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101 Best Businesses for Pet Lovers: What You Need to Know about Starting and Succeeding in a Pet Business of Your Own

By Joseph Nigro, Nicholas Nigro

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101 Best Businesses for Pet Lovers furnishes readers with a comprehensive roster of the finest and most unusual entrepreneurial, career, and moneymaking opportunities in today's colorful pet care trade. The authors provide current and prospective entrepreneurs with user-friendly and tested counsel on starting and succeeding in each one of the businesses presented.

With a wealth of resources it provides invaluable information on initiating and prospering in these endeavors:

- Pet photography service
- Doggie daycare
- Dog fashions designer
- Cat furniture manufacturer
- Gourmet treat maker
- Dog walking
- Pupperware parties
- Pet grooming
- Pet party organizer
- Dog training
- Pet-specialty arts and crafts
- Pet affiliate website
- Vet technician
- Importing/Exporting pet products
- Catnip farmer
- Pet grief counselor
- Aquarium maintenance
- Breeders (fish, small animals, birds, reptiles, etc.)
- Pet shop (live animals: birds, tropical fish, etc.)
- And many, many more

Appendices offer concise information on key business start-up issues, fundamental business planning tips, and numerous selling and promotional resources.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Joseph Nigro: Joe's singular success story unfurled under the vast umbrella of the pet care industry. In 1979, at the age of only 19, he, along with partner Rich Covello, purchased a mom-and-pop pet food and supply store. Located in the New York City borough of Queens, it was aptly named Pet Nosh. At the time, the author was a Fordham University student. His initial career plan, if you could call it that, was to "make a living" out of that one store.

In less than three years time, however, Pet Nosh had leased a warehouse and was operating as both a retailer and wholesaler of pet products, keeping pace with the rapidly changing marketplace of the early 1980s. A second Pet Nosh store opened its doors in Yonkers, New York in 1982. This location is widely credited with hosting the first-of-its-kind "Have Your Pet's Picture Taken with Santa Claus," the brainchild of both Joe and his partner.

Approached by the Petco Company in 1996, Joe and his partners agreed to sell their Pet Nosh stores to the retail behemoth for \$19.1 million. Pet Nosh's final year's sales were \$26 million (and projected to surpass \$32 million during the year of the acquisition). The deal was officially announced in the spring of 1996. As an independent businessperson in the pet care trade for 17 years, Joe experienced life on both the retail and wholesale frontlines. His work brought him into close contact with groomers, dog trainers, breeders, humane society employees, veterinarians, et al-the denizens of the trade-as the business of pets transformed itself from a sluggish non-entity into an unstoppable juggernaut.

Immediately upon the sale of Pet Nosh, the author was hired as a consultant for Petco, specializing in merchandising. His experience in evaluating new pet products-from foods to accessory items-and properly marketing them to maximize their sales.

Finding himself semi-retired at the age of 36, Joe is now a small business consultant and personal coach specializing in retailing. He has done consulting work in the pet care trade for such giants as the aforementioned Petco, as well as independent, smaller pet-related businesses (retail pet food and supply stores), specializing, again, in evaluating pet products and properly merchandising them to maximize sales. As a personal coach, the author has advised individuals (salespersons, distributors, and marketers) for such well-known companies as Iams and Nestle. Joe has also dispensed counsel to men and women interested in starting a variety of businesses, including a "pet gymnasium" and the importation of pet products from China.

Joe (with Nicholas Nigro) is the author of *The Everything Success Book* (Adams Media/F+W, 2003).

Nicholas Nigro: Nicholas Nigro is a veteran of the pet care business. Wearing a variety of hats in the trade, he labored in every imaginable capacity through all 17 years of independent retail chain Pet Nosh's existence. He actively participated in conceiving innovative store promotions, as the pet owner fast evolved into the pet parent.

One highly successful store promotion featured a customer contest. It was headlined: "What's In a Name? A Pet's Name?" It asked patrons to submit brief essays on how their pets got their names. (Why was that dog named "Jif," after a brand of peanut? How'd that parakeet come to be named "Don Ho," after a Polynesian songster?) In fact, the contest generated so much interest and enthusiasm that it spawned an independently published book entitled, *A Cat Named Rush Limbaugh, A Dog Named Howard Stern*. This short work of pet names and the stories behind them was the brainchild of the author, but credited to the fictitious, cartoonish pseudonym of "Francis Pfaff." Nevertheless, the trailblazing title was reviewed in the November 1997 issue of *Cat Fancy* magazine, which said: "This book is not only entertaining, it also provides inspiration to the pet owner who is searching for the perfect pet name." (At the time, there were no competing books dealing with

this whimsical subject matter. Today there are several titles devoted to pet names and their histories.) After Pet Nosh sold its network of stores to the Petco chain, Nick joined the eBay revolution in its infancy, selling myriad collectibles in cyberspace. This led to his authoring *The Everything Collectibles Book* (Adams Media/F+W, 2002).

