



How to Achieve a Six-Figure Income as a Dog Trainer



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Background

Demand for canine professionals and the services they provide is a particularly bright spot in the global services economy. Ask any dog pro about their book of business, and the typical response is “booked solid!” Why is it, then, that many service professionals struggle to convert a packed work schedule into predictable growth and sustainable income? With only so many billable hours in a day, how a dog trainer packages services and products is a game changer in boosting income. While marketing, networking, and other strategies play a pivotal role in the growth of pet business revenue, there is another, less talked about, X-factor: premium and bundled service offers.

Is the key to maximizing your income as a dog trainer rooted in the offers you provide? To answer this question, we performed a comparative analysis of 550+ dog trainers running their business on PocketSuite. Our analysis demonstrates how premium offers, such as subscriptions, packages, and product sales, help pet pros predictably achieve six-figure incomes.

Furthermore, we’ll dive into the challenges dog trainers face in developing and selling premium offers successfully. As small business owners, particularly solo entrepreneurs, it’s difficult to balance the administrative workload of premium offerings and provide clients with a top-tier service experience. Thus, we share our key success factors, developed from 10 years of powering an all-in-one operating system for hundreds of six-figure dog trainers who have achieved operational excellence.



Pet care is a growth industry

Pet owners are ready and willing to spend money caring for their animals. This was true pre-pandemic, but in the years since the COVID-19 outbreak spending on pets has accelerated. A 2022 industry study by Morgan Stanley highlighted the favorable economic environment for pet care by projecting an 8% compound annual growth rate in spending through 2030 to \$500 billion. This translates into average household spending per pet of \$1,897 by 2030¹. The pet services segment (i.e., veterinarian, training, grooming, etc) is expected to have the highest growth of any vertical in the industry.

How are dog trainers responding to this highly favorable economic climate? Like most service-based businesses, success as a dog trainer is all about schedule optimization and exceeding client expectations. Technology driven innovation is replacing a “pen and paper” approach to running a business constrained by available hours to bill for services. Higher income earning businesses are benefiting from technology that automates repeatable processes where human intervention leads to wasted effort and errors. Technology is also enabling service-based businesses to unlock additional sources of income thereby increasing the lifetime value of clients. For example, bundling services into packages, offering subscriptions, group classes, and virtual or video based instruction are innovative ways for dog trainers to monetize their expertise within the time constraints of a work day. By introducing a virtual store-front to their business, dog trainers are able to pair products with services thereby capturing highly profitable, incremental revenue.

From our analysis of 550+ dog trainers using PocketSuite to run their business, we are able to measure the impact of innovative services and offerings on business income growth and business resiliency. We have the data that shows the differences between a \$48,000 and a \$120,000 a year dog trainer business. The top 10% of our dog trainers make, on average, \$273,000.²

So, what is the secret to doubling and tripling your income?

First off, pet parents are willing to pay a premium price for a premium service. The 2022 Morgan Stanley report showed that pet owners are willing to pay premium prices for their pet care, including products, healthcare, and training. Furthermore, this propensity to spend appears to be increasingly inelastic: “Consumers are less willing to cut pet spending even when real personal income declines,” according to the report’s author Simeon Gutman. With Millennials driving the growth in pet ownership, their willingness to pay up for premium food and services is likely contributing to the rosy industry outlook.³

¹ “Fur Babies’ Fuel Pet Industry Boom,” Morgan Stanley, accessed May 13, 2024.

² PocketSuite, “2023 Dog Trainer Revenue Analysis [Unpublished Data]” (San Francisco: California, 2024).

³ “Fur Babies’ Fuel Pet Industry Boom,” Morgan Stanley.

Research tells us that pet parents are willing to pay a premium for convenience and accessibility. This means making it painfully easy for clients to purchase dog training services and communicate with the trainer 24/7. For example, consumer psychology tells us that the perceived cost of individual purchases far exceeds the monthly or annual subscription cost. By offering packages or subscriptions to services, a dog trainer reduces the “checkout” friction and taps into consumers’ “one and done” preference when purchasing a service. Likewise, when it comes to communication, clients expect their service provider to be readily accessible via text and that all aspects of scheduling, invoicing and paying for services can be done digitally without human contact.

The profitability of premium offerings

A dog trainer’s standard offer is a one-on-one, private training service, whether at a client’s home or their dedicated training facility. Premium offers take it a step further, maximizing a professional’s time and income while creating a more personalized experience for clients.

We find that the following premium offers have the largest impact on dog trainers’ income.

