



The Pet Sitting & Dog Walking Business

Standing weekday walks, vacation sits that book themselves, and a client list that behaves like a subscription. The gentlest startup costs in this series.

\$500-1,300

START LEAN

7-14 days

FIRST DOLLAR

80-90%

TYPICAL MARGIN

Is this your business?

Pet sitting and dog walking is a trust business wearing a leash. The product is not the walk: it is the photo report, the GPS map, the latched door, and the absolute certainty that you will show up. Startup costs barely clear a thousand dollars, the standing midday client buys 250 walks a year without a second sales conversation, and the operator who never cancels quietly wins the entire zip code.

\$500-1,300

LEAN STARTUP COST

\$1,500-3,000

STANDARD BUILD

7-14 days

TIME TO FIRST DOLLAR

80-90%

TYPICAL GROSS MARGIN

Yes, fully

SOLO-FRIENDLY

Yes (mobile)

HOME-BASED

BUILT FOR THESE FOUNDER TYPES

THE OPERATOR

THE CONNECTOR

1/5 difficulty

THE HONEST FIT TEST

You will walk in rain, scoop what the dog leaves, manage keys to strangers' homes, and build your day around other people's lunch hours and vacations. If animals are merely tolerable to you, clients will smell it. If a wagging tail at noon feels like a perk and being the most reliable person someone knows sounds like an identity, this is the easiest entry in the catalog.

Who pays, and why now.

Two-thirds of American households own a pet, and this business solves the two problems owners cannot schedule away: the workday and the vacation. The midday walk serves people stuck at the office until six. The overnight sit serves every trip they will ever take. Both are bought on one criterion above all others: can I trust this person alone in my home with the animal my kids consider a sibling. Price matters far less than proof.

The economics hinge on one client type: the standing weekday walker. A Monday-through-Friday midday client buys roughly 250 walks a year without a single additional sales conversation, and a walker with eight of them has a salary before counting a single sit. Overnights stack on top at \$70-95 a night, concentrated around holidays and booked weeks ahead. The two products feed each other: walk clients become sit clients the first time they fly.

Competition splits into marketplaces and hobbyists. Rover and Wag take 20 percent or more and own the client relationship; hobbyists charge \$15 a walk and vanish within a season. The professional tier (insured, bonded, GPS-tracked visits, photo reports after every walk, a real backup plan for sick days) is thin in almost every market. Reliability is the entire product, and almost nobody is selling it properly.

WHO BUYS	WHAT THEY PAY	WHAT THEY ACTUALLY WANT
Office and hybrid workers	\$23-28 per midday walk, 3-5x weekly	A guilt-free workday and a tired, happy dog at the door
Travelers	\$70-95 per overnight; \$25-30 drop-ins	Daily photo proof and a house that looks lived in
Cat households	\$22-28 per drop-in visit	Litter, food, and company without boarding stress
Seniors and recovering owners	\$20-25 per relief walk	The dog kept happy and exercised when mobility dips

ONE STANDING WEEKDAY CLIENT

250 walks/yr

A single Monday-through-Friday midday client is worth \$5,500-6,500 a year, renews by default, and refers the neighbor with the lab. Eight of them is a full-time income walked in four hours a day. Everything in this playbook points at winning that client.

Every dollar, before you spend it.

The buy-in here is the lowest in this series, because the real startup assets are trust signals and systems, not equipment. Spend where clients can see protection: insurance, the bond, software that sends visit reports. Stay cheap everywhere else.

THE LEAN BUILD · START HERE	WHY IT EARNS ITS PLACE	COST
Pet-sitter insurance + dishonesty bond (annual)	Liability for the pets plus the bond that covers you inside homes; the first thing smart clients ask about	\$180-320
Scheduling software with GPS visit reports (3 months)	Time To Pet or similar. The mapped route and photo report ARE the product	\$90-150
Lockbox 4-pack for client keys	Boxes stay at the client's door. Never carry a labeled key ring in your car	\$60-100
Leashes, slip leads, waste bags, treat pouch	Your own gear on every walk; never depend on whatever is by their door	\$60-110
Pet first aid kit, portable water, flashlight	For the walk that goes wrong, and a great trust line in every meet-and-greet	\$40-80
Cards, flyers, vet-office leave-behinds	Vet counters and leasing offices move more clients than ads here	\$40-80
LLC + city license	Your liability wall. See the legal page	\$50-500
Lean total		\$520-1,340 all-in
THE STANDARD BUILD · ADD AFTER FIRST REVENUE	WHAT IT UNLOCKS	COST
Pet first aid & CPR certification	An afternoon course and a credential families repeat to each other	\$120-200
PSI or NAPPS membership	Industry directories plus one more badge on the website	\$100-200
Branded apparel + car magnet	You are the billboard standing at their front door every day	\$100-300
Website with online booking	Turns the Nextdoor click into a scheduled meet-and-greet on autopilot	\$150-500

THE RULE

Buy trust, not gear. A \$40 leash walks a dog exactly as well as a \$12 one, but the bond, the visit reports, and the CPR card close clients a discount never will. Let the first month of standing walks fund every upgrade after that.

