



# STARTING A DOG WALKING BUSINESS

A dog walking business offers a great many benefits. You'll be working your own hours, you'll spend plenty of time outdoors, and best of all, you get to spend all day with dogs. For many people, you'll be living the dream. After all, it's just a walk in the park. Anyone can do it. Or can they?

It has to be noted that starting a professional business requires work. A willingness to stretch your legs is a good start, but there's plenty more to consider.

If you interested in starting a dog walking business, a franchise with MyWaggyTails will help you circumvent the traps and pain points, and we'll help you in whatever ways we can. Before you get started, however, take the following factors into consideration.



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## The Law Surrounding Dogs

As difficult as it is to believe, some people don't like dogs. They're generally identifiable by the fact they don't cast a reflection in the mirror.

All the same, these people do exist. This means that, should an incident occur under your watch, they may make a complaint. You need to ensure that you're legally compliant at all times.

There are a number of laws that pet parents are not necessarily aware of, but could land a dog walker in hot water. Before you start your business, bone up on the appropriate legislation.

- **The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005.** It goes without saying that you'll be expected to clean up after your canine clients. Failure to do could land you a four-figure fine. Allowing a dog to enter territory where they're not permitted can also contravene this law.
- **The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991.** This is the big one. The most concerning issue about this law is the fast and loose definition to dangerous. A playful dog that bounces up to somebody to say hello could lead to a complaint, and the local authorities may investigate this. Until you can be sure that all dogs will walk to heel and follow your every command, keep them on a short leash around people.
- **The Road Traffic Act 1988.** Hopefully, you'll always have a dog on a lead when walking on the road. Failing to do so isn't just dangerous – it's illegal.

- **Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953.** A farmer has the legal right to shoot a dog that is bothering their livestock. The official definition of this 'worrying', and that could include chasing sheep – or even just barking, if the farmer has a particularly itchy trigger finger. Be very careful about where you walk dogs, avoiding privately owned farmland. That's a conversation that nobody wants to have with a dog owner.
- **Dogs Act 1871.** This law may be almost 150 years old, but it's still enforced. If the dog is deemed dangerous, they'll be considered out of control if they're not on a leash or sporting a muzzle. This can lead to legal repercussions.
- And don't forget to check your local authority's bylaws about whether you can walk a group of dogs in your local parks. The Borough of Wandsworth, for example, requires anybody walking 4 or more dogs (up to a maximum of 6) to be licensed. The same applies in Royal Parks. There are creeping regulations that are already impacting the unprofessional dog walker, and the way of the world dictates that there will be more legislation in place before any less.

If you fall foul of breaking any of these laws, public liability insurance may offer you a measure of protection.



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## Public Liability Insurance

One of the biggest mistakes that self-employed people make is failing to open a public liability insurance policy. This will protect you, and your dog walking business, from any accusations of misconduct or mishaps.

This covers you against any range of issues. These could include:

- Injuries sustained by third parties as a result of your dog walking activities. This could include an attack from the animal, or even tripping over the lead.
- Damage to personal possessions in a property while collecting and returning the dog. If you accidentally knock a priceless vase from a shelf, the client will likely expect recompense.
- Injury sustained by the dog while under your care. The dog should also be insured. However, if the client feels that the injury was avoidable, they may attempt to pursue the cost of treatment through the courts.

Public liability insurance is available from most major companies, at a range of prices. Find a policy that protects your business, to a value that you consider appropriate.



## Advertising Your Business

Once you're ready to start launching your business, you need to build up your client base. It's not easy starting to scratch, but good news travels fast. Word of mouth can be a powerful marketing tool.

Until you reach this point, consider a campaign of flyers. You may not get too many bites at first, but don't lose heart. Repeat the campaign after a few weeks. Eventually, your name will seep into the mind of potential clients.

Those flyers will start off shoved in drawers and pinned on fridges. One throwaway comment between pooch parents about whether their dog needs more exercise, however, will result in your phone ringing.

Social media campaigns can also be impactful. In the age of the smartphone, it's never been easier to reach people. Scour Facebook for local business groups in your area, and place advertisements there.



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## Questions for Your Clients

When you're ready to start taking on new business, you should have a stock questionnaire for pet parents. Every dog is different, and you can't just strap on a leash and set off. Things that should be asked include:

- **What is the dog's medical history?** It's critical that you're aware of any ongoing medical concerns, physical and emotional. Does the dog require any medications? Do they have any triggers of phobias, including specific noises or scents?
- **How is the dog's recall?** If you are going to let them off lead, you need to know they'll come back.
- **Is the dog's microchip information up to date?** It's a legal requirement that all dogs in the UK are microchipped. However, some rescue dogs are still registered to former owners.
- **Is the dog insured?** If so, what does the policy protect? Not all insurance policies cover personal injury.
- **Is the dog social?** Some dogs are jollier than others – not every dog tolerates canine company well. Learn how friendly the dog is and pair them up with like-minded walking partners.
- **Is the dog patient?** Every animal has a breaking point. Short-tempered dogs and puppies don't mix, so learn where each dog draws the line.
- **Does the dog chase wildlife?** Avoiding cows and horses is one thing. Ducks and other wild animals, which are protected by law, is another.

- **How much exercise does the dog need?** Just because a dog is large, it doesn't necessarily mean they need hours of exercise. They could be arthritic, or just plain lazy.
- **What kind of exercise does the dog enjoy?** Some dogs like to run free, some love to swim in rivers, and others will climb wherever possible. Learn about the particular canine's habits so you can be prepared.
- **Which vet is the dog registered to?** If the dog has an accident under your care, they may need rapid medical attention. Learning which vet holds the dog's medical records may save their life.
- **How will you contact the owner in an emergency?** Do you have contact details in case of an emergency?

And that's all before we discuss the best ways to structure your day, differentiate your business, market and price your services or for any transport considerations.

A MyWaggyTails franchise provides you with a dog walking 'business in a box'. We ensure you have the necessary training in dog handling, canine behaviour and pet first aid, the appropriate insurances, a web presence, local area marketing, flyers and promotional cards as well as ongoing support. Together, we reduce the risk of starting a business, bringing you peace of mind and a proven formula for success.



To find out more about starting your own dog walking business...

Visit: [MyWaggyTailsBusiness.co.uk](https://MyWaggyTailsBusiness.co.uk)

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