Packages

Packages provide dog trainers the ability to lock a client into a longer term commitment which typically leads to more successful training outcomes. By selling a group of services or classes, and getting paid upfront, a dog trainer is able to spend more time training and less time scheduling. Packages are often grouped based on the type of training, the length of the training sessions, or specific types of training required, e.g. puppy training, high distraction, or aggression packages. Clients use the services and classes included in the package over a specified time period.

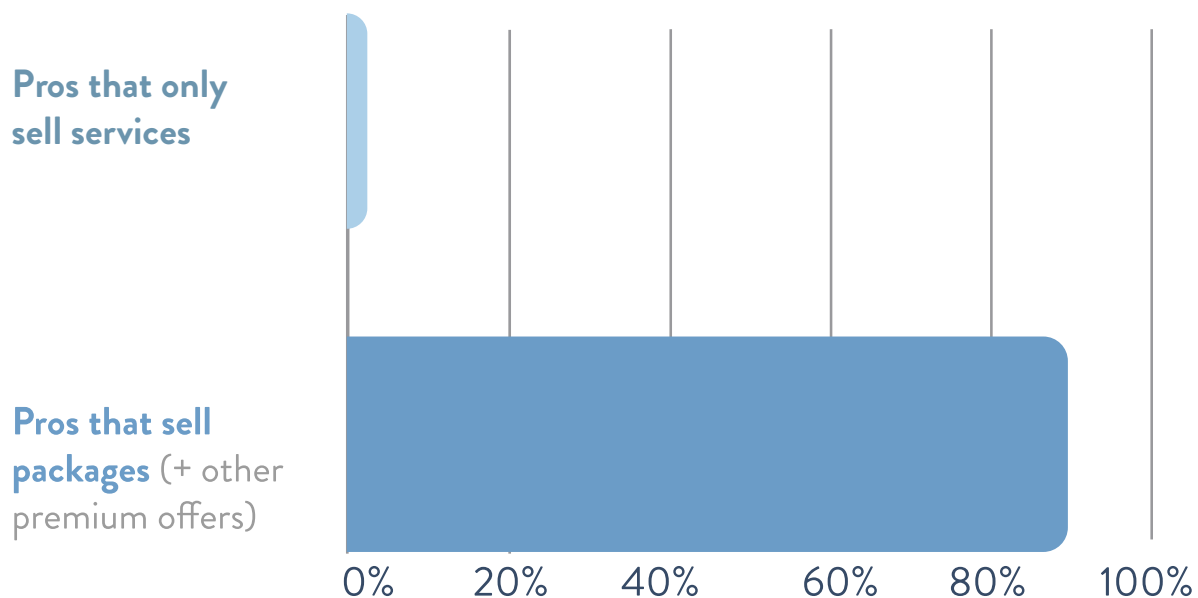
Training packages have numerous benefits for the trainer, the clients, and the dogs. For one, because business owners receive payment for packages upfront, their revenue is more predictable and less scattered throughout the year, making it easier for them to reinvest in their business by hiring more staff or upgrading their equipment and facilities. The benefits of packages extend beyond the payment transaction. Dog owners who commit to a longer term training program are more likely to become advocates for the business, which makes them a valuable source for referrals. A business owner should allocate marketing and support to those clients who provide the greatest potential lifetime value to the business.

Dog trainers may also see higher retention rates from clients who purchase a package. A 2019 study by Dogs Trust UK, suggests that dog training classes that are paid upfront see higher engagement from pet parents and lower dropout rates. Among other factors, this is in part due to the fallacy of sunk costs, i.e., “people are more likely to continue a course of action if they have already invested time or money into it.”⁴ The idea is that clients who make a long-term commitment to the training services are more likely to follow through until the package expires.

Training packages are also ideal for clients. Each pet is different. Dog training is rarely a one-size-fits-all solution. Packages give clients more options and, therefore, more control. They can decide which offering makes the most sense for their pet and their budget. Clients appreciate when a dog trainer’s offerings reflect the nuance and diversity of the household context and pet’s needs.

We find that dog trainers offer packages priced as low as \$250 and as high as \$8,000, with the average package coming in at \$268. Our data tells us that dog trainers who sell one or more packages make on average 88% more than dog trainers who rely on single session billed services.⁵

Annual Revenue Increase Services + Packages



⁴ Lauren Harris et al., “Impact of Socio-Economic Status on Accessibility of Dog Training Classes,” *Animals* 9, no. 10 (October 22, 2019): 849.

⁵ PocketSuite, “2023 Dog Trainer Revenue Analysis”.