Clean from day one.

No state licenses dog walkers, which is exactly why the paperwork you choose to carry becomes your competitive moat. Bonding, agreements, and a vet release form separate the professional from the neighbor kid in one conversation.

- Form your LLC:** File in your home state, get the EIN free at irs.gov, open the business bank account. THE LAUNCHPAD Module Three walks every step.
- City or county business license:** Usually \$50-150 a year. One call to the city clerk settles it.
- Pet-sitter insurance plus a dishonesty bond:** Specialty policies (Pet Care Insurance, Pet Sitters Associates) bundle liability with care-custody-control coverage for the animal itself. The bond matters because you work inside homes unsupervised: it is the answer to the question every client is too polite to ask.
- Pet care service agreement:** Services, schedule, fees, cancellation terms, emergency spending cap, entry authorization, and photo permission. Signed before the first visit, every client, no exceptions.
- Veterinary release form:** Authorizes you to seek treatment, names their vet, and sets a dollar cap for emergency care. The form nobody needs until the day it is the only thing that matters.
- Key and entry protocol:** Coded lockboxes at the client's door or garage codes stored in your software, never on paper. Keys are the highest-liability object in this business: handle them like a locksmith, not a babysitter.
- Know your leash laws and pet limits:** City leash ordinances, dog-park rules, and how many dogs you may legally walk at once (some cities cap it). A citation with a client's dog attached is a fired walker.

INSURANCE, SPECIFICALLY

Carry the specialty pet-sitter policy from day one: general liability alone does not cover injury to the animal in your care, and the animal is the whole job. Add the bond before you hold a single key. When you eventually bring on help, nearly every state requires workers' comp, and your insurer must list them: an uncovered helper voids more than it saves.

WATCH FOR

The dog that 'has never bitten anyone.' Every incident report starts that way. Hold a real meet-and-greet before accepting any dog, watch for guarding and leash reactivity, write behavior notes into the client file, and reserve the right to decline or end service in your agreement. Never walk dogs from different households together unless both owners have agreed in writing: a pack fight between clients' dogs is the lawsuit this business produces.

Requirements vary by state and city. Verify with your state, city clerk, and a licensed professional. Education, not legal advice.

Three doors. Real numbers.

Price per visit, anchor on the standing weekly plan, and resist the hobbyist undertow. You are not competing with the \$15 walker; you are replacing boarding fees, lunchtime dashes home, and guilt. Quote accordingly.

	RECOMMEND	
<p>DOOR ONE</p> <p>The Drop-In</p> <p>\$24-28 per 30-min visit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Feeding, fresh water, litter or potty break ◆ Photo and visit report every time ◆ Mail, plants, lights rotated on request ◆ Same sitter every visit 	<p>DOOR TWO</p> <p>The Midday Walk Plan</p> <p>\$23-27 per walk, most-booked</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 30-minute walk, Monday through Friday ◆ GPS-tracked route with photo report ◆ Your locked weekday slot, same walker ◆ Monthly invoice, card on file ◆ Second dog from the same home \$8 	<p>DOOR THREE</p> <p>The Overnight</p> <p>\$75-95 per night</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 12-hour overnight stay in your home ◆ Morning and evening walks included ◆ Daily photo digest to wherever you are ◆ House kept lived-in: mail, plants, lights ◆ Holiday priority for plan clients

PRICING NOTES FOR THIS BUSINESS

- Holiday surcharge of \$10-15 per visit on the six major holidays. Demand triples and your competitors are with their own families: scarcity is real, price it.
- Floor: never leave the house for under \$20. A 'quick let-out' still costs drive time, and cheap visits crowd out standing clients.
- Meet-and-greets are free, but only book them after the client has seen your rates. You are qualifying them too.
- Raise rates \$1-2 per visit every January with a thirty-day note. Standing clients almost never leave over a dollar; they leave over flakiness.
- Two-dog households are your best margin: add \$5-8, not double. Three-plus dogs gets a custom quote.

THE UPSELL THAT PAYS THE RENT

The conversion moment is the key return after a vacation sit. They have just spent ten days getting photo reports of a happy animal: offer the standing midday slot before you hand the key back, with the first week at the founding rate. Sits are windfalls; standing walks are the salary. Every sit client should hear the walk pitch exactly once, at that exact moment.