With a B.S. in Business Administration from Manhattan College, and membership in the New York chapter of Omicron Delta Epsilon, the Honor Society in Economics, Nick subsequently authored *The Everything Coaching and Mentoring Book* (Adams Media/F+W, 2002). Finally, Nick is the co-author, with brother Joe, of *The Everything Success Book* (Adams Media/F+W, 2003).

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Increase Your Cash Flow by Inventing Pet Toys

Excerpted from *101 Best Businesses for Pet Lovers* by Joseph Nigro and Nicholas Nigro ©2007

Cat Toy Inventor

Through the years at Pet Nosh, our most reliable seller in the packaged cat toy department was-hands down-the Cat Dancer. For lack of a better description, this "toy" consisted of a coiled steel spring with a few petite strips of rolled-up cardboard attached to its "play" end. The Cat Dancer was designed for humans to wave at felines in their company. That is, this unpretentious product was crafted to encourage cats to do what countless cats relish doing-batting at objects in their inimitable and endearing styles. And, naturally, such swatting and boxing at tiny cardboard pieces attached to a spring causes the spring to ripple to and fro-and to and fro some more-thus instigating further feline flailing.

You could be the next cat toy inventor. Before assuming this vaunted title and getting to work, there are a couple of key questions to chew over. What do cats enjoy playing with? What truly excites their "inner kitten"? Granted, the answers to these queries are not clear-cut. Feline aficionados will tell you that their cats are one-of-a-kinds-true originals all. In other words, there is no single cat toy that will win over the hearts and minds of the entire feline species or even the preponderance of these individualistic and hard to please companion animals. So, perish the thought of inventing a product that every cat will endorse-it's not going to happen. Even the ultra-popular catnip doesn't interest and affect every single cat. Feel free to lower your inventor's bar a bit.

How Much Does It Cost to Start This Kind of Business?

To invent a cat toy and successfully market it will require a sizeable investment when you feel you have a product that can sell in the marketplace. Inventing most toys can be done on the cheap-often under \$1,000. Mass producing them and marketing them will cost you a fair chunk of change-\$5,000, and perhaps way up depending on the piece of merchandise and strategies to get it in stores and such.

What Qualifications Do You Need for This Kind of Work?

Foremost, you have to have a good idea and the capacity to turn that idea into more than that. You have to also be committed to manufacturing a quality and safe product. Essentially, an inventor's charge in this dynamic merchandise arena is to ascertain what an ample portion of the general cat census will take a shine to. The inventor of the Cat Dancer did just that. And, you might have noticed that there are various Cat Dancer epigones on the market. Toy mice of all varieties-from faux-leather to felt to catnip-filled cloth-are also coveted cat playthings. Another toy product worth mentioning here is the Crazy Circle, which appeals to a lot of cats-but hardly all and definitely not most felines-as they bat at an excitable ball cozily tucked inside a rounded track made of plastic. This attention grabbing-but again, rather unsophisticated-product consistently sells well. This is precisely where you want to take your invention-to the market and reliably in demand today, tomorrow, and next year.

Foremost, as a budding cat toy inventor, you would be wise to comb the aisles of pet-specialty retailers and see what's out there and selling on their myriad shelves and pegboards. Check out relevant websites, too. What are cat consumers buying? Where is there room for improvement on already tried and tested products? Is there an opening for a truly new concept in cat toys? Ask and fully answer these questions and you never know what will spring from this exploratory brainstorm. Needless to say, inspiration for cat toy inventors often comes from their feline cohorts. Indeed, many of the cat accessory items of today are the derivatives of owner-inventors solving a problem-creating merchandise to satisfy their exceptional cats. Getting an all-important paw up from a feline in residence is often at the top of the cat toy inventor's checklist.

How Do You Find Customers?

Take your winning creation to cat trade shows, craft fairs, flea markets, and gift shows. Advertise in pet-themed periodicals. Visit retailers with your product. If feasible, work with pet merchandise wholesalers. Get your invention out there among the consuming masses.