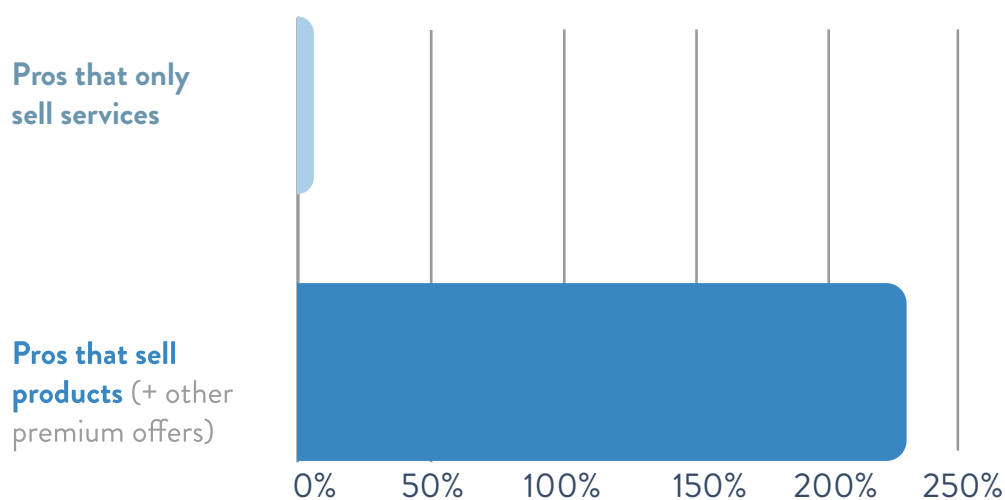
Products

From treats to toys to training gear, pet products comprise the largest segment of the pet industry. Spending in the U.S. is predicted to hit \$158 billion in 2030.⁶ Pet parents are becoming more informed about animal welfare, and are on the hunt for products that improve the health and safety of their pets.⁷ Dog trainers, by establishing a position of trust with a pet owner, have the opportunity to provide informed recommendations on the products best suited for the animal. The pet benefits by receiving the right products and the business owner benefits by capturing high-margin revenue.

Offering recommendations on pet care products is a natural extension of a dog trainers' business. Many pet professionals already do this, but don't make product sales themselves. Therefore, an opportunity exists for trainers to monetize their product knowledge and affiliations. Even better, pet parents are loyal when it comes to purchasing pet products. They're reluctant to change their pet's diet or preferences. Therefore, by upselling quality, tested products to clients, dog trainers can lock in repeat customers.

Retail product sales can significantly boost a service professional's income. We find that, on average, dog trainers who sold at least one product in 2023 made 144% more annually than dog trainers who didn't sell products and 233% more than dog trainers that only offer services. Therefore the value of product sales to boosting a dog trainer's income is undeniable.⁸

Annual Revenue Increase Services + Products



⁶“Fur Babies’ Fuel Pet Industry Boom,” Morgan Stanley.

⁷“Pet Care Market Size, Share, Trends: Growth Analysis [2032],” Fortune Business Insights, accessed May 13, 2024.

⁸PocketSuite, “2023 Dog Trainer Revenue Analysis”.

Subscriptions

Subscriptions present a unique opportunity for dog trainers. The independent service professional doesn't have the luxury of a predictable semi-monthly paycheck, but they can create something even more valuable: subscription revenue. It's the closest thing to predictable, W2-like income.

The so-called subscription economy emerged as a by-product of the rapid growth in e-commerce. Service businesses, large and small, have transitioned to recurring revenue models for the simple reason that recurring revenue brings predictability and stability to schedule constrained one-time purchase business models. In fact, according to Gartner Group, 75% of companies selling directly to consumers were set to offer subscription services in 2023.⁹

From daycare to grooming to bathing and walking, most pet services are needed on a recurring basis, so they work great as a subscription. Doodles, for example, need frequent grooming to avoid matting. Many long-haired dogs need frequent bathing, especially in the summer. Office workers need daycare or walkers for their dogs on a regular basis, so are eager to lock in a fixed recurring price.

Here are fictional examples of subscriptions pet professionals might offer:

- Weekday Doggy Daycare Subscription
- Weekly 3 Walk Subscription
- Premium Bathing Membership - 1 free bath each week
- Bi-Monthly Doodle Grooming Subscription

Subscription revenue is particularly important as millennials become the predominant group of pet owners. Subscription business models are their accustomed way of purchasing services whether they be streaming movies, gym memberships or cosmetics. Millennials place a premium on convenience and have demonstrated their willingness to pay more for a product or service if they can avoid the hassles of going through a checkout process for a regularly purchased product or service. Furthermore, businesses that implement subscriptions see improved customer retention as long as they deliver on the promised value. Customers typically churn or "unsubscribe" when they don't receive the expected results or benefits from the subscription they purchased.¹⁰

⁹ Susan Moore, "Top 10 Trends in Digital Commerce," Gartner, October 13, 2019.

