfaction will ensure that your business receives more repeat business, generates more word of mouth referrals, and creates automatic client buzz and community publicity and recognition. It will also allow you to collect sparkling testimonials from your clients that then work to help you build trust and market your business to new clients.

## The 3 Keys to Creating Pet Sitting Excellence

To achieve pet sitting excellence in your business you need to have the following 3 key systems in place:

- A marketing system that brings you a steady stream of new clients
- An operational system that ensures outstanding and consistent customer service
- A support system of dedicated team members who support the daily operations of your business

Without consistently marketing your business you will not continue to bring in enough clients to grow your business and achieve financial success. The first step to effective marketing is to create a marketing plan that details the methods that you will use to market your business to pet owners. The second step is to create a system that spells out the measures that you will take daily, weekly, or monthly to put the marketing plan into action. This second step is often missed but is critical to your business success.

Operational systems describe how things are done in your business. A system lays out the steps it takes to accomplish any task – whether that task is accepting a customer booking, completing an initial client interview, or performing an in home overnight visit. These systems ensure that each task is completed the same way every time, no matter who in your team is performing the task. Without having operational systems in your business you are leaving customer service and the wellbeing of the pets to chance.

When you first start your business it may just be you doing the visits, taking the bookings, and completing the office administrative tasks. To grow your business you will eventually need to hire staff so that you can service more clients. These staff may be as varied as book keepers, pet sitters, office managers, website designers, or marketing specialists. These staff members may be either in your office or virtual, and they may be either contractors or employees. To ensure that you find and hire the ideal candidates for each position, you need to have a hiring system, and to ensure your team is easy to train and manage; you come back to needing strong operational business systems.

The rest of this book is dedicated to showing you how to create your own marketing and operational systems and your own business support team.

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# Marketing Excellence

Whether you are just starting your pet sitting business or have an existing business that you want to grow, the key ingredient to your business success is a steady stream of new clients. To consistently attract new clients you must always be marketing your business. This can be difficult once you start to get busy with clients but this is where your support team comes in to help you find more time.

The only way to be truly consistent with your marketing is to systemize your daily, weekly, and monthly marketing activities. These systems will make it simple for you to stay focused and get your marketing tasks done on schedule.

To attract new pet sitting clients to your business you must:

- Know exactly who your ideal pet sitting clients are and the best ways to make sure that they know about your business
- Have a balanced marketing plan that gathers new client leads and follows up to educate and build a relationship with potential clients to build trust and credibility
- Create your own marketing systems that take the guesswork out of your marketing by showing you exactly what you need to do every week to market your business and keep you focused
- Know how to track your marketing efforts to ensure you are getting the results that you desire

## **Your Market Profile**

Your market profile describes how your pet sitting business fits within your local market. It outlines the features and benefits of your service, identifies what makes your business unique, describes the characteristics of your ideal customers, and profiles the services of your competitors, and their target market. This profile will be your guide for creating your new marketing plan and marketing systems. Completing the market profile is your first step towards marketing excellence.

### **What Is a Target Market?**

A target market is the group of people that you aim to have as clients for your pet sitting services. It's those people whose pets you want to sit for and those who are inclined to want or need your pet sitting services.

You may currently consider all pet owners in your geographical area as potential customers. While all pet owners at some time may need pet sitting services, your business appeals, or has the potential to appeal, much more strongly to a certain group of pet owners. If you can define and target your marketing to this group then you will be much more successful in attracting new customers and also need to spend less money on marketing.

The identity of these pet owners can be revealed by conducting market research and analyzing the demographics of your current customers.

### **Why Target Markets Are Important**

Identifying a target audience is extremely important to the success of your business. You need to pinpoint and break down your target audience and appeal specifically to them. Knowing exactly who your target market is can also help you streamline your marketing efforts and increase the chances that you'll reach the people who are most likely to become clients instead of wasting time and resources marketing to people who don't want or need your services. Imagine all the money you could lose by marketing to the general public, many of whom don't even have pets!

## Using a Target Market to Market Services

Once you've identified your target market, the next step is to use its specific information to maximize the possibility of getting new clients. For example:

- Finding out where your target market works can influence where you put advertisements or tell you about their after-hour habits. If many of your clients have IT jobs, you can assume that they access the Internet at home and visit pet-related websites. These pet-related websites can be prime places to advertise your business.
- Identifying your target market's species of pet may affect the types of services that you offer. A target audience that owns dogs will need different services than one that owns iguanas.
- Knowing the average annual income of your target audience may influence how much you charge for your services. More telling information may be how much they spend on their pets annually. Does your target market spend only the bare minimum on pet maintenance services or do they splurge on their furry friends? The answer can also guide you when determining but how many "extra" or "special" services you offer.

Of course, your research and marketing doesn't end there. As your business expands, your target market will likely change and your marketing efforts will have to change with them. But having a working knowledge of your target market is the first step to seeing your pet sitting business blossom into a success.

### How to Define Your Target Market

Your target market can be defined using 3 criteria:

- 1) Geographical targeting - Defining your potential customers based on the city or zip code in which they live.

Typically a pet sitting business owner chooses to target their services in an area within 5-10 miles of their home to minimize travel time and gas expenses. When you conduct your market research and examine the characteristics of the

residents in your area you may however discover that residents of an adjacent city may make better potential customers.

One of the easiest ways to examine neighborhoods is to do a simple drive through. Notice the condition of the houses and yards, notice what type of cars are parked in the driveway.

Compact and sporty cars - young married couples.

Bulky sedans and luxury cars – middle aged residents

BMW's and the like - upscale professionals

Bicycles and basketball hoops in driveways indicates that families live in the area.

While these are obviously generalizations, these observations can still be useful in determining the best geographic areas to target in your marketing.

## 2) Demographic targeting

Defining potential customers based on statistical, behavioral, and psychological things they have in common.

Demographic characteristics can include age, sex, marital status, occupation, annual income, if they have children, how often they travel, what credit cards they carry, what magazines they read, how many and what type of pets they own, where they shop for pet supplies etc

## 3) Affiliation and Association

Defining potential customers based on their common membership in clubs or associations.

Are there any associations or clubs where you have been a member for many years – a PTA, civic group, church group, or dog club or rescue? If so, this may provide a large pool of people who already recognize your name and reputation. Because they know you, fellow members of these clubs are probably more receptive to hearing about your pet sitting services. Large groups in which you are a member can become a super target market for your services. Actively

promote your business at group events by offering to speak about topics that are a concern for pet owners.

If there are local dog clubs or rescue groups where you know that local pet owners congregate why not become a member so that you can network and market your services to these caring and engaged pet owners.

The first place to start when you are trying to identify the geographic location and demographic characteristics of your ideal customer is to take a good look at your existing customers.

Look at the characteristics of your best customers and make an effort to identify any trends. If you don't yet have a customer base you can also find this information by conducting some research by surveying local pet owners.

Some of the ways that you can collect potential customer information is by:

- Stopping and surveying people in their environment (for example: at a dog park, or in the street walking their dog)
- Asking questions at local online forums
- Emailing friends and family with questions
- Putting a survey form on your website and offering an incentive to customers to fill out the survey

### **Researching the Target Market of Your Competitors**

Another great tool in identification of the target market for your services is to look at the target market of your competitors. Their target market will not necessarily determine your ideal customers as you may not offer the exactly the same services, but it will give you some clues about what types of people they are targeting. Typically they will be targeting people that they have found to make good pet sitting clients for their business.



Knowing more about your competitors and the people they are trying to target in their marketing will be valuable when we move on to the next lesson and discuss how you can differentiate your services.

If you cannot already name all the competing pet sitting services in your service area you can find them easily in the yellow pages (paper or at [www.yellowpages.com](http://www.yellowpages.com) and [www.smartpages.com](http://www.smartpages.com)) , and online in the following pet sitting directories:

[www.petsit.com](http://www.petsit.com)

[www.pet-sitters.biz](http://www.pet-sitters.biz)

[www.petsitusa.com](http://www.petsitusa.com)

[www.petsittingdirectory.com](http://www.petsittingdirectory.com)

Just type in your zip codes in the search features at each of these sites to get a list of all pet sitting services in your area.

Take a look at the ads and websites of these other services. Look for clues about the demographics of their target customers. For example - do they have packages for clients that are business travelers, or have multiple pets? Do they give discounts when clients book several visits per day, or do they offer overnight visits?

Do they make specific reference to the special needs of business travelers, families, people who want to get their pets more exercise, vacation travelers? Make sure you read their client testimonials as these can also give you clues to their customer demographics.

Remember not to be too broad – you want to list the profile of your ideal customer, someone who you enjoy working for, and who appreciates the benefits of your services. It may even help to think of one specific person and describe their geographic location, demographics, and affiliations. Don't worry that you are being too narrow – by defining your target market you are not excluding other pet owners who don't perfectly fit this profile from using your services. Having a very specific profile of your target market will make it much easier for you to write your marketing materials to appeal to this group.

**Twitter @APSEtips #targetmarket**

## How to Create Your USP

A unique selling proposition (USP), or unique selling point, is a marketing device intended to make your business stand out to your target market. It's the real or perceived benefit that convinces your target market to invest in your service. For pet sitters, it's crucial to define your USP, as many pet sitting businesses offer the same kinds of services.

To define your USP, you must first evaluate how your business measures up against your local competitors. Take a look back at the competitor research that you completed.

As you looked at the websites and marketing materials of other pet sitting businesses in your service area did you notice differences in the services or customer experience that your pet sitting business provides?

If nothing jumped out at you immediately here are some questions to get you started:

- Do you offer free initial interviews or consultations?
- Do you offer a uniquely secure key system?
- Do you offer a rare pet sitting service?
- Do you have more years of experience serving your local area?
- Do you specialize in exotic pets?
- Do you offer overnight visits or house and pet sitting?
- Do you offer payment by credit card or paypal?
- Do you offer text message or email daily or weekly pet updates?
- Do you offer weekly or monthly dog walking packages?
- Do you offer any additional convenience to your customers?
- Do you offer online or email booking service?
- Do you offer dog training services?
- Do you have accreditation with a pet sitting association?
- Do you have a disaster emergency plan?
- Do you have an arrangement to have a vet on call for emergency service?

Another important question to ask is – is there anything that other competitive pet sitting services lack that you could provide in your business? Is there a customer need that is not being met in your area?

The answers to these questions and those like them can help you define your USP and give you the extra edge against your competitors.

Also consider the needs and desires of your target market. What services do your target market value? Is the need already being met by a competitor in the business? If it's not, you may have an easy opportunity to develop a USP. For instance, if your target market contains active, outdoorsy young adults, it's likely that they take their pets out for runs with them. In a scenario like this, you could offer an “exercise” service in which you stand in for the owner and jog along with the pet if no other business does.

