

# Time to get a pet project

by Linda Whitney

**A**NIMAL lovers can turn their fondness for pets into a business. Most animal franchises are home-based, so you gain the pleasure of working with animals but can arrange your hours so you can look after your own pets.

But it takes more than just a passion for pets to run a successful franchise.

'If you just want to work with animals, think carefully,' says Lee Southern, of the Barking Mad franchise. 'A franchise is about running a successful business. You have to be an animal lover but not let your love of animals cloud your business brain.'

Barking Mad franchisees arrange pet care while owners are away by matching pet owners with hosts who take the pets into their homes. The franchisee is a matchmaker, so you must have people skills and be trustworthy. 'The owners and hosts have to be able to trust the franchisee,' says Lee, who is looking for more franchisees with £11,500 to invest.

Kevin Thackrah of Pet Pals, whose franchisees provide pet-sitting, animal boarding, feeding and dog-walking services, recommends spending time with pet care franchisees before investing.

'Pet owners are nice people in general, but it doesn't mean the business is a soft option,' he says.

'You still have to walk owners' dogs whatever the weather and do the book-keeping, marketing and administration.' Cost is £15,000.

Franchisors will train you in selling your service though you must be confident. 'But it's easy to start conversations about your services,' says Janet Walmsley of Oscar Petfoods.

Oscar franchisees deliver pet foods and accessories to customers' doors, marketing their

service door to door and from stands at events such as agricultural shows and steam rallies.

You must enjoy driving, be able to lift 15kg bags of food, and be happy about meeting big dogs, as owners of larger dogs are core customers for Oscars. Cost is £15,000.

Animals At Home franchisees offer services including looking after pets in owners' homes, finding host families for dogs and providing a pet taxi and ambu-

lance service. 'Our franchisees transport pets to and from vets and clinics, deliver puppies for breeders to new owners, and transport pets in the UK and abroad for people moving home,' says Mark Booty of Animals At Home. The £14,000 investment includes training in animal handling.

■ Barking Mad 015 242 76476;  
Oscar 0800 063 1106;  
Animals At Home 07970 063 364;  
Pet Pals 01264 326 362.



## KERRY'S SO HAPPY TO BANK ON A FLEXIBLE NEW APPROACH

**KERRY WELLS**, 44, from Spalding, Lincolnshire, swapped a banking career for life as a Barking Mad franchisee last year. Kerry, pictured with her daughter Caroline, 13, and Jack Russell terriers Harvey and Archie, says: 'I have always loved dogs, so I wanted a flexible business that allowed me to meet people and animals.'

She finds host families for dogs, which means checking that hosts are suitable. 'They must have experience of dog care and a secure garden, and you have to suit the dog to the host. Older hosts might not want a big, lively dog that is too powerful for them,' says Kerry. If hosts have a dog of their own,

she takes Archie with her to test how the host's dog reacts with others.

She also provides owners with regular reports of how their dog is eating and sleeping, and sends them a picture of their pet with the host.

After a year of operation, she already has nearly 100 clients and might start taking on staff next year.

'Business surges at holiday times, so you have to take your own holidays outside those times,' says Kerry.

'But it is very rewarding. I love meeting the dogs and people. I can take my own dogs on long walks every day, and I pay myself as much as I was earning before.'

## FRANCHISEE OF THE YEAR

**TERRY LUCKING**, a franchisee with letting agency Belvoir Lettings, has been named British Franchise Association franchisee of the year.

Runners-up for the award, which was announced as part of national franchise week last week, were Atul Pathak, franchisee with McDonald's restaurants, and David Amos, franchisee with office training provider Pitman Training.