



Ask SCORE for Business Advice

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Pets Needed by Tina Dettman-Bielefeldt

Troy Pahnke and Hannah Witek need your business. Specifically, they need your cats and dogs and horses and whatever other pets you have. They’ve done their research, and their business, AWOL Pet Sitting Services, is open. They have everything in place, and professionally organized, but the business hasn’t yet taken off.

Pahnke and Witek decided to open a pet service because they love pets. Research posted by the American Pet Products Manufacturer’s Association reports that 34% of U.S. households own cats, while 39% own dogs. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics expects to see a 22% rise in “animal caretakers” between 2000 and 2010. The business idea seemed like a natural. They are passionate about caring for pets, and pet ownership is experiencing rapid growth.

“After we came up with the idea, we went out and did some market research to determine what group of people would be interested in this type of service,” Pahnke explained. “After we felt we had the green light in that sense, we started brainstorming about name and logo and everything in the public eye of the business.”

They joined a few pet-sitting organizations and received accreditation through Pet-Sitters International. They got trained in pet first-aid through the American Red Cross. After that, they got insured, set policies, developed a web site, and started marketing.

“Because we know that pets have a wide variety of needs, and owners have a wide variety of requests, we offer a wide range of service to help you keep your home and pet looking and feeling great when you’re gone,” the website states. Pahnke and Witek promote flexible schedules, year-round availability, in-home care so owners don’t have to transport pets, and a long list of services.

Marketing has been continuous. Pahnke said, “We’ve posted flyers everywhere they would permit us, handed out boxes of brochures to local businesses, and worked to get our website on every search engine imaginable, as high in the rankings as possible.”

Pahnke envisions the business growing. “My ultimate vision is to have a dog-training facility and doggy day-care facility in addition to the original pet-sitting services we offer,” he noted.

But first, Pahnke and Witek need your pets. They want to show pet owners the type of care they can provide. “I absolutely love all animals, and I love to see them happy and playing. My business reflects this by situating me to be able to enjoy every type of animal possible,” stated Pahnke.

In meetings with SCORE, counselors liked the business concept and execution. Now, we’d like your thoughts. We invite you to check out their website, www.awolpetsitting.com, and go to “Contact Us” to post your comments. What do you like or dislike about the concept and, more importantly, what can they do to get your business?

If you have business questions, contact the Green Bay Chapter of SCORE. Visit www.greenbayscore.org or call Cindy Gokey at 920-496-8930 for information.

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