Evaluate your business against others objectively. It's easy to think that you've found a USP when, in reality, it's common or existed as part of the business for years. Think outside of the box and get as unique as you can. What does your competition fail or refuse to provide? What can *you* only offer potential customers who want a pet sitter?

Sometimes, uniqueness in a business can be difficult to identify- especially if the market is already saturated with businesses offering similar services. In cases like these, you may want to make your unique selling point yourself. Consider the experience you may have in pet sitting or your familiarity with certain breeds of animals.

Have you worked at a veterinary hospital or volunteered at an animal shelter?

Do you have pet first aid training?

Do you have experience administering medication or providing daily shots?

Do you have experience preparing raw or special diets?

Do you have grooming experience?

Do you network with other local pet care providers and can offer backup care?

Once you've identified your USP, it's important to incorporate it into your marketing strategy. You want potential customers to know that you stand out over the rest.

Now put together the elements of your USP into a single statement. (2 sentences at most). Make it short, sweet and enticing so that potential customers know why they should use your service and think of you the next time they need a specialized pet sitting service.

- 1) Make it benefit-oriented (tell your client what's in it for her or him).
- 2) Be specific (avoid generalities).
- 3) Use simple language.
- 4) Be direct and to the point (be concise).

Place this sentence or tagline in all of your marketing materials, including your website, business card, flyers and postcards.

**Twitter @APSEtips #usp**

## **Your Pet Sitting Brand**

A brand can come in the form of a name, sign, term, symbol, design or any combination of these. Your brand is what sets you apart from your competition and convinces customers that yours is the only business that can meet their needs.

### **Why Is Creating a Brand Important?**

A brand can speak for your business in short, memorable terms. It represents what your business is about and its potential to deliver its service. Increasing credibility, motivation to buy, customer loyalty and emotional connections with buyers can all be achieved by creating the perfect brand for your business. In many respects, a brand is a representation of potential customers' experiences with your business and can influence the perception of it within the market and in potential customers' eyes.

### **How Do You Define Your Brand?**

Consider what your business has to offer your target market and how it stands out from the competition. Ask yourself these questions:

What are your company's goal, mission and values? How are they similar to your target market's? Is your business' main goal to provide quality pet sitting services for the elderly? Is your mission to provide green, healthy pet sitting care? Are you dedicated to treating pets as valued companions?

Your brand should be directly related to your unique sales proposition.

### **Your Logo**

Your logo is a tool that gives potential customers the first impression of your business. The shapes, colors, and words used in your logo design should reflect and represent your pet sitting business USP and brand.

A logo design should be eye catching and simple. It should be designed using simple color patterns and short text. Your logo needs to be easily seen when reproduced in different sizes and should be legible when used in either both black and white and color marketing tools.

If you need help designing your logo or your site you can find graphic designers for a reasonable price at <http://www.elance.com>. I have had some excellent designs done by their contractors including my Working with Pets logo. Just post your project on their site and have contractors supply you with bids to complete the work. You can review the contractors profile, experience, and reviews from other customers

Another site for logo design work is <http://99designs.com>. At this site you can post a project and a bid price and have many different designers compete to supply you with a business logo. The site works like a competition between the designers with you awarding the winner to your favorite logo. The winning designer is then paid the bid price.

The more information about your brand (the image and feeling that you want your business to project) that you can give to a graphic designer the better your logo will fit your business personality.

**Twitter @APSEtips #brand**

## **Creating Your Marketing Toolkit**

The 3 essential basic tools that you need to effectively market your business are a website, a flyer, and a business card. I am also including customer testimonials in this section as these are an important component that should be included as part of each of your 3 marketing tools. Testimonials will allow you to immediately build trust with potential clients.

## Your Pet Sitting Website

With so many people now using online search engines and directories to find and research pet care service providers it is essential for you to have your own website. A website provides a place for you to give your potential clients detailed information about your service and pricing, display your credibility and qualifications, and give clients several ways to contact you to make further enquiries or schedule your services.

To ensure that your website stands out it needs to be:

- Customer friendly – it clearly gives the customer all the information that they need in order for them to make a decision to hire you
- Pleasing to the eye – it is attractive and easy to read
- Optimized for the major search engines – the site needs to include the right elements to get it ranked in the major search engines so that it is easy to find by customers that are looking for your services.

A website gives you a great opportunity to educate prospective customers about your service and tell them why you are a good fit to care for their pets. A good website will differentiate you from your competitors and make your customer's choice easy.

The home page of your website is very important as it may be the only page people read if they are surfing the net to find a pet care provider. You want to give a good overview of your services that you provide and what makes your business different from other pet sitters in your area (your USP!).

Two of the things customers are immediately looking for on your home page are:

1. A description of the services that you offer

## 2. The service area in which you offer these services

Naming the cities you service is much clearer than identifying a region. Putting the city names on the home page also helps with search engine optimization as the city name is typically one of the words people will use to search to find a pet sitter.

It is great to list your credentials and affiliations on the front page of your site. Listing the associations of which you are a member - such as PSI, NAPPS, Pet Sitters LLC, or PUPS - and/or showing their logos on your home page also adds credibility to your business.

Another piece of info that you can add on your home page is how customers can find you on social media. Put links to your Facebook business page or profile page, your Twitter account, Myspace page, or LinkedIn profile. This gives potential customers a way to find out more about you and ask you questions via social media.

There are several other essential pages that you need on your website:

- An about you page or bio page. This page should describe why you started pet sitting, how long you have been in business, what your past experience with pets is, if you have pets of your own, and why you love being a pet sitter. It is also great to add a picture of you and your family (including your pets of course!). Again this page is to let potential clients get to know you better and start to build trust.
- A testimonial page that displays how and why your clients love your business.
- A page that explains how your service works. This makes it easy for clients to envision what it will feel like working with you and your team.
- A page that explains your pricing and packages. It is very beneficial to clearly list your pricing on your website as it will help to screen out the bargain seekers and those who are shopping around for the lowest price. It also helps the customer to figure out exactly what they need before they call you.



- A page that explains your policies. This lets the client know exactly what they can expect from your service.
- A page that lists your contact information. You want to make it very obvious how clients can contact you to get more information or book services. It is also a good idea to include contact information in a prominent position on every page of your website.

It is also a great idea to have a page where they can make a reservation online. This way you capture their information instantly and can give them a call to discuss the details.

Here are 5 tips to ensure that you create a client attractive website:

- **Give it a personal touch.** Your website should reflect your unique personality. Write as you would speak conversationally and include photos of yourself and your family if they are also involved in the business. Make sure you are smiling, look welcoming and friendly! My clients often comment that they like that they can see who I am (they know I'm a real person) and some also say they chose me because they could tell that my business is a family affair!
- **Maintain a consistent image.** Your website needs to give your customer the perception that you run a professional pet sitting business and that you are serious about providing reliable pet care. Make sure that you have a website that conveys your professionalism by having a consistent background and layout for all your pages. The look and feel of your website should be consistent with the look of your business cards, your stationary and your advertising. This can be done by using the same colors, fonts, and your logo. This consistency builds the image of your business and makes you more recognizable to customers. To make your site easy to read you should also include plenty of white space between your text and pictures. Don't make your site too busy or cluttered - but space out text and use lists and bullets to highlight services and service areas.

- **Give visitors information.** Let your customers know what it will be like to do business with you. People love information and it is easy to provide this via a website. Give them details of your policies, the benefits of your service, pricing structures and incentive programs. Supply downloadable copies of any application forms or other paperwork that you need completed.
- **Showcase customer testimonials.** Ask your past and present customers to provide testimonials about your product or service. I recommend that you set up a regimented process to collect these such as a post job survey, so that you have a consistent supply of fresh testimonials. To encourage more effective testimonials ask customers to describe how your service or product solved a problem that they had and what life was like before they found you and how it changed for the better after using your business. Showcase these testimonials on a page of your website. To make testimonials more credible show the customers full name and their website or email address after their quote.
- **Help make the lives of your customers easier.** Provide links to other complimentary but non-competitive local businesses. For example customers often ask me to recommend local groomers, dog trainers, and veterinarians. This month I will be adding a list of these local businesses on my site so that customers have easy access to them and have a reason to come back to visit my site next time they are looking for a pet service provider. Make sure you have used these businesses yourself or know of others who have so that you can ensure your customers will receive quality service. Ask these businesses if they will reciprocate by placing a link to your site on their web site.

## **Business Cards**

Your business card is a powerful marketing tool that is often missed in comprehensive marketing strategies. You never know who you are going to meet in line in the grocery store, at the dog park, or out on a walk with your family. Business cards are also an essential tool to give out at networking events. A business card can make all the difference between a new customer and just another stranger.

Here are some tips so that you make the most of your business cards:

- If you use a logo on your website use it on your business card too to put forward a strong brand image. Make sure your logo does not overpower the rest of your card.
- Keep it clean and easy to read.
- Include a tagline that is congruent with your brand image. It will help people remember you when they need your services.
- Include a call to action. Use your card to motivate a sale. For example offer a special discount or incentive – for example “Call now to schedule your free in home consultation”.
- Include your website address.
- Include your contact information such as phone number and email address.
- Make it a coupon. The back of your business card is a perfect place to put a coupon or offer of a free report to encourage people to call you or sign up for your newsletter.
- Pass it on. When passing out your card give people more than one just in case they have family or friends who also need your services. On the back of your card you can also tell people about your referral reward program.

Vistaprint is a great source for low cost business cards plus they have design tools on their site that make it simple to design your own cards – <http://www.vistaprint.com>

## **Flyers**

Produce a simple tri-fold brochure or flyer about your business and place these flyers in local small pet supply stores, vet offices, grooming salons, and restaurants. You can also give them local apartments to insert into their new resident welcome packets. I still get people today tell me that they picked up one of my flyers many years ago and have had it sitting on their fridge or in their pet file.

On your flyer you should put:

1) Company logo, tagline, and contact information

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- 2) The advantages of using a pet sitter
- 3) Information about yourself
- 4) Your company mission statement
- 5) Information about services you provide
- 6) Your contact information and website address

You can take a look at my original flyer by downloading a copy here:

<http://www.workingwithpets.com/Brochure.doc>

Feel free to use this as a template for your own flyer. It is designed so that I could print them out at home or at local print shop (eg. Kinkos) and then get them tri-folded or z-folded by the print shop. They fit nicely into a plastic or cardboard brochure holder that you can find at office stores such as Office Depot or Staples.

## **Testimonials**

Testimonials are statements from your clients that testify to your pet sitting services quality or value. You should include these on your website, business cards, and flyers as they will aid you to build instant trust and credibility with potential clients.