Names, not strategies.

Your first ten clients are within walking distance, almost by definition. This business spreads through vet counters, leasing offices, and the neighbor who sees you out with a dog at noon every day wearing the same branded shirt.

1 Your own block and building

Walk one neighbor's dog free for a week and send them the photo reports anyway. The reports get screenshotted into group chats, which is the entire referral engine in miniature.

2 Three vet clinics

Receptionists field 'do you know a walker?' weekly. Bring cards, your insurance certificate, and your CPR card. The certificate is what gets you into the drawer they actually pull from.

3 Apartment and condo leasing offices

Pet-friendly buildings concentrate dozens of dogs under one roof with no yards. Offer a resident rate and ask to be in the new-resident folder; one building can fill a whole midday route.

4 Nextdoor and local Facebook groups

Introduce yourself with a photo report sample, your bond and insurance named plainly, and a founding offer. Then answer every 'anyone know a sitter?' thread within the hour, forever.

5 Groomers and pet stores

Same counter logic as vets: they are asked constantly and have nobody good to recommend. A referral card with \$20 off both sides gives them a reason to remember you.

6 The marketplaces, deliberately

Rover can fill early calendar gaps and teach you the work. Treat it as training wheels with a 20 percent toll, build your own brand in parallel, and respect their rules while you do.

THE EXACT ASK

"Hi, I'm [name]: I run a pet sitting and dog walking service here in [neighborhood]. I walk Murphy, the Carters' lab on [street], every weekday: they get a GPS map and photos after every single walk. I'm insured and bonded, and I'm taking five founding clients this month at \$5 off per walk while I build my weekday route. Does [dog's name] get a midday break right now, or is he holding it like a champion until six?"

THE FOUNDING-CUSTOMER DEAL

First ten clients: \$5 off per walk for the first month, or one free drop-in with any vacation sit, in exchange for a Google review when they are happy and permission to feature their pet in your posts. Pet photos are the best marketing asset in this niche and owners love seeing them. Retire the deal publicly at ten: real scarcity converts; eternal discounts repel.

Owned, earned, then paid.

This is a proof-and-proximity business. The visit report is your ad, the vet counter is your channel, and the holiday calendar is your urgency. Paid ads are nearly pointless here; presence and reviews are everything.

CHANNEL, RANKED	WHY IT WORKS HERE	THE FIRST MOVE
Google Business Profile	'Dog walker near me' and 'pet sitter [city]' are searched by people ready to book this week	Claim it day one, post pet photos weekly, collect a review per week
Visit reports as marketing	Every GPS map and photo report gets forwarded to spouses and group chats	Make reports warm and personal; add your booking link to the footer
Nextdoor + local Facebook	The 'anyone know a sitter?' thread is this industry's lead form	Answer every thread within the hour; post one happy-dog feature weekly
Vet, groomer, and leasing referrals	Counter staff are asked weekly and recommend whoever they remember	Quarterly visits with cards, treats for staff, and a two-sided referral credit
Email/SMS holiday booking alerts	Holidays sell out; reminding clients to book early is service, not spam	Six-week-out alert before each major holiday: 'three sit slots left'

FIVE CONTENT PIECES THAT WIN THIS NICHE

- What a dog walker actually costs in [your city] (the page every searcher wants and nobody writes)
- A real visit report, annotated: what you get after every single walk
- 5 signs your dog needs a midday walk (chewing, zoomies, the 5 p.m. explosion)
- How we handle your keys: lockboxes, codes, and why we never label anything
- Meet the pack: a weekly client-pet feature, with the owner's blessing

THE REVIEW MACHINE

Ask at the peak moment: right after a vacation sit, when they walk into a calm house and a happy animal. 'If the reports made your trip easier, a review would mean the world: I'll text you the link.' Texted link, same hour, every sit. Twenty-five reviews mentioning trust, photos, and reliability make you the default choice in a neighborhood, and unlike ads, they never stop working.

One unit, one month, no fog.

Two honest snapshots: what one standing midday client is worth each week, and what a steady solo month looks like mixing walks, drop-ins, and overnights. Rates use the middle door at \$25 a walk.

