



How to begin your dog training business

Congratulations on finishing the ISCDT certification course!

Now that you have finished your online certification, we recommend that your first step be to get some hands-on experience any way you can. You can get this by volunteering at a local shelter or start offering to help friends and family that have a new puppy or dog with bad manners. ISCDT recommends staying away from the tougher cases at first, such as resource guarding or human aggression until you are more experienced. There are also many rescue groups that you can volunteer your time with. ISCDT also offers a hands-on training program if you are in the Long Island, NY area.

Setting up your business

To get started, you need to choose your business name. You can either come up with your own, or hire someone to come up with ideas. There is a website, www.fivver.com that has many freelancers available that can create a name for you for a very low fee.

After you have chosen a name you will need to set up your company with your state. Each state has different rules, so please check with your state and county to get the exact steps.

Here are the steps to take in Nassau County in NY. This can be used as an example of what the process may be like.

To file your business name and create a sole proprietorship with the state of NY, you begin by going to the county clerk and filling out a one-page form and paying a small fee. This allows you to go ahead and start doing business in your county as a sole proprietor. This is the most inexpensive way to get started immediately.

Note: If you conduct business under your name and not a business name, you don't need to do this at all, you can just use your name.

Now that you have applied with the state to create your company, you need to contact your state Department of Taxation and Finance. You need to find out if you are required to charge sales tax on your services.

In New York, dog training is taxable and you must charge it and then pay sales tax quarterly. If you plan to sell products to your clients, you will most likely need to charge sales tax as well.

Either way you will need to obtain Federal Tax ID Number is known as the [Employer Identification Number](#) (EIN). Sole proprietorships, partnerships, limited liability companies, and corporations, (including "S" corporations and non-profit corporations) must have a Federal Tax ID Number. The quickest and easiest way to get a form is online. Download the [Form SS-4](#).



Marketing

After you've set up your business with the state, the best thing to do is get a unique logo that you can use on all of your marketing promotional items. If you need a logo designed you can go to sites like Fivver.com and you can get one designed for \$5. They usually come out great. Other ways to find cost effective logo creation would be craigslist.com.

Next step is to get some business cards printed (you can get these printed inexpensively online at sites like Vistaprint.com).

Now that you have a logo and some biz cards, you need a website.

Online Marketing

Once you establish yourself online, business will begin to come in more regularly. There is no greater marketing tool than the internet. You can make your own site online at low cost or you can hire a company to design one for you which. Hiring a business is costlier, but worth it. I went the route of hiring someone to design my site. I wanted something professional and not cookie cutter. The other reason I hired someone is so that I can create a domain name of my own. Sites like weebly.com that allow you to create your own site, will give you a web address that also includes their name in it. That will not help to get you listing higher up in google. If you are seriously making a career out of this, you have to please google.

Okay, so now you have set up your website. It is not going to get traffic all on its own. Rankings on search engines requires some work. I hired someone to do this for me, because I am not as computer savvy as I need to be to do this right. I hired a company to do Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for my biz. This service is all about getting you to rank high up on sites like Google and Bing. If you hire someone, make sure they are experienced and will give you reports on a monthly basis showing your progress. I went through three companies before finding the right one that takes time and care and truly watches my site and makes constant improvements to please google. This will be your biggest expense in the beginning, but well worth it.

The next key is Google reviews. Google reviews can make or break you. It's sad that this is the case, but it is. You should ask your clients to give a google review at the end of your program if they are happy. I created a document that gives exact instructions on how to give a google review. Not everybody is into writing reviews, but if they loved your service and you show them how to write one, they will do it. I used to ask for Yelp reviews as well, but Yelp's system will actually block reviews if they are not an avid yelp user. Many of my great reviews got blocked so I stopped focusing on them. I completely focus on Google reviews. I respond to every google review with a quick thank you. This is FREE marketing and by far the most effective.

There are also websites that are designed for advertising such as craigslist.com. You can create an ad on Craig's list for free. It will get your name out there and people often check craigs list when searching for a service-based business.