Testimonials serve as endorsements that can convince tough-sell potential customers to give your services a try. Many times, testimonials from real customers are the driving force behind sale conversions - they are what turn a potential customer into a real client. In some ways, testimonials act like word-of-mouth buzz. They make potential clients trust in your ability to deliver a service by having past and present customers speak about their experiences with your business. And convincing your target market that you are trustworthy and

dependable is an important part in getting your business off the ground. No one wants someone sketchy and unpredictable to take care of their pets, do they?

A very powerful way of showing proof of the claims that you make about your business in your USP and taglines is to have customers comment on these specific aspects of your service in their testimonial. For example, if you claim that your pet sitting service offers more peace of mind because you offer regular email updates – having a customer provide a testimonial in which they state “I felt very confident that my animals were receiving excellent care during our vacation – we loved receiving the daily email updates” will add great credibility to your claim.

While it may seem easy, collecting testimonials can be a challenging aspect of marketing. You can be the best pet sitter in the world, but you probably won't collect any testimonials unless you actively try. To ensure that you'll get great testimonials, you'll have to start by doing a great job pet sitting. Then, you can try doing the following:

- Listen to your clients. If a client makes a positive remark about your service, take the opportunity to ask for a testimonial.
- Follow up on services. Use post-service communication as an opportunity to request testimonials.
- Communicate with your most frequent and best customers. Write letters to them and ask them to provide you with testimonials.

Some Tips:

- Provide sample templates of what a good testimonial looks like. Many people don't know how to write testimonials, so give them examples. Don't change the testimonial if it doesn't follow the exact template, as it can end up looking fake.
- Insist on detail.
- Give your clients the opportunity to give you testimonials by email, video, phone and via snail mail. Many people will prefer one method of delivery over the other.

- Don't be afraid to compensate customers for their time. Consider giving your customers a small discount on a future purchase if they offer to help. However, choose rewards carefully or they might be considered bribes.

Adding a picture and the full name and location of a satisfied client can also lend credibility to your business' testimonials. You might even want to request that a client take a picture with their pet and include the pet's name in the testimonial.

**Twitter @APSEtips #toolkit**

## **Selecting Your Marketing Methods**

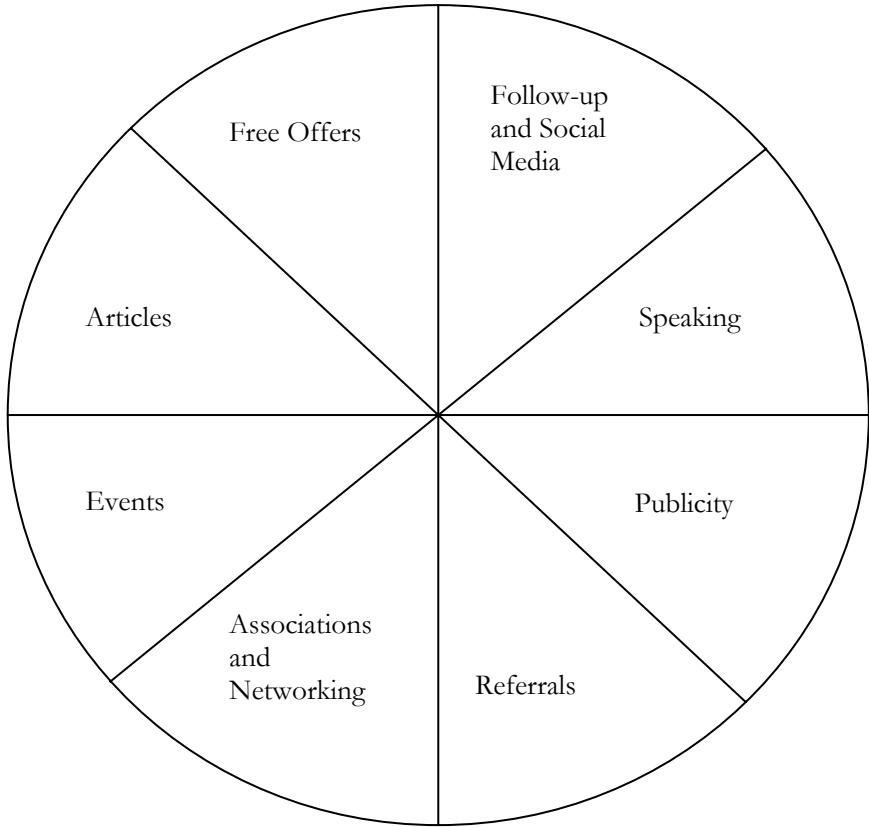
Marketing methods are the ways in which you get the message about your business into the hands of potential clients. There are so many options available today that choosing how to market your business can become very confusing. Traditional marketing methods used by major corporations include television and radio commercials, and advertising in major magazines and newspapers. These methods are typically not affordable or effective in marketing small and local pet sitting businesses. Luckily there are many other methods that are both low cost and more effective to reach your target market of pet owners.

When choosing the strategies and tools that you use to market your business you need to ensure that they lead potential customers through the following 3 sequential steps in the sales process:

- Step 1 – Find potential clients and gather their contact information
- Step 2 - Follow up with these clients by giving them valuable information to build a relationship
- Step 3 - Close the sale

Some potential clients will find your business and immediately be ready to schedule you to care for their pets. Other clients may find you but want to learn more about you and build a relationship with you before they are ready to buy. By including all three steps in your marketing you will insure you meet the needs of both types of clients.

The ideal mix of low cost high impact marketing activities for a pet sitting business is illustrated in what I call “The Pet Sitting Marketing Pie” diagram below. By including marketing actions from each of piece of the pie you will ensure you include all 3 steps of the sales process and can creatively engage your target market.



**The Pet Sitting Marketing Pie**

The pie does assume that you have your marketing toolbox at the ready and can apply those tools to each situation. So don't skip putting your toolbox together!

You have probably noticed that most of the pieces of the marketing pie are there to make sure you have the first step covered – finding new potential clients. New clients can either meet you offline or online. It is important that in either location you have a mechanism for collecting their contact information as this enables you to move to the second step and follow up with them to build a relationship. This is where your free offer goes to work for you – so let's start with that piece or your pie first.

## **Free Offers**

Today people are very wary of giving out their contact information. With the explosion of the internet and growing use of email, marketers have realized that our email inbox is a great way to get their message in front of us at low cost, so we get our inbox filled with spam and offers for new products every day. The same happens at home in our mailboxes.

If you want people to give you their contact information on or offline you have to offer them something in return that they perceive as having a high value. I suggest that you create a short informational report or checklist that will both make their lives more convenient and help them take better care of their pets.

A report or checklist can be easily delivered to potential clients via your website using an opt-in box and email auto responder. This will require some work on your part to set-up but once you have this system in place it will automatically collect client names for the life of your business. We are also going to use this system as a method of following up with clients via an online newsletter which I'll discuss soon!

I use a software program called Aweber ([www.Aweber.com](http://www.Aweber.com)) to place a sign up box on my pet sitting website. I offer visitors to my site two free gifts as an incentive to fill out their name and email in the sign up box - a pre-travel checklist and a local pet services guide. (You can see my sign up box on the right side bar of <http://www.protectingmax.com>)

Once people fill out the box, their name and contact email are added to a subscriber list inside my Aweber.com account. Every other week I go into my account and write my newsletter and then Aweber sends it out to everyone on my subscriber list.



The Aweber system is one example of an auto responder program. An auto responder collects lists of names and then allows you to send emails to this list whenever you choose to. The program also allows you to send out automatic welcome emails as soon as visitors fill out the sign up box (this is how I deliver my 2 free gifts) and also allows you to set up and deliver a series of email messages to subscribers at pre-determined intervals - such as a 5 day e-course.

There are many other auto responder systems that you can use such as Constant Contact, GetResponse, and those contained in shopping cart systems such as Wahmcart and 1Shoppingcart – but Aweber is the most widely used.

If you want help brainstorming ideas for your free offer or need help to set up your opt-in system contact me at [daniellechonody@gmail.com](mailto:daniellechonody@gmail.com) or tweet me at

**Twitter @APSEtips #freeoffer**

## **Referrals**

One of the easiest ways to meet new people is to have your current friends, family or colleagues give you a warm introduction by giving you a referral. However, before they can recommend you they have to know that you provide pet sitting services and should be aware of the details and benefits of your service.

A great way to educate them is to send them a warm letter of introduction. Put together a very personal letter to let them know that you have a pet sitting business and tell them what value you provide to your clients. In the letter politely ask them that if they know people who may need your service that they pass on your information to them and also let them know that they can get more information at your website. Make sure you continue to send out this warm letter to new friends as you meet them.

Here is an example of a warm letter of introduction:

Hello <first name>,

I'm writing this quick letter to ask you for a small favor.

You see, I have just started my own pet sitting business.

We offer an in-home pet care service for people when they travel for vacation or business. The pets stay in the comfort of their own home and we can make up to four visits per day to feed, exercise, and play with the pets. We can also administer medications.

Our service is an alternative to boarding that is less stressful for pets, and more convenient for pet owners as they do not have to drop off and pick up pets from a boarding facility. Having someone visiting the home regularly while owners are away offers enhanced security. As part of our service we pick up mail and packages and can rotate lights and window shades to give the home a lived in appearance.

At our free initial interview the person that will be caring for the pets visits the clients home to meet them and their pets, collect pet care, vet, and emergency contact information and collect keys.

We need a small favor, will you help us out? If you have friends with pets that will be travelling and are looking for help with pet care, can you please let them know about our new service?

We really appreciate any help you can give us to spread the word and we know your friends and family and their pets will thank you too!

Thank you for your help!

<your name>

<your phone number>

To encourage existing clients to tell their friends and family about your business you can set up a referral rewards system. I send any client that refers business to us a \$25 Walmart gift card that they can use to spoil their pets. I let clients know about this reward by writing about it in my newsletter. Alternatively you could offer clients who refer friends a discount on their future services or gift them one of your services the next time they use you.

## **Associations and Networking**

The obvious way to find new clients offline is to get out in public and start meeting new people – preferably those who love pets! You can find those pet lovers involved in organizations such as animal rescue clubs, community animal

shelters, pet meet up groups, and dog and cat breeders clubs and shows, and you can also find them at dog parks, at your local pet supply store, pet expos, and out walking their dogs at the local park or in your neighborhood.

You can find and network with other business owners at your local Chamber of Commerce and specialty business networking groups such as BNI. These groups generally will give you time at their meetings to tell people about your business and the types of referrals that you are looking for.

