

# Discover your canine calling

Want to escape the daily grind for a new career in the pet industry? Leanne Davies talks to three Aussie entrepreneurs and discovers you don't have to work like a dog to build a successful canine business

The pet industry is one of the biggest industries in Australia, turning over more than \$3.1 billion dollars a year and employing in excess of 37,000 people.

So if you want to launch your own career with pets, there are plenty of different professions to choose from. The biggest decision you'll have to make is what area you'd like specialise in.

Can you see yourself pounding the pavement each day as a dog walker, or would you rather delve into the area of pet psychology? Do you have skills in certain areas that you could utilise in various canine careers, or would you rather start from scratch?

Once you have a direction for your canine career, you can then put an action plan in place. Look at what training, if any, you need to launch your career and if you can afford all the tools required. If, for example, you'd like to be a groomer, it's a good idea to check out local TAFE and private courses that can teach you the skills of the trade. You may also want to volunteer at a local grooming parlour, veterinary hospital or animal shelter and learn some tips from the experts.

Some canine careers take more study and training than others, but each is rewarding in its own right. If you want to



be a veterinarian, you'll not only need high marks from school, you'll also need to devote at least four years to full-time study learning this complex profession. But when you are fully qualified, and saving canine lives, all the hard yakka makes it worthwhile.

Regardless of whether you want to be a pet photographer or volunteer shelter carer, the only thing you truly need is a passion for animals. If you have a love of dogs, it will make study and work seem less of a chore and it will give you the determination to fulfil your dreams.

This was the case for Jenny Brearley who set up Don't Fret Pet, a business that places dogs in loving homes while their owners are away. Jenny got the idea for her business when she moved from Melbourne to Sydney and couldn't find a sitter for her dog. She kenneled her pet on several occasions but fretted about them the whole time she was away. Jenny rationalised that if she was having these problems, then other pet people must be having them too, so she jumped at the chance to open a business that tapped into her passion for animals.

"I read that if you follow your passion, then all else will follow," she says. "And dogs are my passion so I decided to move out of computers to do something I loved."

The move was a successful one for Jenny and her business has gone from strength to strength in just over seven years. Jenny believes her success has come from the fact that she has moved into a largely untapped part of the pet industry.

"Many of our customers say they haven't taken a holiday in years because they wouldn't leave their dogs in a kennel," she says. "Using Don't Fret Pet, they feel they can go away knowing their dog is happy and being well looked after."



*Above and left: Matisse the Staffordshire Bull Terrier puppy helps owner Laura run an art gallery in Cronulla, New South Wales. (Picture: Leanne Davies)*

*Right: Jenny Brearley created her successful business Don't Fret Pet because she couldn't find a minder for her dog Sophie, and figured others were in the same predicament. (Picture: Don't Fret Pet)*

Jenny's business is geared towards customer satisfaction and Don't Fret Pet offers many services that other dog-minding facilities don't.

"The dogs get taken for walks and fun outings and they get to live with a loving family where they get lots of pats and cuddles," Jenny explains. "They also often get to stay with a compatible canine playmate," she adds.

Jenny says that by working hard and looking after her customers, she creates more business for herself.

"When customers pick up their dog after a holiday and see how happy it is in its holiday home, they will use us again and again," she says proudly.

"And depending on availability, they she now offers Don't Fret Pet franch make a good living from their animal



# Working with dogs

## Jobs with dogs

Pet groomer

Assistance dog trainer

Obedience trainer

Puppy trainer

Breeder

Search and rescue handler

Canine writer

Pet photographer

Animal welfare officer

Animal behaviourist

Veterinarian

Veterinary nurse

Boarding kennel operator

Pet minder

Pet walker

Customs officer

Police dog handler

## Why a job with dogs?

>> Dogs aren't fussed about your academic credentials, they are more interested in your ball playing and patting skills.

>> If you're having a bad day, you've got furry, four-legged stress relief at your feet.

>> A dog won't make you stay back late at the office.

>> Dogs work for a tasty treat or cuddle, keeping overheads low.

>> Dogs don't notice if you're having a bad hair day or wearing mismatched socks.

>> Dogs can be a lot more entertaining than human work colleagues.

>> A dog won't steal your stationery.

>> Dogs won't drink the last drop of milk and place the empty carton back in the staff fridge.



**Above:** Judy Cox from Don't Fret Pet in Brisbane has made a great success of her franchise, thanks to her passion for dogs and enthusiasm for customer service. (Picture: Don't Fret Pet)

**Below:** Martin Hopp from Pets in Peace changed careers from the human to pet funeral business after losing his German Shepherd Dog. He says his job is a rewarding one as he can help pet owners overcome the grief of losing a much loved pet.

(Picture: Pets in Peace)

passions. One franchisee, Judy Cox, joined Don't Fret Pet after reading about Jenny in *Dogs Life* magazine. And although Jenny wasn't quite ready to expand into Queensland, she couldn't go past Judy's enthusiasm and passion for dogs. Her instincts proved correct and Judy has made a real go of it.

"Judy started her Brisbane franchise from scratch as no one up there had heard of our concept of dog minding," Jenny explains. "So Judy had to educate the dog-owning public about our alternative to boarding kennels."

But by buying a franchise, Judy didn't have to work out how to go about doing things; she just followed the procedures already set down by Jenny, which saved her both time and money. It gave her the opportunity to put her energies into building a solid customer base and now, after only a year, her business is also a success.

Fellow Queenslander Martin Hopp also runs a successful pet business, but his work begins when a family says goodbye to a much loved pet. Martin is a funeral director and runs Pets in Peace, a service that offers owners the chance to give their pet a

proper and dignified send-off.

Martin, who spent years running one of Australia's largest and best-known funeral homes, decided to start the business after losing his own pet, a German Shepherd Dog, to arthritis.

"We looked into a pet funeral for him and were disturbed by the lack of sensitivity we were given during our inquiries," says Martin. "They asked us how heavy the dog was, and quoted us a price by the kilo, as if our precious mate was just a piece of meat," he recalls sadly.

Martin gathered together family and friends with experience in the funeral industry and set about creating a pet funeral parlour that offered customers sensitivity and a chance to grieve for their loved ones. Martin believes his pet business is so successful because he and his staff are there for the customers, day or night, to help them deal with their grief.

"I remember one lady who rang us in a distraught state at about eight in the morning because her dog had passed away," recalls Martin.

"She had no family and had lost her husband a few years earlier and the dog