¹⁰ The Subscribed Institute, "The SEI Report: Recurring Growth Strategies for Total Monetization," Zuora, April 9, 2024, <https://www.zuora.com/resource/sei-report/>.

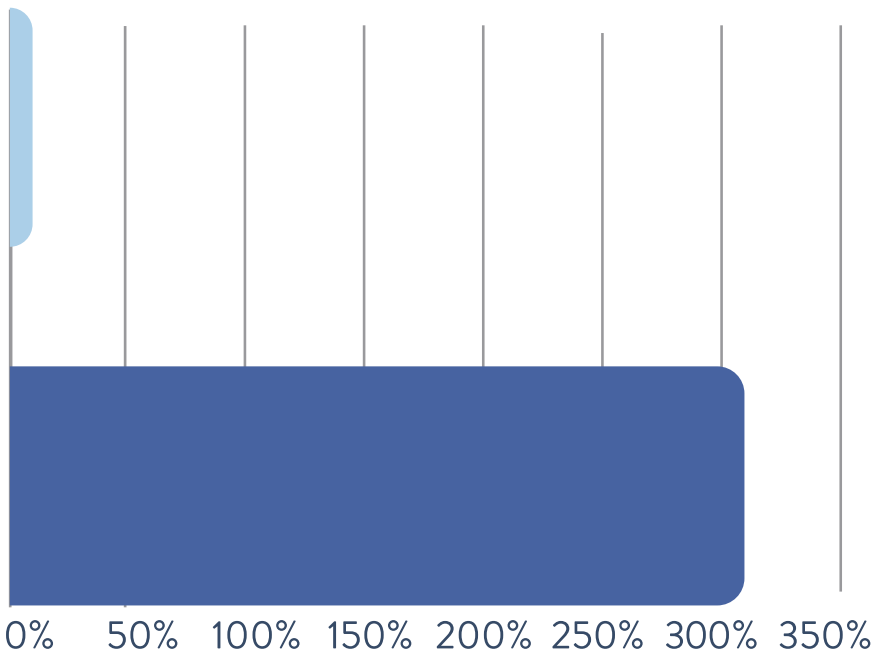
Dog trainers who offer subscriptions see significant boost in income. In our analysis, we find that, on average, dog trainers that sold at least one subscription in 2023 made 41% more annually than dog trainers that didn't offer subscriptions, and 305% more than dog trainers that relied solely on charging clients for a single service. The benefits of subscription based business models are numerous, yet, just 14% of dog trainers offer subscriptions to clients.¹¹

Annual Revenue Increase

Services + Subscriptions

Pros that only
sell services

Pros that sell
subscriptions (+ other
premium offers)



¹¹ PocketSuite, “2023 Dog Trainer Revenue Analysis”.

