

Chapter 1

Barking Up The Right Tree

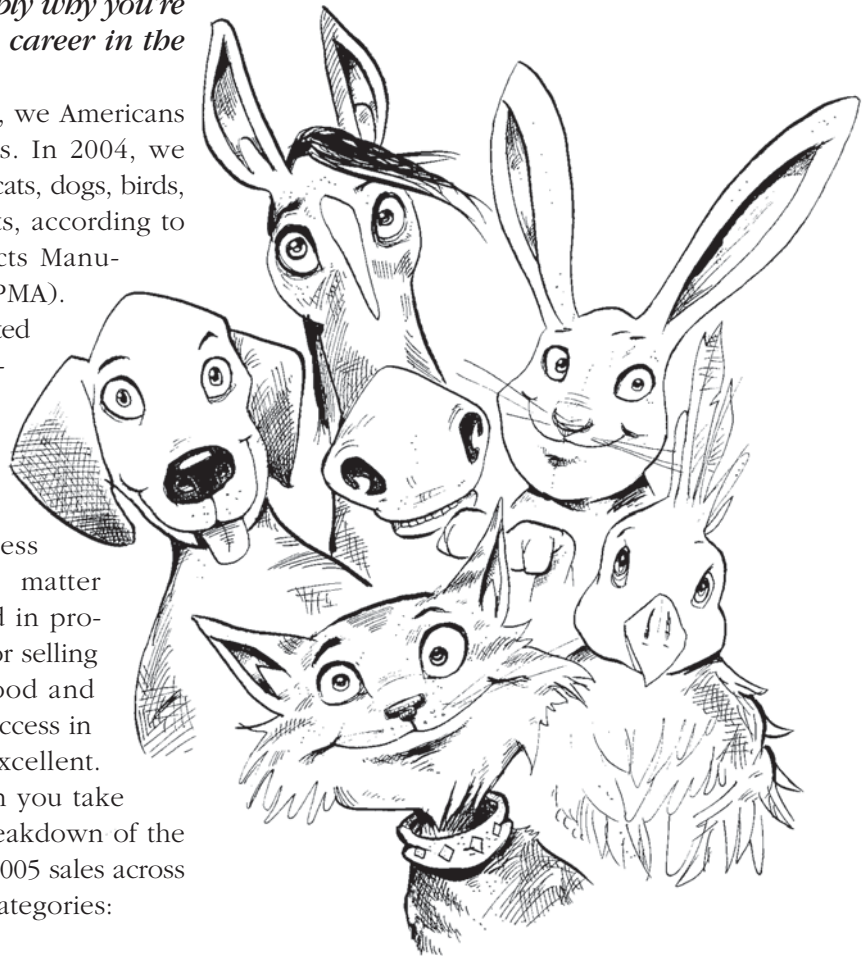
When you think back to your childhood, is there a warm and fuzzy memory of a four-footed or winged companion in whom you confided your deepest secrets? Do you gaze into pet-store windows and vicariously tickle the puppies under the chin? Or have you ever considered buying a sweater for your horse, some galoshes for your cat, or some Armor All for your armadillo? If so, then you understand what it means to be a pet lover—and that's probably why you're interested in starting a career in the pet-care industry.

As you no doubt know, we Americans are in love with our pets. In 2004, we spent \$34.5 billion on our cats, dogs, birds, fish, horses and other pets, according to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (APPMA). In 2005, that figure is expected to jump by another \$1.4 billion, continuing a decade-long trend of pet-spending increases.

This is good news for aspiring pet-care business owners like you. No matter whether you're interested in providing hands-on pet care or selling pet products like toys, food and treats, the prospects for success in a pet-care business are excellent. It's easy to see why when you take a look at the APPMA's breakdown of the estimated \$35.9 billion in 2005 sales across pet product and service categories:

Category	Estimated 2005 Spending
Food	\$14.5 billion
Supplies/medicine	\$8.8 billion
Veterinary care	\$8.6 billion
Live-animal sales	\$1.6 billion
Pet services (grooming and boarding)	\$2.4 billion

"The strong growth in the [pet-care] industry demonstrates what an important role pets are playing in the lives of Amer-



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Fun Fact

Presidential pets have their own museum in Washington, DC. More than 1,500 artifacts and photos of famous pets, ranging from George Washington's horse, Nelson, to President and Mrs. Bush's Scottish terrier, Barney, are on display in this charming museum. The Presidential Pet Museum is located 19 miles from the White House on Route 4.

spoil those pets, pet-care businesses are playing an increasingly important role in the lives of pet owners. Busy people rely on these professionals to look after their pets while they're away at work or on vacation. They turn to pet-care services for care they may not feel qualified to provide themselves, such as grooming and training. They also buy pet food and toys at specialty shops or online and turn to the internet to search for retailers far and wide that carry the things that will appeal to their little darling's palate or sense of fun.