Make sure you also reach out to other local pet business owners such as dog trainers, vets, and groomers – you can find them in the phone book or in online directories.

Whenever you meet new people make sure to give them your business card or a flyer and invite them to visit your website to learn more. Tell them about your free offer and remind them later by putting your free offer on the back of your business card.

Today it is also easy to connect with pet lovers via online networks such as Facebook pet lovers groups, at sites dedicated to social networking for pets, and pet online forums. When you meet people online use an email or forum signature to display your website address and include your invitation to download your free offer at your site.

## **Speaking**

Speaking is a way to get the message about your business out to many people simultaneously. Think about a subject related to pet sitting or pet care that you consider yourself to be an expert in (or you just love to talk about!) and put together a 20-30 minute talk.

Contact pet related community groups, women's groups, or clubs such as Rotary or Lions to find out if they are looking for speakers for their regular meetings. You can also call local veterinarians and ask if you can give a presentation to their staff at a regular staff meeting.

If you have a local pet supply store, boarding or day care facility, organize with the owner to give a regular presentation to their customers. This is a way for them to add value for their clients so sell it as a win-win opportunity for them and you.

You can also find online radio shows related to pets. These types of shows are always looking for fresh speakers. One great source for finding pet related online radio shows is Blog Talk radio.com.

## **Events**

Pet events are always happening in your community. They are typically organized as fundraisers by local pet rescue clubs - some are also held by city groups. At most events you will be able to rent a booth or a space where you can set up a table and introduce your services to attendees. Make your booth fun and attractive by organizing a live demonstration, offering pet treats to passers by, or holding a competition (great way to collect contact info!). Of course have plenty of business cards and flyers to hand out – you can also get creative and put your brand onto pet items such as balls, Frisbees, or cat toys, or giveaways such as pens or magnets.

You can always organize your own events too – such as holding an open house, a community dog walk or bath day, or holding an event to celebrate a milestone in your business. To make organizing easier you could also partner with another local pet business or businesses to put together a joint event.

## **Publicity**

Publicity is all about creating buzz about your business by having your pet sitting service featured in local newspapers or magazines, on local radio or TV shows.

To be featured in the press you need to get your business in front of local reporters regularly. Make it one of your marketing tasks each month to write a one page press release and submit it to journalists at local papers, TV stations, and radio shows.

A press release is just a fancy name for a short article that is written about a public interest topic, formatted correctly, and submitted to a newspaper reporter, radio station, or online. The internet has made it easier to find the right contacts as many papers and shows list their journalists and editors on their web sites. If you can't find a contact call the office of the publication and ask for the editor that handles the type of story that you are writing about.

Here are 5 tips for writing press releases that grab the attention of the editor:

- **Use statistics in your release.** These could be statistics from a survey that you have performed, or from studies published by trade journals, or pet industry associations. Statistics must be related to the topic of your release and of interest to the audience of the publication.
- **Keep your release short** (2-3 paragraphs). A short, concise press release will stand out from the crowd and won't take editors long to read.
- **Make your releases newsworthy.** Tie in your stories to holiday topics or events that are currently in the news - or make sure your release tells a news story.
- **Interests the publication audience.** Make sure that your story not only interests you but it is also of interest to the readers of the publication that you are submitting your release to. Do some research by reading the publications and looking at the type of stories they print to get clues.
- **Include a photograph or product sample.** Including a photo or sample lets the editor experience your story first hand.

## Articles

Another way to get your business in front of new people is to write useful and informative pet related articles that are published on the internet. You can publish your articles on your own blog, post them to article directory sites such as ezinearticles.com, print them in a newsletter that you publish online, or publish them on your pet sitting website. When you publish valuable content on the internet people will automatically link to it or share it with their friends. Search engines like Google and Yahoo will also naturally link to your content and you will start to appear in search engine results.

Every time you publish an article make sure that you include a short bio at the end of the article that invites the reader to visit your site to download your free offer.

If you don't have time to write, or don't enjoy writing I offer the members of my "Circle of Pet Sitting Excellence" 3 original pet articles each month that they are free to publish in their newsletter, on their blog, on their website. For details about this program visit [www.PetBusinessSuccessCircle.com](http://www.PetBusinessSuccessCircle.com).

## Follow up

Follow up is the essence of step two in the sales process and is how you move a new prospective client to the last process step of making a sale. There are many ways in which to follow up with people but the aim of any follow up that you do should be to establish and build a relationship so that the prospect learns about you and begins to trust you as a pet expert. Of course you also want to follow up with existing clients to keep your business at the top of their mind so that they immediately think of you when they need another type of pet care service or need to use your service again.

Now that you have contact information collected in your auto responder or in another type of database as a result of your marketing methods so far, there are several easy methods to constantly keep in touch with these people.

- **E-zines or Newsletters.** An auto responder like Aweber.com makes it very simple for you to publish your own regular online newsletter. In the auto responder program you can send a broadcast message to everyone that is subscribed to your list. Make it a priority to put together a newsletter each week that includes a short personal introduction from you, and a useful pet care article. You can also include information about local pet events, any special company news, or ask readers to submit photos for a pet of the week competition. This is a great place to tell readers about your referral program and give them a coupon for a promotion or discount on their next purchase.
- **Emails.** Send clients a follow up email after you complete their services to thank them for their business, check to make sure they were fully satisfied, and request testimonials or online reviews.

Here is the text that I use in my follow up emails:

Welcome Home From Protecting Max

A Quick Thank You! We know you have plenty of choices when it comes to the care of your animal during your absence and appreciate the trust you have placed in Protecting Max.

In an attempt to make life easier for you in the future, I will keep all your relevant information on file so it will take one brief phone call to me the next time you must leave town. As you know, our sitter schedules fill up quickly, so please call when you have your dates set.

Were You Thrilled With Our Service?

In order for our business and reputation to continue to grow, it is important to us for happy and satisfied customers to express their joy in our services through a positive online review. We ask that if you were delighted with our services to please take a moment and write an online review on our behalf at any of the sites below. It will mean a lot.

As always, if you'd like to discuss your experience with us over the phone, we can be reached anytime by calling 817-692-4404. Our goal is to achieve 100% client satisfaction, and if you were not completely satisfied with any portion of our service for any reason, let us know, and we will work to make it right. We appreciate your business and look forward to caring for your furry family again in the future.

Your Opinion Matters!

Review Us on Google:

The mega-giant search engine provides listings to local businesses. Click Here to add your review to Google Local Listings - <http://maps.google.com/maps/place?cid=2394466044607729121&out=html>

Review Us on Yelp:

Yelp is an online city guide offering real reviews from real people.

Click Here to share your experience with fellow pet owners - <http://www.yelp.com/biz/protecting-max---your-pet-sitting-partners-eules>

This is a one-time email correspondence to welcome you home and ask for your feedback. We do not sell, rent, share or otherwise disclose your personal information including your email address.

Our email address is: [protectingmax@gmail.com](mailto:protectingmax@gmail.com)

- **Postcards.** You can send clients updates about special promotions or invitations to events, changes to your policies, service areas or staff using a one off broadcast email or by sending a physical postcard in the mail. You can get great low cost postcards at [Vistaprint.com](http://Vistaprint.com).
- **Cards.** Send cards to celebrate pet birthdays, special events, or holidays that also remind clients about your referral programs. I use a service called Send Out Cards so that I can send cards directly from my computer and save time on purchasing and mailing cards. The service also allows you to include gifts such as chocolates, brownies, or gift cards (I use Send Out Cards to send out the Walmart gift cards for my referral rewards – it saves me a trip to the store to buy the gift card!). You can try out this service by sending a card from my account at [www.sendoutcards.com/chonody](http://www.sendoutcards.com/chonody).

Here is the text that I use in my follow up cards:

Thanks for trusting us with your pets! We enjoyed spending time with them.

We appreciate your business and would love to keep in touch regularly to bring you pet health tips, information on local pet events, and discounts on our services.

At our website <http://www.protectingmax.com> you can sign up to receive our bi-weekly email newsletter - just see the box at the right hand side of the page.

When you sign up you'll also get a free copy of our local pet services guide and our pre-travel check-list.

If you appreciated our service the highest compliment you can give us is to tell your family and friends about us. We'll reward you by sending you a \$25 Walmart gift card for each referral that books pet sitting services!

Danielle Chonody

Owner Protecting Max

## Social media

Social media is a term used to describe the use of Twitter, Facebook, Linked In, blogs and other similar sites where you can network and chat online with your existing contacts and you can also find new people with similar interests – or



people can find you. Blogs, Twitter, and Facebook are all ways that you can follow up to keep in touch and educate prospective and existing clients.

**Blogs** are a type of website that are very easy to update and they give you a place where you can post your pet articles, write stories about local pet events, and tell your readers about other company news. They also have the functionality to let your readers join in the conversation by posting comments on your posts. This means that they are very interactive – unlike your static pet sitting website.

Google and other search engines love blogs because the content on them is updated regularly (as long as you regularly post!) and it is much easier to get them ranked well in natural searches. Getting ranked well on search engines just means that it is easier for people to find you and learn about your business. There are many blog providers such as Blogger.com and Wordpress.com that will host your blog for you and make it very simple to get started. However, I recommend that you get your own domain name for your blog and host it with the hosting service that you use for your pet sitting website. You can set up a blog on your own domain by installing a software called Wordpress. Many hosts make this very easy by having an automatic installation program called Fantastico.

If you want help setting up a blog please contact me at [daniellechonody@gmail.com](mailto:daniellechonody@gmail.com) or post a question to

**Twitter @APSEtips #blog**

**Facebook** is a site that lets you publish a profile page where you can then post written updates, videos, links, notes, and photos. You can network with friends who can then view and post updates and comments onto your profile. Your contacts can also see a live stream of your posts via a news feed on their home page.

Facebook also allows you to publish a fan page for your business that is very similar to your personal profile. People can become fans of your page and can keep up to date on what's happening in your business by reading any posts that you make onto your fan page.

On Facebook you can also join groups to meet new people. Look for local pet groups that you can join to network with pet lovers that may need your services.

Invite members to become your friends or become fans of your business page so that you can get to know them and build a relationship.

**Twitter** lets you publish very short updates (140 characters each) to the Twitter wall where other people can then view your posts. Twitter gives you the ability to follow people so that their posts appear on your home page wall, and people can follow you so that your posts appear on their home page wall.

You can use Twitter to connect with other pet sitters or pet lovers by either following their posts or you can start a conversation with them by using their username in your post – i.e. you could start a conversation with me by placing @daniellechonody somewhere within your post. You can also conduct searches for key words to find people chatting about pet topics or you can directly contact people by sending them a direct message to their Twitter inbox.