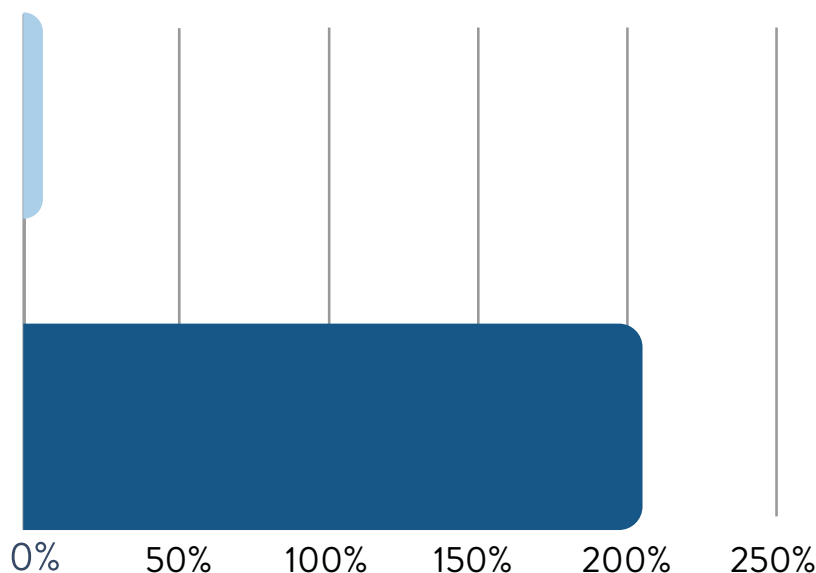
Reservations

Another type of premium offer is reservations. Pet professionals who provide daycare, overnight boarding, or board and train services rely upon reservations for schedule and capacity management. Many pet businesses still rely on pen and paper or a spreadsheet to allocate space and schedule availability. This is enormously inefficient for the business owner, and frustrating for pet owners who expect that making an online reservation for overnight boarding should be as simple as booking a hotel reservation for a vacation. The data shows that reservations take a pet professionals' revenue to the next level. In our analysis, we found that, on average, businesses that sold at least one reservation in 2023 made 120% more annually than businesses that didn't offer reservations at all and 202% more than pet professionals that only offered services as a single offering.¹²

Annual Revenue Increase Services + Reservations

Pros that only
sell services

Pros that sell
reservations (+ other
premium offers)



Classes

One-on-one sessions, while popular and effective, can limit your income growth. Small business owners may box themselves in with one-off, private services, and their only option becomes working more hours to hit their income goal. However, there is a way pet professionals can maximize revenue from a one-hour time slot: by offering group classes.

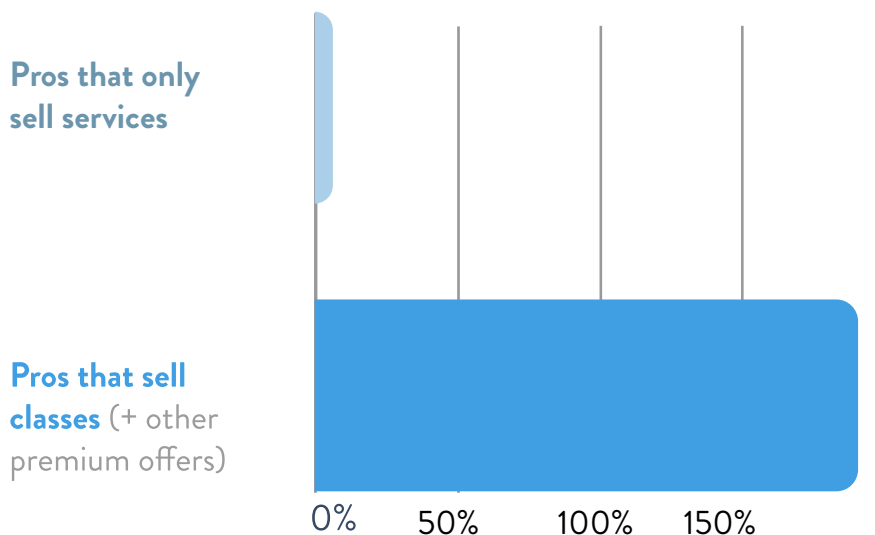
¹² PocketSuite, "2023 Dog Trainer Revenue Analysis".

Classes are a premium offering that allow dog trainers to monetize their expertise over a larger group of clients. A trainer can host a class with five to twenty students at the same time. The group session format cuts down the workload for the trainer and their team members. There are also benefits to dog owners who are able to connect with other dog owners, thereby creating opportunities for community and social connection. And, of course, there is the benefit to the pets who are social creatures and will benefit from being in a classroom with other dogs. Pets, just like people, benefit by learning in a group environment!

The pandemic accelerated adoption of an alternative to in-person classes: on-line and virtual instruction. Faced with the severe limitations imposed by social distancing, dog trainers were forced to deliver training virtually. While initially out of necessity, on-line instruction has outlived the compelled restrictions of COVID-19 and proven to be a valuable means for delivering instruction. The benefit to dog trainers is two-fold: 1) greater flexibility in time management, especially for trainers who primarily travel to their clients' homes (synchronous delivery); and, 2) opportunities to monetize training methods through the sale of video based instruction (asynchronous delivery). Pet owner adoption of virtual training for their pets is not surprising in light of the massive growth in open online courses (MOOCs) like edX and Coursera since the early 2010s.¹³

Dog trainers that offer group classes to their clients often see their revenue skyrocket. In our analysis, we found that, on average, dog trainers that sold at least one class in 2023 made 89% more annually than dog trainers that don't sell classes at all and 187% more than dog trainers that only offer services.¹⁴

Annual Revenue Increase Services + Classes



¹³ Ilana Hamilton, "By the Numbers: The Rise of Online Learning in the U.S.," Forbes, March 22, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/education/online-colleges/online-learning-stats/>.

¹⁴ PocketSuite, "2023 Dog Trainer Revenue Analysis".