Traditional Marketing

Now that you have established your company, you can begin advertising locally. The best strategy to get started is to go to veterinarian offices and local groomers. Most likely you will not get to see the doctor, but will be working with reception. Always be polite and friendly and give business cards to them. I recommend developing a letter (see attached) that introduces yourself and tells about your experience. The letter should also offer some free lessons to any one of the practice's veterinarians. If you want people to refer you, you have to prove yourself and this is the best way to get in the door. You could also offer free training to vet techs or other staff, but a lot of times they have a high turnover and you will lose your contact. Or, it could work in your favor, if they go to another vet and you have an established relationship. In the beginning, it may be best to offer free training to anyone that works in the practice. As you get more established you can extend the offer to veterinarians only. If you are dealing with the receptionist, give them the letter as well as some business cards and a gift. I used to buy treat jars and put my logo sticker on them and add some dog treats to the jar to give to them. I would go back months later and the treat jar was still on the counter. They always need treat jars, so it will work out well. You could also bring doughnuts with you, but that is not as permanent as the treat jars. Make sure to stick your logo somewhere on the jar.

Next step is to create flyers to hang up in local supermarkets and train stations. They will often have corkboards where you can hang a flier. Make sure you develop a flier that has ripped off tabs on the bottom so people can rip them off if they want to quickly grab your contact information.

Go to local pet stores and meet the owner if you can. Give cards to them as well. It's a good idea to buy a bunch of plastic business card holders and tape one of your business cards to the back of it. Then when you go to a shop you will be able to leave the business card holder with some cards in it. Should the cards run out before you get a chance to replenish at least your card will still show.

All of these ideas are ongoing marketing campaigns for your business, not a one-time thing. You will need to keep going to these locations to make sure they still have cards or that your flier is still visible with tabs and that they remember and get to know you. You need to make a name for yourself. I also had pens printed in the beginning of my business so that I could leave them places. Vets always need pens and are happy to leave them out for clients too.

Contracts

As with any business, you want to protect yourself. It is necessary to consult with a lawyer to create terms for your programs. We have tablets with us at our evaluations and have clients read through the contract on an application called Sign Easy. There are plenty of apps now that you can choose from if you are going to keep electronic records. You can use paper, of course, if you prefer. The client must sign at the evaluation before moving forward. Important pieces of the contract are the cancellation policy and the fact that they must agree to practice. Attached is a sample of our contract.

Pricing



Developing pricing for your services varies by location. What we are going to cover is not what you should charge, but how you should charge. There are two options:

1. clients pay as you go.
2. sell programs or packages.

The advantages of paying as they go is that most clients will sign up if they know there is no commitment. The downside is that since there is no commitment it is likely that you will lose many clients after the first or second lesson. Dog training takes work. It's like exercise and that is why they ask for a long-term commitment at most gyms. It is the same concept in dog training. You need to get a commitment so that you can turn around well-trained dogs and build a great reputation.

The other option is to charge for programs. You should develop a program that consists of a certain amount of lessons, certain commands or behavior modification and whatever equipment or add-ons you want. Some trainers offer unlimited help for the life of the pet in their programs, others offer free group classes for the life of the dog, we offer equipment included. Get creative when creating your programs, and make sure to check out your local competitors' websites to see what they are offering.

Payment

The best is to have clients pay in advance of starting the package with you. This gets commitment and you will be sure to get paid. We take a deposit at the evaluation to hold the first lesson and then the balance is collected at the end of that lesson. Payment in advance will help avoid frequent cancellations as will having a cancellation policy in your contract. We have a cancellation policy in place that states the client must give 24 hours' notice to cancel with no fee. This would be very difficult to enforce if you do not get payment in advance.

After you have had enough hands-on training and you feel you are ready to begin training, you need to prepare for that first call or email.