Put useful pet information in your Twitter posts, or add links to your blog posts, or online articles. You will build up a following of pet lovers who like your information.

To learn more about Twitter and how to use it in your marketing download my free EBook at [www.PetSittersSharingExcellence.com](http://www.PetSittersSharingExcellence.com)

Don't forget that to be most effective your marketing should contain actionable goals from each slice of the pie.

My free report “101 Ways to Market Your Pet Sitting Business” that you can get by subscribing to my blog at <http://www.workingwithpets.com> will help you brainstorm ideas for each of the marketing methods.

**Twitter @APSEtips #piemethods**

## Your Marketing Systems

A system is simply a series of steps that lead to an outcome. Your marketing systems job is to outline the steps that you are going to take to attract a consistent stream of new clients. Your marketing system is also your schedule for when you will complete each step.

The purpose of putting together marketing systems is to automate your marketing actions to make sure your marketing gets done consistently! When you have a marketing system in place you will find that you will know what to do each week and when, are less stressed about attracting clients, and are less distracted by bright shiny new marketing techniques.

If you are just starting your business or want significant business growth you should plan to spend approximately 30% of the time that you work on your business on marketing activities.

Here is a step by step plan to put together your marketing systems:

- Review the marketing pie methods and make a list of the actions that you will take for each piece of the pie. Don't try and do everything at once as you will get overwhelmed.
  
- Get the upfront setup work completed :
  - Write a short free report and set up an auto responder with an opt in box on your pet sitting website
  - Write your warm introduction letter. Send out to your friends family and colleagues
  - Join Associations or Networking Groups
  - Prepare a 20-30 minute topic speech
  - Set up a blog
  - Set up your Facebook or Twitter profile
  
- Take the action step you chose from each of the pie pieces and decide what task you will do this year to complete the step.

For example:

- Referrals – Send out warm letter to new contacts as I meet them at networking functions or events
  - Networking –Attend a networking or association group meeting each week
  - Speaking – Speak in front of a group once a month
  - Events – Organize a community dog walk and have a booth at a local pet event every 4 months
  - Publicity – Write one press release per month
  - Articles – Write one pet related article each week. Publish in an online article directory.
  - Follow up – Write two blog posts per week. Send out follow up card to clients 2 weeks after services.
  - Social Media –Post updates daily and set up blog articles to automatically post to profile
- 
- Look at each of the actions and work out who will get them done. Will you do these tasks yourself, outsource to a virtual assistant or office manager, or purchase articles and reports through a membership?
  - Schedule each of these actions into a yearly planner or calendar. Write in the date and time that you or someone else will complete each regular action step.

Now that you have your marketing system set up all you have to do is complete the actions in your planner or calendar to stay on track. Don't do any other marketing tasks until what you have scheduled is completed.

If you complete your tasks per the schedule – you are sure to have a stream of new clients consistently entering your business.

**Twitter @APSEtips #piesystems**

## **Tracking your marketing**

Tracking your marketing efforts and results will ensure:

- That you are doing what you planned to do on your marketing system worksheet
- That the steps you are taking are effective in creating results

Things you should be tracking weekly are:

- How many people are visiting your website each week?
- How many people signed up to receive your e-zine newsletter or blog updates this week?
- How many new phone enquiries have you received this week?
- How many new client bookings have you taken this week?
- How did these clients find your business? (Note how many by each source)
- How many new bookings have you received from existing clients this week?

When you start to record this data it will be easy to identify which marketing methods are most effective and you can then take action to increase the use of these methods while reducing or dropping methods that are less effective.

**Twitter @APSEtips #tracking**

# Operational Excellence

Operational excellence means that your business runs smoothly, day to day tasks get done accurately and on schedule, you provide an excellent standard of care for the pets, and your customers love using your service.

To achieve this level of excellence each task that needs to be completed as part of providing your pet sitting services to your clients needs to be done professionally and completed the same way every time. Your business team (including you) needs to know exactly how each task should be done and what to do in any given situation. This includes procedures for responding to unusual situations such as pet illness, weather conditions or natural or man-made disasters, client travel delays, and last minute changes.

The only way for your business to run and provide a consistent standard of care and service is to have a set and documented way that each task is performed that consists of a series of steps, in sequential order, which must take place to complete each task. This documented series of steps is what is called an operational system.

## Why Create Operational Systems?

If you have been pet sitting for a while then you have probably slipped into routines of how you perform different tasks. How you answer the phone, conduct a client interview, perform a visit, and follow-up with clients. Do you have these routines written down or are they all in your head?

To create a system you must put your routines down on paper in an organized format. A system lays out the steps it takes to accomplish any task – whether that task is accepting a customer booking, completing an initial client interview, or performing an in home overnight visit. The best way to document your systems is to create flowcharts that show the steps involved in each task and how they link together.

Getting routines written down on paper can help you to see opportunities to improve the way you do things and make regularly performed tasks more efficient. When you start growing and need to get help from assistants or sitters

having a written set of steps will save you time when you assign them tasks and make sure they perform the tasks the way that you want them done.

## Typical Pet Sitting Business Systems

To get you thinking about what types of business routines you should document as systems here are a few common pet sitting business processes:

- Answering new phone enquiries
- Returning voicemail messages
- Answering new internet or email enquiries
- Overcoming potential client objections
- Collecting new client information
- Setting up new client in pet sitting software
- Scheduling pet care services
- Assigning jobs to staff pet sitters
- Scheduling and conducting initial client interview visits
- Filling out the client contract
- Collecting and labeling client keys
- Performing vacation pet sitting visit
- Performing overnight pet sitting visit
- Performing dog walking visit
- Writing of notes for clients or daily updates via email or I-phone
- Emergency procedures for natural or manmade disasters
- Caring for sick pets
- Administering medications to pets
- Cleaning up pet mess
- Notification of client returned home
- Accepting client payments
- Depositing payments and book-keeping

- Payroll for pet sitters
- Client follow up
- Return of client keys
- Dealing with client complaints
- Cancellation of client services
- Advertising for new staff members
- Screening and hiring new staff members
- Orientation and training of staff members
- Staff member annual reviews
- Mailing of holiday cards
- Writing, formatting, and sending of newsletters or e-zine
- Reward of client referrals



# What Systems Does Your Business Need?

Your pet sitting business may be at many different stages and you probably don't need all the processes that I have listed above – or perhaps you may need more! The best way to work out what you do need is to examine what tasks you or your staff does day to day in your business.

One way to systematically list out what you do each day is to fill out a daily tracking log. Here is an example of a simple log sheet:

Day 1

Date : \_\_\_\_\_

Item :

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You also want to have each of your staff members fill out a log sheet. Don't forget to include any virtual assistants or temporary staff that completes tasks for your business. You may also want to document the amount of time that you spend on each task to help you prioritize which tasks you want to work on first.

To get a good overview view of the tasks you do in your business I would recommend completing these daily logs for an entire week. At the end of the week compile all logs to get your complete task list.

To decide which processes to work on first here are some questions for you to answer :

- Have you had any recent business or client problems or issues?
- Are there any tasks that you would like to delegate to staff or assistants?
- Are there tasks that are taking too much of your time?
- Which tasks are critical to ensuring pets health and emotional well-being?
- Which tasks have the greatest impact on customer satisfaction?

**Twitter @APSEtips #opsystems**

## How To Create Your Systems

Another way to look at a system is to describe it as a step by step path to achieving a desired outcome. The completion of each of the tasks that you listed as part of your daily logs will result in an outcome for your business.

A simple method for creating systems is to ask yourself two questions:

- Where are we going? What is the desired outcome upon completion of each of these tasks?
- How do we get there? What are the steps that have to happen to reach the desired outcome?

Let's look at an example -

**Task** - Answering a new phone client enquiry

**Outcome** - The first desired outcome is that the client schedules an initial interview and makes a booking for future pet sitting visits. A second outcome is collecting the client's contact details - phone number and email address - so

that you can keep in touch with them and follow up. This means that even if they call and cancel (the neighbor has decided they can watch the pets this time!) that you will have their contact details and can send them coupons or flyers to entice them to use your service in the future. A third outcome of the call may be to find out where they heard about you so that you can track the effectiveness of your marketing.

**System** - The steps that you have to go through to get them to book will vary depending on the client but you will always have to :

- Greet the client.
- Ask them about their needs and their pets and when they will need your services
- Explain the features and benefits of your service and your pricing
- Ask them when they would like to schedule their initial interview or consultation
- Ask them for their address, phone number and an email address (so that you can send them welcome information)
- Ask them how they found your service

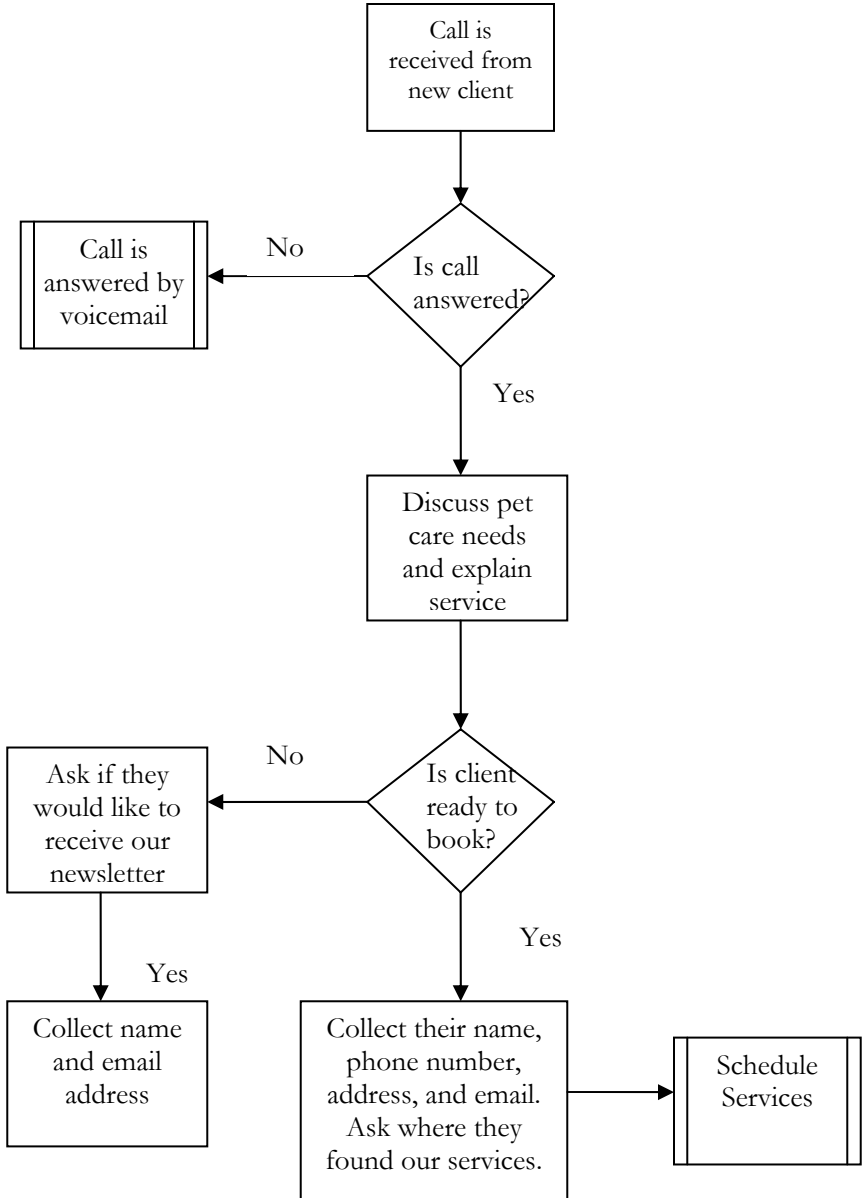
This is a simplified step by step process for the initial call - in reality on a system flowchart the next step on the call would depend on their response you have received from the previous step. However, I hope this example has illustrated how the steps in your process flow from your desired outcome for the task.