The rapid adoption of digital instruction has the additional benefit of providing experienced dog trainers with opportunities to earn income by mentoring other dog trainers. Digital mentors have become a common component of the professional support provided by organizations such as the International Association of Canine Professionals, The Association of Professional Dog Trainers, Victoria Stilwell Academy, Modern Dog Trainer, and more. These organizations and their mentor networks provide young trainers with opportunities to broaden their expertise. In an industry with little government oversight and no regulatory body, trainer certification and continuing education is an important differentiator in the eyes of pet parents when they consider who to hire to train their pet. By combining dog training for pet owners with the coaching of aspiring dog trainers, experienced trainers earn additional income and establish themselves as thought leaders in the field.

Challenges to developing & selling premium offers

Premium offers aren't new to the pet professional industry. The question is: Why don't more dog trainers implement these offers to boost their income? In a nutshell, what stands in the way of adopting innovative offers is technology? Packages, subscriptions, pairing products to services, and reservations introduce complex time and task management as well as resource allocation challenges to a business. Pen and paper or a spreadsheet will not provide the visibility on team and resource availability, current liabilities, and future income necessary to manage the growth that premium offers can bring to the business. For example, small business owners may struggle to collect and account for revenue from subscriptions, which is subject to deferred revenue accounting.¹⁵ This is important because while the business benefits from generating cash up front for services to be provided in the future, it's critically important that the pet professional has a clear understanding of the obligations and resources that will be required. A pet professional accustomed to accounting and financial management as a side hobby to delivering training services, is suddenly confronted with the need for automation and tracking to manage the business. This can be an especially daunting challenge for a business owner adverse to adopting technology to solve a problem, even if solving the problem leads to significant growth in income!

Dog trainers also face external, unforeseen challenges as they try to expand their business offerings. About one in five small businesses had to furlough employees during the pandemic.¹⁶ Despite setbacks from the pandemic, there is still a bright spot for pet professionals, as the number of pets in the U.S. has increased by five million since 2019. Some pet professionals have adapted their business models to sustain this pandemic-induced income, mainly by implementing virtual services, like consultations and online training classes. In times of stalled growth, these businesses are more resilient to macroeconomic shocks and can "win" by investing in customer upselling and retention strategies, like premium business offers.

Therefore, even if dog trainers have the skills and motivation to implement premium offers, a mixture of macroeconomic factors and administrative readiness can make it difficult to do so.

A six-figure income is closer than you think

Change is never easy. Even more difficult is change that requires adopting technology and modifying workflows. The evidence is abundant, however, that technology, properly implemented, is a game changer. Pet professionals are confronted by a plethora of tools to automate tasks such as managing client communications, scheduling, lead management, payment processing, and digital document signing. The choices are overwhelming. The temptation in sorting through the options is to approach each business process that needs to be solved in isolation of the other processes that require attention. The danger of this approach is that it too often leads to prioritizing sophistication over efficiency. A small business owner needs to take a holistic approach to implementing technology solutions to ensure that the technology is making things easier. Running a business is hard enough without having to add the burden of managing multiple technology tools. At PocketSuite, we've developed an all-in-one platform with a singular focus on simplicity. Extensive analysis of the best practices of PocketSuite's top performing pet professionals provides a playbook for operational efficiency and simplicity. Here are 8 key success factors that will put you on the path to a six-figure income.

1 Administrative clean up

Dog trainers spend hours a week managing training sessions. When they're not hosting clients or training pets, they're building skills through CEU courses or marketing their business. Administrative work naturally becomes a tedious burden for these busy service professionals. We've found that dog trainers benefit from tools that allow them to go paperless and automate administrative tasks such as collecting and tracking pet vaccination records, requesting pet profile information, and getting training agreements and liability waivers signed. All of these tasks can be done digitally to give dog trainers more time to plan and promote their premium offers.

2 Client management

Service professionals must place clients at the center of their business “to foster loyalty and fuel recurring revenue.”¹⁷ In Salesforce's 2023 Small Business Trends report, 61% of customers reported feeling that larger enterprises treat them like just a number.¹⁸ This opens up an opportunity for small businesses and solo professionals to stand out from the competition by fostering stronger client relationships.

¹⁵ “24 Recurring Revenue Statistics You Need to Know,” DigitalRoute, March 20, 2024.

¹⁶ “Small and Medium Business Trends Report, 5th Edition,” Salesforce, 2021.

¹⁷ The Subscribed Institute, “The SEI Report: Recurring Growth Strategies for Total Monetization”

¹⁸ “Small Business Trends, Special Report,” Salesforce, 2023.

