



# THE DOG GUIDE

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## Interview with PhilaPets Pet Care

DogGuide.Net - by Daniel Stein

The Dog Guide was fortunate enough to sit down with PhilaPets owners Deirdre and Zeth Weissman for a delightful interview. PhilaPets is a wildly successful pet care company in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Just read this interview and you'll know why! Enjoy.

### **How did you first come up with the idea of starting a pet care company?**

PhilaPets.com was started in January of 2004 by Deirdre Weissman as a way to make money before starting vet school. She didn't want to get an office job, so Deirdre would just go to the dog park and ask people if they needed a dog walker. She got 5 clients, then 10, and then 15. It got to be a lot for her to do on her own so she hired someone to help, then another and another.

We were in the right place at the right time and we were able to offer a top-notch service that a lot of people really needed. It just kept going from there.

### **What was involved in the process of start up? Was it more or less work and/or expense than you had figured it would be when you came up with the idea?**

We were lucky in that both Deirdre and I are Web developers. Our Web site was the thing that really legitimized us in the eyes of our clients. It was essentially our storefront and our experience allowed us to make it very professional looking. So for us, the startup costs were pretty low. We just paid for liability insurance, bonding, a laser printer, and membership to some trade organizations.

Because we had little to no money when we started out, we had to think of ways to be smart about our spending and to spend the little money we had in the right places (basically lawyers, accountants, and insurance). We have been lucky in that we have never needed to take out a loan and we have never had a non-profitable month. That is pretty unique for any business.

### **What sets PhilaPets apart from other pet care companies?**

I think that we have a few unique qualities that separate us from the other pet sitting companies in the area.

First of all, I think a lot of our success is due to the quality of our Pet Care Specialists. We are extremely picky about who we hire and have a rigorous interviewing process. We hire only people who take pet care seriously and we always do background checks. I can truly say that our group of Pet Care Specialists will care for others' pets as they do their own.

We also have our staff set up so that we can handle emergencies without having to worry our clients or compromise the care of the pets we care for. We have backup Pet Care Specialists in case

In addition, we hire a lot of vet techs and vet students. That really gives us a huge advantage in caring for sick or elderly pets. In most cases, our staff already knows the animals from the vet office, we know their medical history, and can help out with administering medication or any special care needs. We also have the expertise to recognize signs of illness and to seek medical attention when warranted.

### **What are things that dog owners should look for when they are selecting a pet care company?**

First and foremost you should select someone that you feel good about and can trust. Be sure that you have the opportunity to meet the sitter first so that you can see how they interact with your pet and if your pet seems to like them. Pets can be picky and it can be any number of things. Tall people, short people, men, women, my dog doesn't like pregnant women. Not sure why, but she just doesn't care for them and will just bark constantly.

You should also ensure that they are detail-oriented, organized, and professional. If they don't boast organizational skills (they are flustered when they arrive or forget paperwork, etc.) then you should worry about whether they are organized enough to ensure they see your pets. Professionalism is key, as this is the life of your pet that you are putting in someone else's hands. If they don't take their job seriously, you can't be assured that they will give your pets the care they deserve. They should come to the orientation visit prepared and ask you detailed questions about your pet's care. It is the details that truly make the difference for you and your pet.

The next thing to check is to be sure they are insured and bonded. Again, it's important to ensure that your sitter is serious about their profession. It costs money to take this step, but it also shows dedication to their career choice. Not to mention the ability to file a claim in case something should accidentally happen.

### **What issues do your Pet Sitters have to deal with when interacting with a client's dog(s)?**

Dogs are all different and can have a variety of issues. Dogs can have anxiety issues, leash / food / toy aggression, or even bite histories. We try to help out potential clients with these issues by creating a plan with the owner to slowly build-up a trusting and respectful relationship between the dog and the sitter. If a dog is in our care, we have to be 100% confident that we are in control of him / her. This also goes back to hiring the right people. Because of the detailed information our staff gathers from the client and the relationship we form with each dog, we know what may set a dog off. We avoid those situations while walking that dog. There are rare cases that we do not feel comfortable handling a dog. We always refer these cases to animal

someone gets sick or is unable to make a visit. We have managers in place to make sure that everything is set up and runs smoothly. We also have an emergency system in place so we are prepared for any problem that occurs.

behaviorists who have more experience with solving aggressive or anxious behaviors.