It's not hard to figure out why pets are so pampered and integral to people's lives. They bring us joy, they love us unconditionally, and they even lower our blood pressure and give us a sense of well-being. They also fill the aching void left when children leave the nest or a spouse dies; for childless couples, a pet is "someone" on whom to lavish affection and gifts. Many people consider their pets their "kids," and even relate to them better than they do to people!

icans," says Bob Vetere, APPMA COO and managing director. "They have become a part of the family. Spending across all sectors, from pet food and veterinarian care to toys and treats, reflects what lengths we are willing to go to for our pets."

As a result of this desire to pamper and

It's A Zoo Out There

A lot of people think of dogs and cats when the subject of pet care comes up. But Americans keep any number of pets in their homes, and unless you're a dog trainer or pet groomer, you're likely to encounter some of these animals at one time or another. To illustrate, the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (APPMA) breaks down pet ownership in the United States as follows:

<u>Animal</u>	<u>Total in U.S.</u>
Cat	90.5 million
Dog	73.9 million
Other small animal	18.2 million
Bird	16.6 million
Reptile	11 million

In addition, the APPMA estimates there are 139 million freshwater fish and 9.6 million saltwater fish swimming around in tanks or ponds in or around U.S. homes.

Pet Businesses

This love of pets is also often the reason why people decide to start pet-care businesses. "We started our business with the intent to help animals and to point people in the right direction to help animals," says John Zambelli, owner of NaturesPet.com, an online pet-food business in Elmwood Park, New Jersey, that specializes in all-natural pet food. "By feeding pets properly, you give them a good shot at a healthful life. This type of business was the right thing to do for us, and we knew the money would follow."

In this book, we give you the advice you need to start one of five different types of pet-products and pet-service businesses that are in demand today: pet sitting/dog walking, dog training, pet grooming, pet-food sales and upscale pet products. Each of these businesses can be started as home-based enterprises with a fairly low financial investment. Two can be started as strictly internet businesses to really keep costs low. And all of them can be launched and run successfully by the owner, without any assistance from employees—at least until the time comes when you want to grow and expand the business beyond what you can personally handle.

The information and advice you'll find in this book relates strictly to the business side of running a pet-care business. In case you do happen to need instruction in the specialized skills necessary to groom cats and dogs or train them to be well-mannered, we've included contact information in the Appendix for a number of professional organizations and schools you can explore.

Read on for a look at the five types of pet-care businesses discussed in this book.

Pet Sitting/Dog Walking

If you are charmed by all things furred, feathered and finned, this is the profession for you. As a professional pet sitter, you will care for people's pets while they're away, either for the day or for longer periods of time

Bright Idea

When selling services like pet sitting, dog walking and in-home dog training to new clients, offer to provide a list of references, even if your business is bonded. Giving a key to and allowing a stranger (you) into their homes while they're away will make clients understandably nervous, and being able to check your references will put their minds at ease.



like during vacations or business trips. Pet sitters play with their charges, feed them, brush them, and possibly give them medication or injections. They often offer other services to make life easier for their customers, like cleaning up accidents and changing cat litter boxes, bringing in newspapers and mail, watering plants and taking out trash.

Dog walkers take pooches out for their daily constitutional one or more times a day, either individually or in small groups. In some cities across the United States, like New York, dog walking alone can be a booming business. But it's actually more common for dog walkers to offer additional services, including playing with and feeding pets, bringing in newspapers and mail, and turning lights on and off.

Both pet sitting and dog walking are still in their infancy as recognized professions. According to an industry expert, only 3 percent of households nationally use a pet sitter or dog walker. Even so, that adds up to 50 million to 60 million visits annually, according to the same source—and that number is on the rise. In fact, the outlook for pet sitters and dog walkers has never been better. Some estimates put the number of bonded and insured pet-sitter businesses

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nationwide at 10,000 (regrettably, there are no stats on the number of dog walkers).