A dedicated CRM helps to consistently nurture those relationships and even allows small business owners to make connections with clients remotely. At PocketSuite, we've found that client management tools, like an in-app messenger to chat with pet parents and pet profiles to organize their pets' information, can help dog trainers improve client retention. Loyal clients are more likely to become regular consumers of their premium service offers.

3 Automation

71% of growing SMBs say digitization allowed their business to survive the pandemic.¹⁹ In 2024, automation will be key for service professionals to implement business strategies. Dog trainers are able to complete the majority of their business management tasks, like scheduling and appointment reminders, on autopilot, leaving them more time to bundle offers for clients.

4 Integrated online products

U.S. e-commerce sales continue to see dramatic growth and will likely double by 2030.²⁰ With that, e-commerce is becoming the go-to channel from which to acquire pet care products. Online product sales are growing in popularity in the pet industry as clients expect easy access to buy pet products.

It should be noted that e-commerce is no longer just about transactions, but also about the fulfillment experience and building client loyalty.²¹ To successfully implement product sales as a premium offer, dog trainers need a tool that can handle both. PocketSuite developed an online store for dog trainers that is optimized for e-commerce best practices, such as one-click checkouts, add-on products, pickups as well as shipment tracking capabilities.

5 Payment Processing

If pet professionals are going to offer premium services at a higher price point, it's also essential to offer flexible payment options.²² It's a race to meet clients where they are, and many of them want access to consumer financing options, such as Buy Now Pay Later. PocketSuite makes it easier for pet professionals to close the deal on their premium offers with a variety of payment methods, including providers like Affirm, Klarna, and AfterPay.

¹⁹ Small and Medium Business Trends Report, 5th Edition," Salesforce, 2021.

²⁰ Global Pet Industry To Grow To \$500 Billion By 2030, Bloomberg Intelligence Report Finds," Bloomberg.com, March 24, 2023.

²¹ Susan Moore, "Top 10 Trends in Digital Commerce," Gartner

²² The Subscribed Institute, "The SEI Report: Recurring Growth Strategies for Total Monetization".

6 Client Acquisition

Premium offers attract high-quality clients. Marketing strategies such as automated text campaigns, promotional offers, solicitation of 5-star Google reviews, and online lead generation can help dog trainers acquire first-time customers and gain “wallet share”.

7 Insights

Clients want a personalized experience, so small businesses are becoming more reliant on data for understanding client psychographics and purchasing trends.²³ The Subscribed Institute puts it plainly in their 2023 report: “Businesses should invest in strategies and technologies that help surface rich customer insights into behavior and preferences to quickly adjust product development and go-to-market initiatives that can deliver maximum value back to customers.”

At PocketSuite, we’ve used smart report data on income, bookings, and utilization patterns to help increase dog trainers’ share of the customer wallet and personalize their client experience. For example, business owners can review which clients book classes most often and send automated reminders about new package offerings based on the client’s interests.²⁴

8 Recommended premium offers

The Dog Trainer Edition of PocketSuite comes with pre-built templates of premium offers that are optimized based on best practices for a dog training business. It mimics the packages, subscriptions, forms, prices, and product offers of top-performing dog training businesses. Dog trainers can customize these offers to their business specifications and launch their business in minutes.

