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# Is a Pet Value Offering Right for You?

By Coleen Ellis

Are you still trying to decide if this addition to your service offerings is right for you? Still confused as to the benefits and the pitfalls? Here are a few thoughts.

Why **should** you consider adding this sort of service to your existing business operation? Pet ownership is still growing by leaps and bounds, according to the American Pet Products Association. In 2020 over 67% of the U.S. population now owns a pet with expenditures expected to hit an all-time high of \$99B (yes, that's BILLION!). Pet "friendliness," be that as simple as integrating the fact many consumers enjoy the companionship of their pets while they visit your place of business, or offering a service line extension that includes pets, has become a differentiator in many business segments.

For instance, landlords are saying they not only need to permit pets, but they also need to even encourage pets in their units as they market to younger renters. The odds are high that a Millennial has a pet, maybe two! (45% of pet owners own more than one pet, by the way.) Businesses like Ralph Lauren clothing stores have dog walkers on staff, encouraging their shoppers to bring Fluffy shopping with them, to be pampered and cared for as Mommy spoils herself with a bit of retail therapy. Fairmont Hotels are not only pet-friendly on their properties, they complement the welcome packet of a pet parent traveling with a four-legged companion with a pet-menu of services and treats. They also have pets on staff! Dogs that can be scheduled for a quick walk around town, for a run in the local park, or possibly just to get a fix of petting a dog in the privacy of one's own room, curled up by the TV, just like home! Of course, that's what Fairmont wants experientially.

**What does the market look like?** As I mentioned previously, 67% of Americans own a pet; and 83% of them identify themselves as pet parents, not pet owners.

Baby boomers began empty-nesting roughly 15 years ago and pets became their new children. This explained a lot about the launch of: doggie spas, boutique doggie bakeries, doggie facials, and doggie daycares with suites complete with TV's and nanny-cams for these



over-protective and over-indulgent pet parents. The Boomer's children, the Millennials, oftentimes wait to have children. They also decided pets would be their children. In fact, Millennial couple surveys point to pets essentially constituting a "trial-run" before having kids. This also helped escalate the pet industry, with more businesses and services that treat those pets just like children.

**Key watch-out – everyone in your organization MUST support the program if you opt to offer a pet value offering.** Handling deceased pets just like you would handle a human loss, with the same amount of dignity, respect, and care, will be vital. The landmine is when one person within your enterprise doesn't understand or respect pet loss and grief, creating brand damage will be off-the-charts. The bottom line for this program is to handle pet parents because you truly WANT to service this segment. The profit margins are much smaller compared to handling a human family, however this can be a wonderful opportunity to expose the members in your community to your services by assisting with their four-legged family members, demonstrating the high level of care your company should be known for.

Pet parents have become very picky in how their precious loves are treated. Anthropomorphism is rampant with this segment of the population, meaning the assigning of human characteristics to non-human things. Attend any pet expo and you will see animals dressed up, being pushed around in baby buggies, and talked to, or more-than-likely reprimanded, like small children at a social outing. Therefore, they WANT the

same level of care as they would receive for a human loved one.

Here are a variety of business questions and ideas as you consider offering pet loss services to your existing operation. If you are already offering pet loss services, here are some ideas for changes, additions, or marketing avenues to consider:

- What type of business model makes the most sense for you: B2B, B2C, or B2B2C?
  - B2B: offering services from business to veterinary clinics, which will require a sales team, vehicles to make routes to the clinics, quantity supply of cadaver bags for the clinics, and a wholesale pricing structure.
  - B2C: offering pet loss service from business to consumer, and marketing pet loss services directly to families. This should require those client-facing types of services and the physical set up of the facility to aid in a client experience much like a human funeral home or cemetery.
  - B2B2C: offering pet loss services from business to business to client. This type of a model would have a wholesale pricing strategy for veterinary partners as well as a different value offering for direct clients.
- Hours of operation.
- Physical layout. Create a designated pet area within your funeral home that is respectable and leaves an impression with a family that your firm truly cares about their loss. Appoint the area so that it's respectful for a family as they hold their visitation or service honoring their pet and is a place where families would be proud to bring their beloved pet.
- Preneed integration. Handling pets is also a preneed advantage. Get the preneed team members proactively trained to look for pets in the homes to leave behind a brochure on your services or a pet Guide To Planning Ahead. GREAT lead generation!
- Removal standards. Handle every aspect of the care of the pet with the same amount of care for a human loved one. For B2C operations, consider using a respectful little casket for the removal, with the pet wrapped in a blanket and being treated with an amazing level of care. If you are operating a B2B business model, create branded cadaver bags which are more respectful than a black plastic trash-like bag.

- Marketing collateral. Quality pet specific brochures and print pieces.

The tactical marketing opportunities when offering pet loss services are abundant! Here are a few for you to consider as you are evaluating these types of services:

- Pet Loss Support Groups. Specific to a pet lover and speaks to the experience of pet loss in a safe and non-judgmental environment.
- Holiday Pet Remembrance Ceremony. If you're already doing a memorial program at the holidays, add a pet specific event.
- If you Own a Cemetery. Partner with a local shelter or rescue organization in facilitating a charity dog walk through your park. Doggie waste bags and water bottles with your logo will have "sticking power," not to mention your park being associated with such a wonderful philanthropic event.
- National Pet Memorial Day. The second Sunday of September. Partner with your local ministers to host a memorial ceremony in your parking lot or chapel.
- Consider doing a bubble release, having an area where children can create their own memory box, have families bring their living pets and have a station where clay paw prints can be done, and create a memory wall of paper or fabric where families can put their pet's name.
- Before the Pet Memorial Day ceremony. Have families send photos of their pets and create a memorial tribute video. It's a great way to add names and their contact information to your data base for future follow ups.
- Extend your services to the local K9 team, SAR (search and rescue) organizations, and therapy dog groups. Honor the work they do. August 10th is International Assistance Dog Week. In honor of the service they gave, or are giving, and the work they do to serve us daily, create a ceremony to say thank you.
- Feast of St. Francis. It's October 4th, St. Francis, the patron saint of the lowly and animals. Throughout the month of October, many organizations will host Pet Blessings. Host your own at your facility.
- Partner with a local attorney. Share the nuances of pet trusts and allow families to complete their own Guide to Planning Ahead, for themselves

AND their beloved pet. Have your preneed team there to schedule appointments to help the humans with their wishes, as well as their wishes for the pet. (Download a Pet Guide To Planning Ahead here: <https://twoheartspetlosscenter.com/brochures-pet-loss-care-journal/>)

- Cross Market to Your Families. After you decide to host some of the above events, or have those resources available, let your current families know. A powerful marketing message to let people know you now have support for any type of loss they're experiencing. Message your current client base, strategically place an ad in a local pet publication, share on your social sites, as well as your website and hang flyers where pet people hang out!

For those offering amazing and respectful end-of-life services, thank you! For those whose family members do come with paws and fur, all we want is a memorable end to a beautiful life shared!


*In 2004, the death of her dog, Mico, guided Coleen Ellis to start Pet Angel Memorial Center. In 2009 Coleen founded Two Hearts Pet Loss Center, assisting*

*others in providing meaningful pet death care services, as well to be an educational resource in the pet grief discipline. She is Certified in Thanatology, a Certified Pet Loss Professional, and teaches Pet Loss & Grief Certification courses. In the fall*



*of 2011, Coleen released her first book Pet Parents: A Journey Through Unconditional Love and Grief. In 2014, she helped found The Pet Loss Center, and remains a consultant and advisor.*

*She is a founder and past co-chair of the Pet Loss Professionals Alliance, past president and current Executive Director of the IAAHPC, and currently serves on the Board of Trustees for her alma mater, Fort Hays State University where she was the 2018 Alumni Achievement Award recipient.*




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