Just a few decades ago, these two professions didn't even exist. Instead, people relied on neighbors to watch and water their pets while they were away on vacation, or they dropped them off at kennels. But all that changed in the '70s with a decrease in stay-at-home moms available to let the dog out or take the cat to the vet. Also, young couples began postponing their plans to have a family in favor of establishing their careers and often adopted pets to fill the void. Finally, an upsurge in business travel that started in the '80s and continues today also contributed to the need for the services of a pet-sitting or dog-walking professional.

The field is wide open, so now is a great time to jump in with both paws...uh, feet!

Dog Training

Part instruction, part psychology, the field of dog training requires great people skills as well as a love of canines. Dog trainers will tell you that you're not just training the pooches—you're also training the folks who live with them. So you have to be able to talk to them kindly, deal with them patiently

and reinforce their behavior—then do the same with their furry friends. While a background in psychology can be helpful, a true love of both people and pets and a desire to help them goes a long way to ensure success in this career.

People have been training dogs professionally for decades, although the training wasn't always done humanely. Prior to World War I, trainers used patience and rewards to school dogs. But with the war came the need for a lot of four-footed "soldiers" who could work in the trenches alongside human handlers. The military often used harsh techniques to train the animals they needed quickly—techniques that included choke chains, punishment and fear.

But in the '70s, a trainer who would become a legend began to teach people how to use kinder and gentler techniques to train animals. Barbara Woodhouse, an Irish dog trainer, believed there were no bad dogs, only inexperienced owners, and espoused the use of rewards and treats to train pets. Her 1982 book, *No Bad Dogs: The Woodhouse Way*, became a classic.

By the late '80s, there was a resurgence of a type of training that had been invented 30 years before. Largely due to the efforts of animal behaviorists Karen Pryor and Gary Wilkes, clicker training made a comeback. It uses a small mechanical device that serves as both a conditioned reinforcer and a signal that a reward is coming later. Although clicker training was initially ridiculed by trainers, "click and treat" training is now the standard in modern dog training, or as Wilkes says, "the first major improvement in dog training in about 15,000 years."

While there are no statistics on the number of dog trainers in the country because the profession is not licensed, the Association of Pet Dog Trainers has about 5,000 members. And with an estimated 74 million dogs in America, there's lots of room for good trainers to enter the field.



Fun Fact

The American Pet Products Manufacturers Association says the top six pet-industry trends for 2006 will be: new pet services (including pet sitting and pet butlers), advanced medical care for pets, animal assisted therapy, licensed pet products, private labeling for food and supplies, and mergers and acquisitions to acquire pet-care businesses.

The Scoop On Poop

It's dirty work, but someone's got to *do* it, and if that someone is you, there's the potential to really clean up—both literally and figuratively.

Pet-waste removal is one of the hottest homebased pet businesses around today. The investment is minimal—just the cost of a vehicle, a few cleanup tools (usually a rake and a dustpan), a closed-waste disposal system (for carting the waste away in your vehicle), some advertising and really good vision—but the returns can be great. Scooper services commonly charge as little as \$25 a month to clean up after one to three dogs and up to \$125 a month for twice-weekly services. Biweekly plans are also quite common in the industry and may cost \$40 to \$50 per month. Thus, an entrepreneur who has 100 biweekly customers at \$50 each would gross \$5,000 a month, or \$60,000 annually.

Spring and fall are the busiest months for pet-waste removal. In northern states, the optimal time to do business is April through November, when the ground isn't frozen or covered with snow that can impact your ability to locate waste. Although it's possible to soldier on during those months, many services suspend operations, then charge a spring cleanup fee (perhaps \$85 to \$100) to get the grounds back in shape for regular waste-removal services. A first cleanup for new customers also will fall into this price range.

Pet Grooming

From bathing and clipping to tying bows and cleaning ears, the nation's approximately 50,000 to 70,000 pet groomers do more than just change pets' appearance—they also make them feel better both physically and psychologically. The loving touch of a groomer can calm a skittish pet, reassure a frightened pet, and make a well-adjusted pet wriggle with pleasure. In addition, groomers are often the first to notice that a pet has a skin condition, ear mites or other medical issues that should be brought to the attention of a veterinarian.

In addition to having a true love of animals and enough physical strength to lift big boys and girls onto grooming tables and into tubs, groomers must be behaviorists who know how to handle biters and scratchers. They also need the same kind of patience and good humor when relating to pet owners, so a general love of hu-

mankind is a necessary trait for a groomer.