Evaluation

At Sublime K9 Dog Training, we offer a free evaluation. I would recommend this in the beginning of your business, but you may want to change it as you get established. Some trainers will charge a fee for the evaluation if the client does not sign up. If they sign, they waive the fee. Some trainers don't offer an evaluation and simply charge for the first visit. This is up to you and should be based on what other local trainers are doing to be sure you are competitive.

Prior to the evaluation, we suggest creating a recommendation form. This form will be given to the client at the end of the evaluation and will give them pricing, what your training program consists of and any included equipment. Be sure to put your contact information on this form, as it is often the document they hang up on the fridge when you leave, so be sure it includes your phone number as well as your website and logo.

We suggest including the following information of the recommendation form:

1. Company logo
2. Company name and contact information



3. Your Program options (must state what commands or behaviors you will teach during the program)
4. Cost of the program you recommend for them
5. Any items that will be included (we include training collars to our clients)
6. What the commitment is on their part (ex. Client must practice 30 minutes per day)

You also need to prepare a list of questions to ask owners at the evaluation. Our trainers bring a tablet to each evaluation and take notes into our software. Until your business grows, you can simply use the notes app on your phone or use paper.

You want to be sure to ask the following questions:

- 1) How old is your dog?
- 2) Does your dog have any health problems?
- 3) Is your dog up to date on vaccines?
- 4) Is your dog spayed or neutered?
- 5) You have owned your dog since he was what age?
- 6) Where did you get your dog?
- 7) How many people live in your household?
- 8) What are the ages of your children?
- 9) Any other pets?
- 10) Where does your dog sleep at night?
- 11) Where is your dog when no one is home?
- 12) How much education has your dog had thus far?
- 13) What commands does your dog know?
- 14) Do you have a fenced in yard?
- 15) Is your dog allowed on the furniture?
- 16) Does your dog exhibit any of the following behaviors?
 - a. Excessive barking
 - b. Jumping on people
 - c. Digging
 - d. Urinating or defecating in the house
 - e. Pulling on leash
 - f. Reactive towards other dogs or people when on leash?
 - g. Aggression toward other dogs
 - h. Food or toy possessiveness
 - i. People aggression
 - j. Chasing cars or other moving objects
 - k. Chewing on furniture or other items
 - l. Stealing things such as remote controls, tissues or toilet paper)
 - m. Play biting or nipping
 - n. Bolting out the front door or running away



o. Overly fearful of anything

17) Is there anything I didn't ask about that you want to add?

18) What are your top three goals for this training program?

After going through this list of questions with your prospective client, you will have a very good understanding of what is going on and why they called you.

You can work with the dog a little, but we recommend not divulging too much information or working intensely with the dog at this point. Our evaluation is free, so we are careful to focus on our questions and just fact finding so as to be sure the client signs up before we actually train the dog. Now you can fill out your recommendation form and give it to the client. Then ask, "when do you want to start?" and schedule your first visit.

What to Bring

Always arrive at your visits prepared. Plan your lesson ahead of time, so that you are less nervous. We recommend practicing your lesson with a friend or family member so you can be sure the lesson flows well. When you are ready for your first lesson, you need to bring a tool kit. We recommend the following items be brought to every lesson that you do:

- 1) Your own 6' leash (leather preferred) (nothing like working with your own leash that fits perfectly in your grip)
- 2) 20' lead for working dogs at longer distances
- 3) Treat pouch
- 4) Small training treats (can use kibble too)
- 5) Squeaky tennis balls 2 small and 2 large (for drop it game)
- 6) Flirt pole
- 7) Business cards
- 8) Business magnets
- 9) Pens
- 10) Documents: Homework sheet, evaluation forms, housebreaking instructions, puppy document
- 11) Pet corrector or doggie don't device
- 12) Collars to show at evaluation if needed (we keep a martingale, prong and e-collar in our bags)
- 13) Bitter apple spray
- 14) Credit card processor (like Square, if you are taking credit cards)

You are ready to go! After completing the CDT course and reading this starter kit all you need to do is get out there and get some clients. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.