ONE UNIT: ONE MIDDAY CLIENT, PER WEEK (5 WALKS AT \$25)	AMOUNT	A WORKING MONTH: SOLO, 8 MIDDAY CLIENTS + SITS (OCTOBER)	AMOUNT
Revenue	\$125	Revenue (walks, drop-ins, overnights)	\$5,180
Fuel between stops	-\$15	Fuel	-\$260
Payment processing (2.9%)	-\$4	Insurance, software, phone	-\$180
Insurance + software share	-\$8	Treats, waste bags, supplies	-\$45
Gross profit (about 2.5 hrs with drive time)	\$98	Marketing (cards, boosts)	-\$110
Tax reserve (27%)	-\$26	Pre-tax profit	\$4,585
Yours, per client week	\$72	Tax reserve (27%)	-\$1,240
		Owner take-home	\$3,345

BREAK-EVEN

16-20 visits

The lean build plus a year of insurance is recovered inside a single month of one standing client and one vacation sit. Capital was never the barrier in this business. The barrier is proving you will show up every single time, which is precisely what the photo reports exist to do.

Illustrative figures at typical market rates; your market, prices, and costs will differ. Run YOUR numbers in the One-Page P&L from THE LAUNCHPAD, Module Six. Remember the 25-30% tax reserve on every dollar of profit.

Pre-decided, so motivation is never consulted.

WEEK ONE: FOUNDATIONS

- LLC filed, EIN issued, business bank account open
- Insurance and bond bound; certificates saved to phone
- Software configured; GPS visit reports tested on a friend's dog
- Google Business Profile claimed; first pet photos up
- Service agreement and vet release templates finalized

WEEK TWO: DOORS OPEN

- 3-5 founding clients walked at founding rates
- Photo report habit locked from the very first visit
- Three vet clinics visited with cards and certificates
- Nextdoor introduction post with a sample report
- Lockboxes deployed with first key clients

WEEK THREE: MOMENTUM

- Founding offer running; track asks versus books
- First reviews requested right after great reports
- Leasing offices pitched with a resident rate
- Holiday booking calendar opened six weeks out
- Meet-and-greet flow standardized and timed

WEEK FOUR: THE SYSTEM

- Sit clients pitched the standing slot at key return
- Founding rates retired; posted rates live
- Weekly content cadence locked: one pet feature, one tip
- Month-one P&L completed; one lever chosen
- Backup sitter shortlist started for sick days

DAY 30 VERDICT

Green light: 4+ standing weekly clients, 20+ completed visits, 5+ reviews. Yellow: one-off sits but no standing slots: you are selling windfalls instead of the salary: pitch the midday plan at every key return. Red: under 10 paid visits despite 25 real asks: the proof is invisible: lead every conversation with a sample report and your bond, and re-run week two.

How this business fails, and how it grows.

THE FIVE KILLERS

- ✗ **Pricing like a hobbyist**
The \$15 walker is not your competitor; they are a cautionary tale who quits by August. Cheap rates attract clients who treat you like staff and leave over a dollar.

- ✗ **Skipping insurance because 'it's just walking'**
A bolting dog, a bite, a key incident: any one of them costs more than a decade of premiums. Bound and bonded before the first visit.

- ✗ **Overbooking the holidays**
Saying yes to every Christmas sit until you physically cannot deliver torches a year of trust in one week. Cap your calendar and waitlist the rest at full price.

- ✗ **Living on the marketplaces**
Rover's 20 percent is tuition, not a business model. The platform owns the client, the reviews, and the rate. Build your own book in parallel from day one.

- ✗ **No backup plan**
You sell reliability, and you will eventually get the flu. A vetted backup walker and an honest client communication plan is the difference between a hiccup and an exodus.

THREE SCALE PATHS

- 1 **The walk-zone monopoly**
Densify one zip until midday walks stack back to back with five-minute drives. Then raise rates, open a waitlist, and let scarcity do the selling. A dense small route out-earns a scattered big one every time.

- 2 **The team of sitters**
W-2 walkers, software-run scheduling, you keep meet-and-greets and quality control. Margin per walk drops to 35-45 percent but volume compounds, and the brand stops depending on your knees.

- 3 **The overnight ladder**
Build the high-ticket book: overnights, house sitting, pet taxi to vet and groomer, medication visits. Twenty overnight clients turn every holiday into a windfall season you already own.

YOUR FIRST HIRE

A backup walker, part-time, W-2 from day one: misclassifying walkers as contractors is the industry's standard lawsuit, because you control the schedule and the method. Hire for warmth and punctuality, train them on your report format, and remember that your backup IS the product: 'never cancels' is only true once someone else can hold the leash.

THE STAIRCASE CONTINUES

The playbook is the map. The machine is waiting.

Everything this playbook describes, Epic Advisory Group can build with you: the brand, the cinematic website, the entity, the engine. Describe your idea to the Launch Engine and see your business real in about sixty seconds, free.

- The Launch Engine: your idea, built free, in about a minute
- THE ASCENT: Founder Edition: the eight-module course
- Launch-in-a-Box: entity, brand, site, and first campaign, one flat price
- Growth, capital readiness, and the path to the public markets

"There is no right age. There is only the decision."



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