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“...could you be doing more to promote your experience and services to potential clients?”

## A Picture's Worth a Thousand Words— So, What's the Value of a Video?

**A**s a professional pet sitter and small-business owner, you must always look for ways to differentiate your company from the competition to attract new clients. On top of this, you need to continually focus on providing your current clients with better-than-expected service to keep them satisfied and loyal. This combination of effective client recruitment and retention is the key to a successful business.

Perhaps you are already off to a good start. PSI membership? Check. Insured and bonded? Check. Accredited? Check. Professional logo, Web site and marketing materials? Check.

But, could you be doing *more* to promote your experience and services to potential clients? What additional perks could you offer to truly “wow” current clients? It may be time to pull out your smart phone or video camera.

### Lights. Camera. Action!

Have you uploaded a video about your pet-sitting service to YouTube or added a promotional video to your Web site? If you have not considered creating and using video for your pet-sitting business, it's time to take a closer look at this option. There's no question that consumers—including pet-sitting clients—are turning to the Internet more and more for information on businesses and services such as pet sitting. With so much online content, service providers like you must put forth an effort to make your online content stand out—and using video can give your business a competitive advantage.

Think about different Web sites you have visited. Didn't those sites with video seem much more interactive? Isn't it easier and more appealing to actually see and hear someone provide you with information instead of your just reading it? Your current and potential clients feel the same way!

**How can you put video to use for your pet-sitting business? Consider these ideas:**

### Introduce yourself ... on camera.

As the saying goes, you never get a second chance to make a first impression. With today's technology, a potential client's first impression of you typically occurs not at the initial consultation, but on your Web site. A brief video introducing yourself and inviting the pet owner to learn more about your services is an impactful introduction.

### Shoot video of your clients' pets and e-mail or text it to them when they are away.

Your daily notes give your clients day-by-day details when they are away, but imagine the extra reassurance you can provide by simply texting or e-mailing your clients with a short video of their happy pets.

### Answer pet-sitting client Frequently Asked Questions.

What questions do you get asked most often by pet owners? Do you have special expertise in a specific area of pet care? Answer these questions and upload the videos to your business' Facebook page, YouTube channel or Web site.

**Interview one of your most loyal clients.** It's a fact that third-party endorsements are the best advertisement for your business. Your clients love you, so why not ask a long-term client to give a brief on-camera testimonial for your pet-sitting service? Again, upload this content to Facebook, YouTube or your Web site.

**Thank your current clients "face-to-face."** After the initial consultation, there are likely some clients that you never see—but without them your business would not grow. Record a brief video thank you to clients and include the video in your next electronic communication to clients, such as a newsletter or special holiday e-mail.

Perhaps the idea of creating a video just seems difficult and time-consuming. Have no fear—smart phones and easy-to-use flip cameras have made creating videos easier than ever.

In his article, "Five Super Easy Ways to Promote Your Business with Video," Rohit Bhargava, author of the *Influential Marketing* blog, lists the three basic rules of using online video:

1. Get an easy upload camera, like a Flip Cam.
2. Shoot exactly what you want, so you don't need to edit anything.
3. Make sure you get close enough for good sound.

Cara Armour, owner of Active Paws and PSI's reigning *Pet Sitter of the Year*, regularly uploads videos of clients' pets to YouTube and Facebook and has found that clients love having the opportunity to visit Active Paws Facebook page while they are at work to see the videos.

Other PSI members receive this same positive response from clients:

"We do this all the time. We made a video about our services and we frequently do videos for customers

showing their pets while they are away. Our customers love it! They share it with their friends and family and it helps them with their separation anxiety as well." — Ann Wesley, Bloomington Pet Pals, PSI member since 2005.

"I had a client who was away with family for the whole summer and I would go in during the day to check on the dogs when the husband was at work. I texted her a video of the dogs playing in the backyard and she really loved watching it and being able to show her young daughter. I have posted videos on Facebook as well but I've found that people really love getting texts while they're away!" — Melissa Germano, Long Island Pet Nanny, PSI member since 2008.

#### **More Tips for Video Success**

Video can be a great source of low-cost PR for your business and an additional way to engage your clients and increase client satisfaction—but you need to have a plan in place before you begin to create and upload videos.

If you are not comfortable being on camera, start by shooting and sharing video of your clients' pets. Be respectful of your clients' privacy and only e-mail or text the video directly to the pet's owner. If you would like to upload the videos to YouTube or Facebook, just make sure you have your clients' permission. Consider adding this question to your contract or discuss it at the initial consultation. Most clients will love the opportunity to receive video and have it shared with others!

Ready to be on camera? Whether you are describing the services you offer or providing tips for convincing a cat to swallow a pill, your voice and body language should be casual and personable. Write a script for your video in advance and practice until you feel comfortable presenting the information in a relaxed way.

Your video should have a clear beginning, middle and end—but also be very succinct. Videos should be no longer than three minutes. In fact, a video that is 90 seconds to two minutes will be more effective. While your videos are not expected to be of professional quality, you should pay special attention to your lighting and sound. Inconsistencies in lighting and sound can distract viewers from your message.

To maximize the full potential of your video content, use cross-promotion to share your videos. If you are using video to reach potential pet-owning clients online, don't rely on just one Web site. If you upload videos to YouTube, be sure to also promote your videos through your business Web site, electronic newsletter, Facebook and other social media sites you may use. Take advantage of the functionality offered through various sites. YouTube, for example, enables you to add your business Web address and keywords in the video tags, description and title—an easy way to increase your business' online presence and popularity in search results.

As with any marketing and public relations strategy, there is no "one size fits all" plan for incorporating video in your pet-sitting promotions or client offerings. However, when done well, using video can benefit any pet-sitting service, regardless of your size or location. So, take a close look at your business goals, create a strategy for using video content to help achieve these goals and then get your camera ready!

Are you already using video to promote your pet-sitting business online? Do you have a YouTube channel for your pet-sitting service or a video library on your business Web site? Let me know how you've incorporated video into your marketing and public relations plan. E-mail [beth@petsit.com](mailto:beth@petsit.com). ■