

Purrfect profit from pet care

A PASSION for pets is certainly a must if you are thinking of a pet care franchise, but there's more to it than just being a pet lover.

by Linda Whitney

Pet care franchisees provide services that can include home-from-home dog boarding, animal feeding, mobile dog-washing, cat cuddling, pet transport and even pet cremations.

If you love animals more than people, think twice. You must be confident handling animals, but happy to deal with owners, too.

Pet care franchisors also stress it's not all about cuddling kittens — you must be business-minded.

'Competition means pet care is a tough industry these days, so you must be businesslike as well as being a dedicated pet carer,' says Monica Loosely of the Pals4Pets franchise.

'Franchisees can get too taken up with pet care and building relationships with owners, but if you end up working unprofitably, you will soon not be working at all,' says Mrs Loosley.

Pals4pets franchisees provide a home boarding for animals, pre-booked pet care and an emergency pet care service. Business skills

training is included in the franchise package, which costs £11,950, or £5,000 up-front with the remainder paid over five years.

Denis Chirgwin of pet care franchise Animals at Home (AAH) says: 'Pet care franchisees tend to be very kind-hearted, but you need the courage to turn down some jobs. Agreeing to walk a dog for £10 an hour might help the dog and client, but if you travel too far to do it, it can be unprofitable.'

'That's why we run marketing courses to ensure that franchisees produce the best profits possible for their turnover.'

As well as having a business head you will need to be happy with marketing, so check that franchisors provide training.

'Many of our franchisees do not have a background in business, so our training aims to develop their business acumen from day one,' says Janet Walmsley of the Oscar pet food delivery franchise.

Oscar franchisees deliver pet foods and accessories to pet

owners' homes, and the £14,995 package includes training from a marketing expert. While you are delivering petfood, you can cross sell other items such as dog treats or wild bird food, to boost profits.

Franchisees with Dial-a-Dog Wash, operate a mobile dog-washing service from a specially-converted van equipped to bath a dog outside an owner's house.

THEY receive a week's training, including basic dog grooming and handling plus a day's training in marketing. 'It means they are more confident when marketing their service on the phone,' says Andy James of Dial-a-Dog Wash, where investment is £13,999.

Franchisees with the Pets, Homes and Gardens Company offer pet care and household services.

It also stresses the importance of business growth. 'We want to hear from people who love animals but also want to be a part of a successful business,' says the company's Peter Maxted. Packages from £2,977.

■ Pals4Pets — 020 8201 1606; Dial-a-Dog Wash — 0845 123 5843; Oscar — 0800 068 1106; Pets, Home and Gardens Company — 01403 268282



■ 'WE HAVE always adored animals and kept dogs, so the Barking Mad pet care services franchise sounded appealing,' says Cate Court. She and husband Russell, pictured, run a Barking Mad franchise in Abingdon, Oxfordshire. 'We provide a boarding service for dogs while owners are away, so we have to meet the dogs, the owners and host families,' says Cate, 58. 'It's not enough to be a dog lover. You must be a good communicator, and well organised with an eye for detail — you can't afford to forget a

dog's name or holiday dates.' Tact is important. 'Sometimes you have to turn down hosts because, for instance, their garden is not secure. Hosts also have to be matched with dogs — it's no good sending a Great Dane to a small elderly lady.' She advises others looking at pet franchises: 'Be prepared for lots of marketing, especially in the first two years. 'We put posters up at local vets and take them chocolate eggs every Easter, so they remember us when customers ask about holiday pet care services.' ■ Barking Mad — 01524 276.