Of all the businesses discussed in this book, pet grooming is undoubtedly the oldest. While records of dog-grooming parlors date only to 19th century England, it's pretty apparent from paintings by the masters and others that dogs have been groomed for many centuries (the evidence can be found in 14th century paintings that depict what might be assumed to be coiffed pets sitting at the feet of their masters and mistresses). But it wasn't until the 1893 publication of the book *Ashmont's Kennel Secrets* that recommendations for washing and grooming were spelled out in detail.

Kennels started the modern trend toward grooming by washing and fluffing pets in their care so they could be returned fresh and sweet-smelling to their owners. When grooming tools like electric clippers and other modern supplies debuted in the late 1940s, the practice began to gain a foothold

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in mainstream America. But it wasn't until the explosion in pet ownership that occurred in the mid-1950s that grooming services became less of a luxury and more of a necessity. Since the '80s, there has been another boom in pet grooming, largely for the same reasons that pet sitting and dog walking have become so popular.

While many groomers choose to establish their businesses in a building, it's possible to do the work out of a salon set up in your home. (You can either have pet owners drop off their animals or you can pick them up yourself.) A third possibility is to set up a mobile business that brings the salon right to your customer's home. This type of business operates out of a specially outfitted van that has the same equipment and offers the same services as a site-based shop.

There are several companies that offer mobile turnkey franchises that can make it even easier to establish your business. They provide everything from specially equipped mobile vans to sales and marketing support. For the purposes of this book, we will assume you are planning to establish your own grooming business

rather than purchasing a franchise. But in case you'd like to explore the possibility, you'll find contact information for some mobile franchises in the Appendix.

Demand for pet groomers is expected to rise 12 percent by 2010, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Pet-groomer.com, the industry's largest internet resource, reports that career opportunities are nearly endless because there are more than 4,000 dogs and cats for every U.S. grooming business—making this a great time to be considering this field.

Pet Food/Treats

Whether it's brick-and-mortar or virtual, a pet store that specializes solely in pet food and treats can be a great moneymaker. Many pet owners today are willing to spend top dollar to buy the best of everything for their "fur children," including food and treats. Your challenge, then, is to find a niche, such as all-natural food products, and offer a wide assortment so you can position yourself as a leading provider of these items.

And you'll have plenty of products to choose from. There are all-natural (that is, human-grade) foods, specialty foods for diabetic pets or pets with kidney problems, and raw-food diets, as well as food for pet birds, livestock and exotic animals like snakes. There are even bakeries that specialize in making dog biscuits and other tasty treats. In addition, some pet-food stores choose to stock other pet-related products, like collars and leashes. Whether you should do so, too, depends on how much you can afford to sink into your inventory and how much room you have to stash the products until they're purchased or shipped out.

According to statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 15,890 pet and supply establishments in 2001 (the latest year for which data is available), with sole proprietorships numbering 7,945. The Census



Fun Fact

Americans keep all kinds of pets, from dogs, cats, birds, rabbits, hamsters, ferrets and guinea pigs to exotic animals like parrots, pot-bellied pigs, snakes, herps (amphibians like turtles and frogs), and iguanas. Although some people also harbor dangerous carnivores like tigers and cougars as pets, such ownership is discouraged or illegal in most states.

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Bureau doesn't capture information about how many of these establishments are internet-based, but you can be sure that no matter how many there were then, the number is growing now because an online store is such a cost-effective way to start a pet-food business. There's virtually no building overhead if you work out of your home, and it's possible to make arrangements with manufacturers to drop-ship product (that is, arrange shipping directly from the manufacturer to your customer) so you don't even have to store and ship the product yourself. All you need is a merchant account to accept credit card payments or a PayPal account, and you can ship products all over the world.

The cost to establish a site-based store obviously is higher, but it may be the right choice for some. By specializing in one type of product, you can keep the store fairly simple (basically, four walls with shelves). The key will be to find a good location and the right product mix, as well as a great staff to assist you when it comes to keeping the business running.

The pet-food industry has come a long way since the first processed food for dogs was invented in 1860 by James Spratt of Cincinnati, who was inspired to make biscuits when he observed canines gobbling up the hardtack discarded by sailors in seaports. His Spratt's Patent Meat Fibrine Dog Cakes were made of wheat, vegetables and other ingredients, and were quickly copied by other enterprising dog-food companies.