If you have trouble knowing where to get started with your steps use the following questions to help to get you started:

- What triggers me to start this process?
- What is the first step?
- What has to happen for me to start this step?
- How can I start this process?
- What do I receive that gets me started?
- What is the first thing that happens?

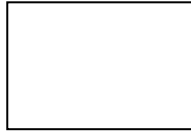
# How To Document Your Systems

One of the simplest ways to document your step by step processes is on a flow chart. A flow chart for our simple example is show below:



## Flow Chart Symbols

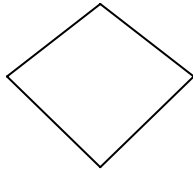
Here is an explanation of the shapes that I used on the flow chart :



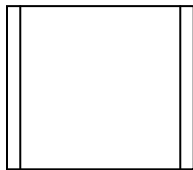
This is a process box. It identifies a single step in the process.



The arrows connect the shapes and indicate the direction of flow



The diamond indicates a decision point in the process. It identifies when a decision must be made to move to the next step. Typically a yes or no answer.



The box with the double lines indicates a predefined process. It identifies that this process has its own flowchart that should be referred to.

When you get started mapping out your processes it may help to use post it notes and a large sheet of paper. Write each process step on its own post it note and then layout the steps on the paper to show the flow of work from one step to another. Post it notes make it easy for you to make changes as you develop your processes as you can move around the steps as needed.

If you have an existing pet sitting business the first step you should take is to document your as-is processes so that you can delegate some of your daily tasks to your support team and analyze your processes to see where there is room for improvement.

If you are just starting your business you can document your processes as you would like them to be. This will help you purposefully create your new business and help you think and plan out how your services will be delivered and managed.

To help you document your business processes all Gold members of the Association of Pet Sitting Excellence will receive a Word flow chart template and new mini-process flowchart every month that you can add to your systems library. For details visit [www.PetSittingExcellence.com](http://www.PetSittingExcellence.com)

**Twitter @APSEtips #flowchart**

## **How To Streamline And Improve Your Systems**

Once you have your pet sitting business processes documented you can then critically examine each process to find gaps or missing links.

Look at each of your processes and ask yourself the following questions:

- Can any of your processes be done differently to save time?
- How can you enhance your processes to increase customer referrals or customer satisfaction?
- Can you use checklists or forms to increase the efficiency of the process?
- Are there any process steps that can be automated?
- Are there process steps that you can delegate to a team member?
- How do you make sure that once one step of a process is completed that the person responsible for the next process step knows to start the next step?

- Are there steps being done manually on paper that can be done electronically to save resources?
- Are there steps being repeated that can be eliminated?
- Can you build in marketing into any of your existing process steps?
- What steps can be added to increase customer convenience?
- What steps could you add to safeguard the pets health and safety?

### **Common Systems Problems**

As you review your process be aware of these common problems:

- Lack of client follow-up – many processes don't have good steps in place to make sure prospective client follow-up is done. If you have someone that calls and is interested in your pet sitting services but does not place an immediate booking, do you have a system in place to make sure you contact them to follow up?
- Customer information management – do you have a step by step process to capture the phone number and email address of prospective clients so that you don't have to go hunting for numbers when it is time to follow up?
- Billing processes – fear of asking for money, time issues, and tracking work done can result in a loss of profits for your business. What is your system to make sure that all client visits, cancellation fees, holiday charges, key return and pickup fees are documented, invoiced, and collected from your clients?
- Lack of planning – do you have a process in place to ensure that you take time to plan for business growth? Planning can be time consuming but it has been shown to provide huge return on investment. This includes completing your marketing and hiring plans!

**Twitter @APSEtips #improve**

## Where To Store Your Systems

When you begin to put together your process steps and build your flowcharts go to your local office store and get a three ring binder so that you can start to build your own business operations manual. Keep your operations manual handy so that you can refer to it as you and your staff do their day to day tasks.

You should also keep your processes in an electronic file on your computer. If you already have a support team keeping electronic files will allow you to share them with virtual team members by using an online project management tool such as Huddle.net (this is a free resource!). Your operations manual is a great tool to use to train and delegate work to new staff members.

Your operations manual is a living document and as your business grows you should keep adding and updating your flowcharts. Encourage your team to continually seek out ways to improve your processes and give them a way to submit suggested improvements.

If you ever choose to sell your pet sitting business your operations manual will significantly boost your selling price. The new buyer will be able to use your operations manual to make sure that when they take over the business the clients notice no change in service quality or difference in the way they interact with the business to schedule and pay for services.





## Building Your Excellence Team

It is very difficult to grow any business working as a one woman (or one man) show. To start and run your own business by yourself you will need to be the customer service department, human resources department, finance department, and marketing department.

Doing all these tasks yourself is possible - especially if you start your business small - but never easy. As you grow your pet business it becomes harder and harder to find the time and energy to get all of these tasks done and do them well. You will probably find that the amount of customers that you can take on is limited to the number of hours that you have in a day - and unfortunately we only have 24 to work with!

To continue to grow every business will eventually need to bring on help. Today this can take the form of employees, contractors, virtual assistants, or outsourcing of tasks to others.

Having a team to help you build your pet sitting business will allow you to increase your income and also have more free time to work on your business building activities. As an additional bonus you will be able to give others that join your team an additional source of income and work that they find very rewarding.

If you have been a solo pet sitter for some time this sudden reliance on others can be scary at first. Don't let fear hold you back from building a team and growing your business to its full potential. With the right processes in place you can find the right people for the right jobs and having a team to support you will mean that your business will be able to function even if you or a family member become ill and cannot work in your business every day.

**Twitter @APSEtips #support**

## When Is The Right Time To Hire Help?

If you have been operating solo there are several phases of your business when you should recognize that it is time to hire some help so that your pet sitting business can continue to grow.

- The first situation that many pet service business solo operators encounter is burnout. We reach this point when we are so busy we don't have time to take a break, we may not have been able to take vacation for months or years, and we are losing the joy of running our business. To avoid burnout we should be looking to find the right people to help relieve some of our daily visits or other business functions so that we have time to enjoy running the business and making sure we take time to rest and take care of ourselves as well as our clients.
- The second reason to start looking to hire help is when we want to expand our coverage area. As pet care professionals we can only cover so much ground in one day by ourselves. If we want to be able to serve customers in a larger area then it makes sense to find help that lives in the areas we wish to expand into.
- The third time to find help is when you are so busy working in your business (doing the day to day work of your business) that you have no time to work on your business. By working on your business I mean doing marketing, planning, creating new products, and other functions that strengthen and grow the business. When you are spending all your time working in the business then your business will be stuck at its present state - it will not be able to grow. At this point it is necessary to find help with the day to day running of the business so that you can find time to do the tasks that will allow your business to grow.

## Common support team members

There are many business tasks that can be performed by full time or part time staff members or contractors and consultants. The number and type of team members that you use will depend on your skills, the size of your business, and the types of services that you provide.

Here are some possible staff members that your business may need:

- Pet Sitters
- Dog Walkers
- Overnight House or Pet Sitters
- Office Manager
- Administrative Assistant
- Book Keeper
- Accountant
- Lawyer
- Business Coach or Mentor
- Virtual Assistants
- Web Designer / Graphic Designers

As your business grows you may also need specialized staff such as:

- Customer Relations Manager
- Marketing Manager
- Social Media Manager
- Public Relations Manager

## Defining Your Ideal Team Members

When you are ready to start searching for new team members you should ask yourself the following questions to determine what you want in your perfect staff member:

- When you think about the vision you have for your business what does your relationship with your employees or contractors look like?
- Do they work unsupervised or with close supervision?
- Do they contribute to the business by offering ideas and improvements or do they just do their job and leave the creative work to you?
- Do they work as a team or independently?
- Is it important that they want to improve their skills by attending regular training?

There are other practical considerations that you also need to consider. The first is whether you need staff to work part time hours or a full work week. This will depend on the type of work that they will be doing for you.

One of the major considerations you need to make before you advertise for help is whether you want to work with employees or independent contractors. This will depend on how much control you need to have on how they perform the job. With contractors you must be careful to follow IRS rules and this means that you can control the end result of their work but not how the result is achieved. I will cover the rules in more detail in the next section.

Once you have determined the hours they will work and type of staff you want to work with you will also need to think about the personality traits that you would like your staff members to have. Again this will depend on the work they will do in your pet business. If they are working with customers you want them to be outgoing, have confidence, and be polite and courteous. If they will be working with the pets only then it is more important that they have experience working with animals.

A part of their personality is also their motivation for performing the job for you. Do they want the job just to pay the bills or are there other motivators for them? Are they interested in a part time job with pets because they love to be

around animals? In my experience you want to find staff members who are motivated by the joy of the work itself as they will often go the extra mile to make pets happy and at ease.

Along with the right personality it is also important that they have the right skills for the job. If they will be working in an office you will want someone with a good computer, email, organizational, and phone skills. If they are working with pets you will need to find out what type of pets they are comfortable working with, if they are confident to give medications including shots, and if they have been trained in pet first aid. One other important skill to consider is writing skills. I get my sitters to write a note to clients at each visit to tell them about the pet and their behavior. It is important that the sitter be able to write an informative and legible note.