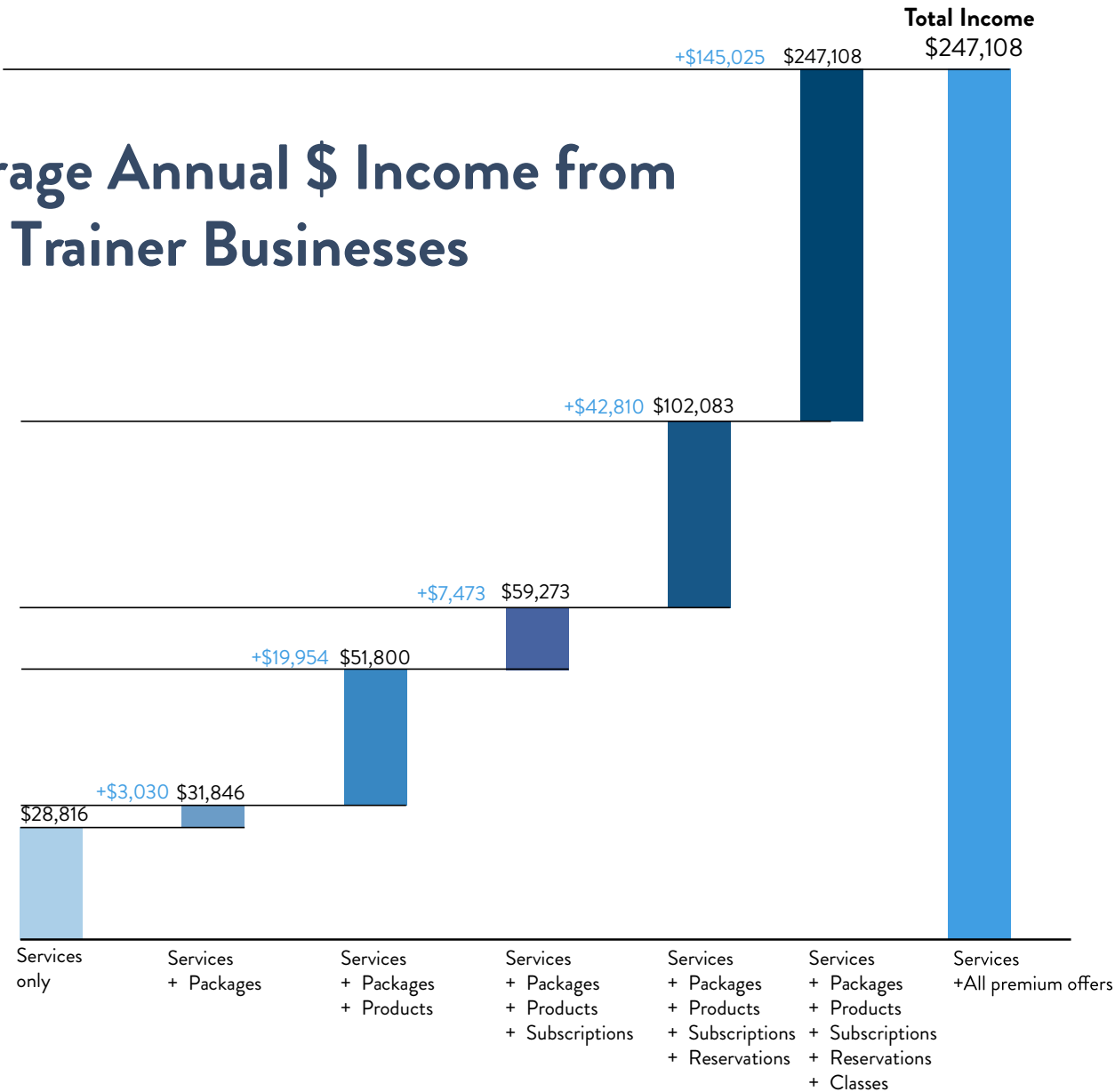
²³ “Small Business Trends, Special Report,” Salesforce, 2023.

²⁴ The Subscribed Institute, “The SEI Report: Recurring Growth Strategies for Total Monetization”.

Conclusion

Pet care is a growth industry! Pet professionals are well positioned to benefit from favorable socio-economic conditions that will continue to sustain high levels of pet ownership along with the services and products necessary to ensure that pets are well cared for. Dog trainers are working overtime to keep up with demand. Long hours combined with the physical demands of the profession stretch many trainers to the breaking point. Now more than ever, it's essential that dog trainers prioritize making their businesses run more efficiently. Affordable and easy-to-implement solutions can bring efficiency and simplicity to business workflows and boost income. Every dog trainer should know that a six-figure income is attainable if they choose to prioritize nurturing long-term client relationships and developing sustainable, recurring income. Greater predictability and visibility into income have the additional benefit of reducing the stress of being a business owner. The playbook we have presented is intended to show you the way to enjoy greater financial security while also making your life training dogs more fun.

Average Annual \$ Income from Dog Trainer Businesses



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About PocketSuite

PocketSuite is an all-in-one business management tool for service professionals. We help pros on our platform find and retain clients as well as achieve operational efficiency. Since starting PocketSuite over a decade ago, we have helped thousands of skilled professionals run their service businesses and serve tens of thousands of their clients. We have proudly supported a diverse community of professionals at all stages of running their businesses, from independent pros to emerging franchise concepts.

Our vision extends beyond delivering an all-in-one business app for scheduling, payments, marketing, and communications. It's about solving a larger puzzle: How do we create a world where anyone who dreams of becoming an independent service professional or franchise entrepreneur can move full speed ahead towards their goal with the assurance that there's a sustainable income waiting for them? We're determined to create a reality where pursuing a career as an independent or franchise service professional is as clear and accessible as traditional W2 professions, complete with predictable salaries, training standards, and milestones.