Prior to that time, pets in urban areas were fed scraps from their masters' tables, as well as raw meat. (In fact, people of great means and royalty often fed their pets specialty diets that were delicately seasoned to appeal to their finicky palates.) But a shift away from table food occurred during the lean years following the Depression when people needed less expensive ways to feed their animals. As a result, home diets began

Bright Idea

The pet industry is such a big business that there are ad agencies that specialize in animal product marketing, public relations and animal welfare promotion. Two to check out include Orca Communications Unlimited of Phoenix (www.orcacomunications.com) and Animal Voices of Davis, California (www.animalvoices.com).



to contain less meat and more grains and cereal, a trend that was replicated in the canned dog food that debuted in the 1940s. Dry dog-food pellets became available after World War II and consisted of either biscuit or crumbled biscuit (known as kibble). Then the Purina Co. took dry dog food to a new level in the 1950s when it invented a way to process dog-food pellets that were larger in size yet lighter in weight. This saved money for the manufacturer while giving the appearance that consumers were getting more food for their money.

In 1969, the pet-food industry did an about-face on the subject of all-meat diets. A researcher at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine said too much protein was harmful to dogs and recommended fortifying their diets with nutrients and carbohydrates. This ushered in the age of nutritionally complete diets, and since then, specialty diets for "patients" with kidney, heart and other diseases, as well as food for pets in various life stages, have become common and give pet-food shoppers a wide range of meal choices for their four-footed friends.

In recent years, there has been a lot of controversy about pet-food ingredients, with accusations that these ingredients are not

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wholesome and nutritious. For this reason, a number of companies now manufacture all-natural products, while others have duplicated the raw-food diets of yesteryear and market them as the ultimate in all-natural diets. In any event, pet food has come a long way, and you'll need to do some basic research to figure out exactly what your business niche should be.

Upscale Pet Products

The urge to splurge on pet clothes, toys and other goodies has been around for a while now. But ever since Hollywood starlets started carrying their pooches around in designer bags and tucking them in to sleep under silk comforters on custom-made beds (and getting press for doing so), the upscale pet-products industry has exploded. Doting owners can now adorn their pets with rhinestone tiaras, pearl collars and cashmere coats. They can wheel them around in luxury strollers or tuck them into glove-soft leather totes.

As with a pet-food business, it's possible to sell products to the public entirely through a website. But you could also sell exclusively to retail outlets like pet boutiques or pet stores. Or you can open your own retail location. If you establish a store and your product mix is truly exclusive and expensive, you'll probably be more successful if you open in a resort area, in or near an upscale neighborhood (can you say, "Rodeo Drive?"), or in an exclusive mall. The rent in the locations may be very pricey, but it will be worth it when you reach people with a lot of discretionary income and the desire to lavish it on their best friend(s). Some of these business owners choose to manufacture the products they sell, which you'll find out later isn't as difficult as it might seem. "Manufacturing gives you more control," says Exton, Pennsylvania, pet-product manufacturer Joyce Reavey. "I know I

Stat Fact

Thinking about taking your pet-products company online? That could mean big business. Americans spent \$66.5 billion online in a recent year, according to comScore Networks, a global information provider and consultancy—up 29 percent from the previous year. Nearly \$16 billion of that amount was attributable to holiday season sales.



won't run out of inventory, and I always know what the quality is like. That's important to me."

Meet The Experts

In addition to the in-depth business information and statistics contained in this book, you'll find a lot of comments and insight straight from the mouths of pet-care business owners who generously agreed to be interviewed for this project. They have commented on everything from advertising to financing, and plenty in between. They've also agreed to serve as a resource for you in the future if you ever are stumped by a particular situation or if you have specific questions that can only be answered by someone with field experience. You'll find their contact information in the Appendix. These pet-care business experts include:

● **Teoti Anderson:** The owner of Pawsitive Results LLC, a Lexington, South Carolina, dog-training business started in 2001, is also president of the Association of Pet Dog Trainers and an award-winning writer who has published three dog-training books.

● **Susan Benesh:** The owner of VIPoochy, a wholesale/retail distributor of upscale pet products founded in 2002 in Columbia, South

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Carolina, designs and manufactures the products she sells. In addition to her pet business, she also has an etiquette consulting business.

● **Jennifer Boniface ("Aunt Jeni"):** The owner of Aunt Jeni's Home Made in Temple Hills, Maryland, is a nutritionist and manufacturer of natural raw-food products for dogs. This multifaceted entrepreneur has a bachelor's degree in animal science and a master's degree in animal nutrition, which qualify her to do the formulation and design of the products she has manufactured since 1997.