Finally there are also practical considerations. Of course it is vital that your new staff member will be able to perform the work you need done. If they need to drive to pet sitting, walking, or training jobs they will need a license, good driving record, and reliable vehicle. If you want to be able to contact them by phone or email, you may need them to have a cell phone or computer and internet access. If you staff will be entering client's homes you will want to conduct a background check and if they will be handling money a credit check is also advisable.

Make a list of the personality traits, skill set, and practical requirements of your ideal staff member. This list will help you to write your advertisements and also help you to screen candidates once you begin interviewing.

### **Are Employees or Independent Contractors Right For Your Business?**

The major difference between hiring employees and using independent contractors is the amount of control that you will have over the way that their work is performed.

A general rule for contractors is that you can control or direct only the end result of their work and not the means and methods that are used to accomplish the results.

An independent contractor owns and runs their own business and therefore must handle their own taxes, carry their own insurance, and cannot be made to sign a non-compete agreement as they have the right to contract with several

businesses at one time. You can only give a contractor limited job training as it is assumed that they already have the skills required to perform the work.

If you hire employees you must withhold income taxes from their pay, and withhold and pay Social Security and Medicare taxes on their behalf. At the end of the tax year you need to prepare a W2 form for each employee. You do not deduct taxes from the pay of independent contractors and do not prepare W2 forms. However, you may need to complete Form 1099 for each contractor.

It is important that you know the 20 criteria that the Internal Revenue Service uses to classify if a worker can be considered an employee or independent contractor. Wrongly treating a worker as a contractor can leave you liable for back payment of employment taxes.

Here is a summary of the 20 criteria used by the IRS:

- **Instructions** - Workers who must comply with your instructions as to when, where, and how they work are more likely to be employees than independent contractors.
- **Training** - The more training your workers receive from you, the more likely it is that they are employees.
- **Integration** - The more important that your workers services are to your business's success or continuation, the more likely it is that they are employees.
- **Services Rendered Personally** - Workers who must personally perform the services for which you're paying are more likely employees. In contrast, contractors usually have the right to substitute other peoples services for their own to fulfill their contracts.
- **Hiring Assistants** - Workers who are not in charge of hiring, supervising, and paying their own assistants are more likely employees.
- **Continuing relationships** - Workers who perform work for you for significant periods of time or at recurring intervals are more likely employees.
- **Set hours of work** - Workers for whom you establish set hours of work are more likely employees.
- **Full time required** - Workers whom you require to work or be available full time are likely to be employees.

- **Work done on premises** - Workers who work at your premises or at the place you designate are more likely employees.
- **Order or sequence set** - Workers for whom you set the order or sequence in which they perform their services are more likely employees.
- **Reports** - Workers whom you require to submit regular reports are more likely employees.
- **Payment Method** - Workers whom you pay by the hour, week, or month are more likely employees. Contractors are usually paid by the job.
- **Expenses** - Workers whose business and travel expenses you pay are more likely employees.
- **Tools and materials** - Workers whose tools, materials, and other equipment you furnish are more likely to be employees.
- **Investment** - The greater your workers investment in the facilities and equipment that they use in performing their services the more likely they are to be independent contractors.
- **Profit or loss** - The greater the risk that your workers can either make a profit or suffer a loss in rendering their services, the more likely it is that they are independent contractors.
- **Works for more than one person at a time** - the more businesses for which your workers perform services at the same time, the more likely it is that they are independent contractors.
- **Services available to general public** - Workers who hold their services out to the general public are more likely independent contractors.
- **Right to fire** - Workers whom you can fire at any time are more likely employees. In contrast, your right to terminate an independent contractor is generally limited by specific contractual terms.
- **Right to quit** - Workers who can quit at any time without incurring liability to you are more likely employees.



Some of the other tips for using contractors are:

- Pay contractors a percentage of the fee paid by the customer for each job
- Allow contractors to bid for available jobs by posting jobs on a notice board or website. This gives contractors complete control over which jobs they select to perform.
- Require your contractors to submit a weekly or bi-weekly invoice to you for their services. You can make this easy for them by supplying a website form that they can fill out and submit via email.

You should consult with your accountant and legal advisors before making the decision to hire employees or contractors as the rules do vary in each state of the United States and in countries other than the US. Ultimately, the decision to use either employees or contractors will depend on how you wish to run and manage your business. Each type of worker can be used effectively to be of benefit to your pet sitting business.

### **Virtual Assistants**

Virtual assistants are a new type of independent contractor who perform work for business owners from their own home office.

One great benefit of using a virtual assistant is that they only charge you for the hours that they spend on your projects or tasks. You don't have to take on the responsibility and cost of hiring an in office assistant and providing them with office space and resources.

Using virtual assistants you can start off by outsourcing small tasks that take only a few hours per week and gradually increase the work that you give your assistant until you are ready to utilize someone full time. Most VA's are available for one off jobs at an hourly or quoted project rate.

Some examples of tasks that can be outsourced to a virtual assistant include:

- Keeping financial records and book keeping
- Administrative duties
- Answering calls and emails

- Marketing activities such as writing press releases or articles, writing and preparing brochures, and setting up websites and online and offline advertising
- Customer follow-up including preparation and mailing of newsletters, mailing of postcards of special offer coupons

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## **How To Find New Team Members**

### **How To Advertise For New Staff**

When you write an ad to find new staff members you want to be very specific and include a detailed description of the job requirements and the tasks that the staff member will need to perform. This will reduce the number of applications that you will need to screen and ensure applicants are able and willing to do what is required as part of the job.

Here is an example of a very detailed ad for a contract pet sitter:

Dallas's oldest and largest Pet Sitting Company is currently seeking responsible, dependable animal lovers.

We are Dallas's largest in-home pet care provider. We provide professional animal care services 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to over 5000 active clients in Dallas, Tarrant, and Denton counties.

Our top priority is the care of pets!

We have a team of 40 professionally trained and experienced pet sitters that are ready to serve you and your animals. We provide training for our sitters to get certified in Pet CPR and basic first aid for animals, plus every sitter has a back-up in case of an emergency.

We need sitters to cover the Euless, Bedford, Colleyville, and Southlake areas. It is important that the sitters live in these areas as we travel to client's homes 1x-4x a day. It's also important that applicants be able to

work AM shifts (5-7am), mid day shifts (11am-2pm), dinner shifts (4-6pm), and beds (9-11pm) as needed.

#### Pet Sitter Job Description:

1. Good knowledge of pets in general.
2. True pet lover.
3. Dependable, trustworthy individual.
4. Comfortable meeting with the public.
5. Detail oriented.
6. Practices confidentiality.
7. Will remain alert and aware in clients' homes.
8. Legible handwriting.
9. Responsible driving to client homes (sometimes in the dark).
10. May work split shifts (morning & evening rounds).
11. Able to understand and operate alarm systems and garage key pads.
12. Able to write detailed notes for client report cards.
13. Competent to exercise/properly walk dogs.
14. Willing to clean up feces, urine, and vomit when necessary.
15. Willing to take out client garbage, water plants.
16. Able to lift dogs or other animals which may include bending, reaching above head.
17. Cannot be allergic to pet dander, bird feathers, etc.
18. Use good judgment in pet, home care, and personal safety.
19. Must be 18 years of age or older.
20. Have a reliable and insured vehicle.
21. Must be able to work days, nights, and weekends
22. Must have internet access
23. Must have a good working knowledge of computers/ data entry
24. Must have cell phone or pager with home phone

Our sitters are independent contractors, which we require to get bonded (we will show you how). We do a lot of advertising but we do expect our sitters to market also, if they want their territory to grow into full time. This is not a get rich quick scheme, the more you work, the more "can-do" attitude that you have the more you market the more you will make. Some sitters make up to \$60K a year.

## Where To Look For New Team Members

Be creative about where you post your ads. Keep in mind the description of your ideal candidate and brainstorm where you might find that type of person.

Here are some places that you can post your ad:

- **Craig's List** - The website <http://geo.craigslist.org/iso/us> gives you the opportunity to post a job ad in your local area on their classified boards for free. On this list you have room in your ad to put in information about the job and detailed candidate requirements. Craig's List gets a lot of traffic daily. There is no pressure to hire any candidates that you receive via Craig's List. You can contact applicants with more information and then ask them to fill out your interview questions or application.
- **Let your clients know** that you are looking for people interested in a position with your company. They may be able to recommend friends or family and will spread the word if they know someone who is a pet lover and looking for work. One way to communicate this regularly to clients is to put a few lines at the bottom of your client newsletter or in a special flyer that you give out to them when they are visiting your business location or that you leave in their home if you are visiting their pets.
- **Place flyers in local vet clinics**, shelters, animal rescues, and pet food and accessory stores. Find pet lovers where they congregate by advertising on a notice board at pet clinics, stores, dog day cares, or grooming spas.
- **Advertise in local job classified magazines** that are free to the public and can be picked up at local grocery stores. This is one of the more expensive methods I have used as you will need to pay to place your ad in these publications. However, you reach a large audience and it is targeted to job seekers. I did get a high response rate from these ads but none of my current sitters have come from this type of advertising. I wouldn't recommend it unless you have the budget and need someone right now!
- **Your website** is a great place to have a Join Our Team page where you can place an "express your interest" sign up form and find people who are interested in pet sitting in your local area. Having this form allows people who are good candidates for your team to contact you and can

supply you with a steady stream of potential candidates without you spending time and money having to place job ads.

Having a system set up where you constantly gather the contact details of interested candidates through your website, Craig's List, or your clients will enable you to have the contacts when you need them and are ready to hire new staff as your business grows.

**Twitter @APSEtips #findteam**

## **Screening Potential New Team Members**

When you advertise for staff typically you will get many applicants and you will need a process to determine which applicants you want to invest your time to interview.

### **Application Forms**

When you advertise for staff you may want to ask candidates to fill out an application form or questionnaire so that you can identify if they have the experience and skills that you are looking for and screen out candidates that don't fit the bill. This can be a simple form that you create on a word processor. Your application form can also contain questions designed to learn more about the candidate's personality such as questions about their hobbies, what they like to do for fun, and what their idea of a perfect weekend or vacation would be. Of course you can ask them why they want to work for your company. You could also ask candidates to submit a resume that shows their education and employment history.

Your application form could be available online and a link placed in your ad to direct candidates to the form so that people can download and submit it to you online (this is one way to automatically screen out applicants that do not have internet access or computer skills).

## Phone Or In Person Interview

One of the biggest challenges to hiring staff is how to interview them – an interview is typically something most people have only experienced from the other side of the table! Don't worry – your interview process does not need to be formal; you can meet the candidate on neutral ground in a casual location such as a local coffee shop.