● **Diane Burchard:** The owner of Teca Tu—a Paws-Worthy Emporium & Deli, an upscale pet-products store and wholesaler in Santa Fe, New Mexico, began as a wholesaler in 1989 who manufactured her own branded pet apparel, neckwear, bowls and treats, then gained retail experience via her previous 400-square-foot import business. Teca Tu was named the Upscale Pet Boutique of the Year by *Pet Products News* in 2002.

● **Jamie Damato:** The founder and training director of AnimalSense—Canine Behavior and Training in Oak Park, Illinois, holds a bachelor's degree with majors in psychology and communications and has extensive

experience working with animals. She founded and operated Out-U-Go Pet Care Services, a pet-sitting business, in 1996, then sold the business to David Lipschultz (see bio, below) before establishing her training business. She's a certified dog trainer and behavior consultant who has worked with more than 12,000 dogs and trained about 7,000. She discusses dogs on the airwaves as a frequent guest on "ABC 7 News Chicago."

● **Leonard Green:** The president of the Green Group, an entrepreneurial consulting firm in Woodbridge, New Jersey, founded the holistic pet-food company The Blue Buffalo Co. in 2002. Annual sales for this subsidiary—one of 14 companies under the Green Group—were a staggering \$6 million in 2004, thanks to landing a significant piece of business with PetSmart.

● **David Lipschultz:** The owner of Out-U-Go, an Oak Park, Illinois, pet-sitting business, also owns Urban Tailblazers, a Chicago-based dog-walking and pet-care service provider. Lipschultz bought Out-U-Go, from Jamie Damato (see bio, above) in 1996, then bought Urban Tailblazers in 2000 because the first company was running so well he needed a new challenge. He says he's always been a big animal person but did a number of different things, including managing a restaurant, before he fell into pet sitting as a profession. Now he can't imagine doing anything else.

● **Dan MacDonald:** The owner of Fantastic Dog and Cat Sitting Service in Seattle provides walking and sitting services, as well as overnight boarding for dogs. He's been in business since 1998 and holds a bachelor's degree in psychology, which he said helps when he screens and interviews clients.

● **Barbara Menutes:** The owner of Barbara's Cat Grooming in Houston has more than 12 years' experience grooming cats and dogs. She also has a long history of animal



Fun Fact

In the 1940s, Ed Lowe, inventor of Tidy Cat kitty litter, attended cat shows and cleaned hundreds of litter boxes every day in exchange for booth space to display his clay-based product. His first bags of cat litter, which he packaged by hand in 1947, were simple brown bags of clay with the words "Kitty Litter" written on them.

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care, having started as kennel help in a pet shop bathing puppies at age 16, then working her way up to bather and brusher before learning how to groom. Menutes specializes in grooming hard-to-handle animals.

● **Amanda Miller:** Miller is the co-owner of Poochie of Beverly Hills with her partner and mother, Cathy Jackson. Founded in 2001, the online company is based in Scottsdale, Arizona, and sells high-end pet beds to specialty boutiques, gift stores and furniture stores. Miller and Jackson design the beds, select fabrics and trims, and oversee production at the furniture manufacturer that produces their products. Miller holds an associate degree in manufacturing, while Jackson has a bachelor's degree in interior design.

● **Joyce Reavey:** The owner of Pawsitively Posh, a designer, manufacturer and online wholesaler of upscale pet beds and other products in Exton, Pennsylvania, is an award-winning doll and jewelry designer who started her pet business in 2004 after being laid off from a 20-year career in doll designing with Franklin Mint. She has tak-

en courses in fine arts and design over the course of her career and says her business is the perfect place to use both her design and management skills.

● **Jerry Wentz:** The owner of Homesitters of Raleigh, in Raleigh, North Carolina, since 1985 is also president of the board of directors of the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters and an arbitrator with the Eastern North Carolina Better Business Bureau.

● **John Zambelli:** The co-owner with his wife, Diane, of NaturesPet.com, an online pet-food business in Elmwood Park, New Jersey, has more than 30 years of experience in the retail and direct marketing industries. He established NaturesPet.com in 1996 as a part-time business when he discovered there weren't many holistic pet foods he could feed to his dog. After the company he was working with "turned into dust," as he puts it, he made a huge career shift and joined NaturesPet.com on a full-time basis.

So are you ready to make your mark on pet care? Then turn the page and let's get started.