Feel free to ask candidates questions unrelated to the pet sitting industry to get to know the person that reveal their personality, attitudes, and character traits. Some topics to get them talking are:

- Discuss Pop Culture. Ask about their favorite musician, movies, or reality TV shows
- Ask how they spend their days off
- Ask them questions about their own pets
- Ask them to tell you more about info they have on their resume
- Ask them if they could have dinner with one person, dead or alive, who would it be and why?

Some of the questions you should ask them to make sure there are no surprises in the future are:

- Schedule and availability
- Availability to work on major holidays
- Scheduled upcoming vacations
- Desired length of employment or contract
- Do they have reliable transportation?
- Do they have access to a cell phone, computer, and printer?

Here are some tips for finding the right staff members:

- You'll be happier finding someone with no experience and a ton of enthusiasm than someone with a lot of experience and a negative attitude
- Look for someone you can relate to and communicate with
- You need to be comfortable around the person and be able to trust them
- Make sure that candidates have good social skills, a good attitude, and good work ethic

Anytime you have a strange feeling about the person during the interview process or your gut tells you to run, thank the person for their time and go to the next person on the list. Hiring staff is a decision critical to the success of your business and it is vital that you have no lingering doubts about the job candidates.

## **Background checks**

Performing a background check on potential candidates will make sure that the people you hire to work with your clients (and that may even enter your client's homes) have no past criminal records. This will give you and your clients peace of mind. It also gives your business credibility so make sure that you highlight that you perform background checks on your website and other marketing materials.

There are many companies that can perform a background check for you. I have used [CertifiedBackground.com](http://CertifiedBackground.com) to provide pet sitter background check records. Once you set up an account with Certified Background you are provided with a form that you can send to a new applicant that gives them a website address and your account code. Applicants log into the website and request and pay for their own background check. Once it is completed you can see and print a copy of the results on the Certified Background website.

## **Contracts**

To protect yourself and the staff member you should always have a written and signed independent contractor agreement or employee agreement in place. This agreement should spell out very clearly to your workers their employment status, and the terms of their work with your company.

You can find employment contract forms online at [www.nolo.com](http://www.nolo.com) and <http://www.petcarelaw.com>.

If you are looking for a pet sitter independent contractor agreement, consider investing in the Pet Sitter Independent Contractor Toolbox - <http://petsittingology.com/toolbox>.

Make sure that you have contracts checked by a lawyer and that you keep a signed copy of the agreement between yourself and your staff member on file.

**Twitter @APSEtips #hiring**

## **Staff Guidelines and Training**

When you have hired a new staff member it is important that you have a process for showing them how to perform their new job. How much guidance and training you need to give them will depend on whether the new staff member is an employee or an independent contractor and their job function.

Contractors such as virtual assistants, marketing assistants, book keepers, and accountants will be well trained in their specific skills and should only need to know what tasks you need them to do and when you need them done. Contract pet sitters may have worked for other pet sitting companies and only need to know your way of getting things done.

If you hire contract sitters or dog walkers with little prior experience you may want them to shadow you on several pet sitting visits and client interviews so that they know what is expected and you know that they are able to job the job per your requirements.

One of the best ways to train staff is to give them a copy of your operations manual. Let them read it and then show them once how each task is done and they should then be able to follow the steps on your flow chart and work their way through performing each task as per the flowchart guidelines.



If you don't have your operational processes completed you can use staff guidelines to let them know how you expect them to perform their job duties. I use guidelines to spell out what I expect from my contract sitters and how pet sitting visits should be conducted so that we create satisfied customers.

Here is an example of the guidelines that I provide to my contract pet sitters:

### **Guidelines for Independent Pet Sitting Contractors**

#### **Our Tips to Creating Happy Customers**

1. At initial interview fill out contract with customer and have them read over and sign the third page. Collect keys and check whether customer wants keys to be kept on file or returned (\$10 fee for return). Leave customer your contact details and office contact number (817 692 4404). Return one copy of contract to office and keep one copy.
2. Carry copy of pet sitting contract with you to all visits in case emergency contact or vet phone numbers are required or in case you have any problems with alarm systems.
3. Pick up checks left by customers either at interview or first visit and return to office before or at time of invoicing for visits.
4. Read carefully any notes left by customer and follow additional instructions. Call customer if you have any questions.
5. Leave a daily diary at EVERY visit. Customers love to read these especially if you note down behaviors of the pets and anything unusual that you notice at your visit. Leaving a note also confirms that you were there for each visit avoiding any questions in customers mind. On last visit leave note to remind customers to call and confirm their return.
6. Try to space two visits per day customers as close to 12 hours apart as possible so that pets are not left alone for longer than 12 hours periods.
7. Refresh water bowls at each visit – some pets are very picky about the freshness of their water.
8. Clean litter boxes at each visit and place bag with litter in garage bins or just out in garage to keep smell out of house (unless other instructions given by customer).

9. If using toilets make sure they are functioning properly and water stops running. We have had cases where valves need to be manually shut off to prevent overflow or continuous running.
10. Bring in mail each day (if delivered) and place on a kitchen counter
11. At completion of visits call client to ensure that they have returned home on schedule. Call at approximate time of the next visit (as if you were making another visit). If you cannot get in touch with clients go ahead and make additional visit (s) until you can confirm they have arrived home to care for pets. We will pay you for additional visits

**Twitter @APSEtips #training**

## **Staff Incentives and Rewards**

You should always reward your staff when they exceed job performance expectations or complete tasks outside their job description that help your business to grow and achieve pet sitting excellence. This will encourage others to achieve more, and keep staff motivated.

Rewards can be as simple as recognizing great performance in a team newsletter or at a team meeting. You can also provide small recognition awards or special job privileges such as ability to purchase coffee at the local café between pet sitting jobs and charge to the company account.

You can also set up a formal reward and incentive plan for your team members for any specific behaviors that you want to encourage. I set up my contract pet sitter incentive plan to encourage them to be loyal and continue to work for my company for many years, take training to increase their skills, be available to work on holidays (our busiest times of the year), and help me to market the business and bring in new pet sitting clients.

Here are the elements of my plan that I use to encourage these behaviors:

### **Length of Service Based Pay Scale**

New sitters – X% of customer charges

After 1 year anniversary – X plus 5% of customer charges

After 2 year anniversary – X plus 10% of customer charge

Your effective start date will be the first pet sitting visit for which you are paid.

### **Pet Skills Incentive**

If a pet sitter chooses to attend a 4 hour pet first aid training course at the Dallas Red Cross or with a Pet Tech certified instructor they will receive a 5% increase in their current pay rate. This increase will remain effective as long as this pet first aid certification remains current (i.e. pet sitter will need to attend refresher training as required by training company). Proof of certification must be submitted before incentive becomes active.

Cost for attending the training course will be the responsibility of the pet sitter.

### **Holiday bonus**

For each of the major holidays listed below you will receive an additional \$5 per visit made:

July 4<sup>th</sup>

Thanksgiving Day

Christmas Day

New Years Day

### **Marketing Incentive**

To reward sitters who choose to market our pet sitting services we are introducing a marketing incentive or bonus plan.

For any new customer that you refer to us - you will receive X% of the service charges to customer for their initial booking (up to a max of 7 days) provided that you are the sitter performing the visits.

Once we have received 10 referrals from a sitter their pay for subsequent referrals will increase to X plus 5% of the customer service charges for the first initial booking (up to max of 7 days) as long as they are the sitter performing the visits. Upon the completion of the 10<sup>th</sup> job referred by the sitter (whether or

not they have performed all 25 jobs) the sitter will also receive a \$40 gift voucher to a store or restaurant of their choice.

After we have received 25 referrals from a sitter their pay for all subsequent referrals will rise to X plus 10% of the customer charges for the initial booking (up to max of 7 days) as long as they are the pet sitter performing the visits. Upon completion of the 25<sup>th</sup> job that is referred by the sitter (whether or not they have performed all 25 jobs), the sitter will also receive a \$60 gift voucher to the store or restaurant of their choice.

We will be happy to supply you with our tri-fold flyers that are customized with your name on the front of the tri-fold. To encourage new clients to tell us that you referred them we will print an offer to give the customer a 10% discount on their initial visits as long as they mention the name (your name) that is printed on the bottom of the offer.

Some ideas for people you can give flyers to:

Friends, relatives, neighbors, church members, school teachers, home repairman, people you see out walking their dogs - I'm sure you can think of many more!

You can also leave flyers in restaurants, shops, libraries, and animal rescue organizations.

**Twitter @APSEtips #rewards**



## What Do I Do Next?

You are now aware of the 3 keys of pet sitting success and you have learned the strategies that you need to use to apply these to your own business. However, if you want to achieve pet sitting excellence this will not be enough. It is essential that you take each of these principles and apply them to the day to day running of your own pet sitting business.

I want to continue to support you as you take this journey by being available to answer your questions, provide additional education when needed, and motivate you to keep going even when the going gets tough. I invite you to join me as a member of the brand new Association of Pet Sitting Excellence (APSE) - <http://www.petsittingexcellence.com>.



The APSE is a new place for pet sitters to share ideas, ask and get questions answered, and continue to learn cutting edge business strategies. Founded by pet sitters Danielle Chonody and Joshua Cary, the APSE is designed for pet sitters who want to achieve pet sitting excellence.

The APSE mission is to promote and recognize excellence in the pet sitting industry by connecting pet sitting business owners, while providing the knowledge, resources, and business building tools that pet sitters need to start and grow a successful and profitable business – all based upon a foundation of excellence.

As a member of the Association of Pet Sitting Excellence you will find yourself surrounded by a supportive group of fellow pet sitters, and will have access to an advisory panel of experts in the insurance, accounting, legal, pet health, and marketing industries that are available to answer your questions in our forums when you need answers.

The APSE is the only association of its kind and as a member you have complete access to:

- Listing in our pet sitter locator directory
- Partner discounts
- Pet sitting business forms
- Member only forums where you can share tips with other sitters and have your questions answered by our panel of business experts
- Extensive content library of articles that you can use in your own newsletters, blog, or website
- Rolodex of resources that make running your business easier
- Personalized critiques and review of your pet sitting website
- Monthly pet sitting business process flowcharts
- Live monthly teleseminars and Q&A calls
- Database of qualified independent contract pet sitters
- Accreditation program based on the principles of pet sitting excellence
- Video tutorials that show you how to use technology to market and run your business

As a member of the APSE, you can proudly display our logo to show your customers that you are committed to providing pet sitting excellence. Members will also receive discounts on live workshops, online events, conferences, and one-on-one pet sitting business coaching.

Find out more information about APSE and sign up for your membership at <http://www.petsittingexcellence.com>.

The Association of Pet Sitting Excellence will officially launch on April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Please join us in celebrating pet sitting excellence!