Dog Toy Inventor

The pet products that receive the most ink and air time-the feature stories in magazines and newspapers, the segments on TV news shows etc.-are, predictably, the most whimsical and peculiar items: things like edible greeting cards, rhinestone tiaras, doggie sunglasses, pastel and glitter nail polishes, and molasses madness cookies. These unmistakably offbeat selections of dog things do, in fact, underscore the far-reaching arms of the modern-day pet care trade. Dog toys and assorted canine playthings and paraphernalia are certainly among the chief contributors to the abiding industry's well-earned reputation for remarkable innovation, unpredictability, and eccentricity. Consider becoming a dog toy inventor or some other kind of dog product inventor and manufacturer. There is plenty of room in this wide-open field to innovate and-yes-profit from a sound idea converted into a sound product.

When Pet Nosh first opened its doors more than a quarter of a century ago, the nature of the business was a far cry from what it is today. If the differences between those days of yore and present reality had to be summed up in one word, it would be choices. In the colorless past, there weren't a whole lot of alternatives on a whole lot of fronts in the pet care trade-from foods to every imaginable accessory product.

In our original Pet Nosh store, canine playthings consisted of rawhide products, Nylabones (just the basic bones, by the way), some primitive rubber rings and pulls, and a smattering of vinyl and latex squeak toys. There wasn't too much else to choose from in the area of dog fun and games. No Kong or rope toys. If your life depended on it, you couldn't find a fluorescent Frisbee for the four-legged. And nothing manufactured from plush fabrics was manufactured to fit into a dog's mouth. In other words, there is a dramatically wider market for inventors of extracurricular dog stuff to tap into and, of course, to conquer. When we entered the retail slice of pet care, we were startled that a latex stalk of broccoli and vinyl milkman existed as dog playthings. We showed our family, friends, and, yes, our dogs too. Courtesy of all sorts of inventor-types and far-sighted entrepreneurs, times change. The dog toy inventor has a lot of room in which to roam-in which to create the next coveted big seller.

How Much Does It Cost to Start This Kind of Business?

Inventing a dog toy needn't break the bank. Getting it into the hands of dog owners and into the mouths of canines will likely necessitate an investment of \$5,000 or more, depending again on exactly where you want to take your invention.

What Qualifications Do You Need for This Kind of Work?

Know your target market and precisely what you need to do to mine the brisk demand for dog toys. Put safety and quality at the top of your agenda. Consumers look for dog playthings in categories (often

overlapping) such as:

- Rubber toys
- Plush toys
- Ball toys
- Durable toys
- Nylon toys
- Rope toys

In addition, as an inventor, don't ignore the power of the holidays, especially Christmas. During the season of goodwill, for instance, we sold every imaginable Christmas-themed item. If only you could have witnessed the conditions of our stores after the holiday madness. Decimation! Santa Claus squeak toys were huge sellers, as were rawhide products shaped like Christmas trees and candy canes. It seemed that we could never stock enough canine Christmas stockings with a variety of toys and treats in them. The larger point here is that if you have a unique holiday dog toy in mind, don't fret about the seasonality of sales. The quantities of attention-grabbing items that sell during holiday stretches are often worth their weight in gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

How Do You Find Customers?

Go to where dog owners go. Countless mega-popular pet products debuted at trade and gift shows. Other big selling dog toys found their first takers via industry trade publications. Sell your invention via an Internet website. Champion its uniqueness and benefits directly to pet parents through dog magazines and other appropriate periodicals.

Bird Toy Inventor

You may think that this section is for the birds-and, you're right, it is. Bird toys are a big business. Bird parents are a large and expanding group of people. Whether they own a canary, parakeet, cockatiel, lovebird, parrot, or any number of other species, there are bird accessory products for them ranging from swings to pacifier beads to bells to rings to every imaginable plaything made of everything imaginable from rawhide to cotton to wood to plastic to wicker. If you have what it takes, you could be a bird toy inventor and manufacturer and see your product or products soar like an eagle.

How Much Does It Cost to Start This Kind of Business?

Again, the world of inventing a product and getting it to market is a process. An investment in real dollars-often \$5,000 and a whole lot more-is required to manufacture it, market it, and realize real profits.

What Qualifications Do You Need for This Kind of Work?

You need, of course, the inventor's touch and a commitment to providing the feathery among us with both a unique and quality plaything. Being a birdbrain rules you out. However, thinking like a bird is an important attribute for a bird toy inventor to possess.

How Do You Find Customers?

New bird toys find a lot of takers at bird trade shows. Advertise directly to bird lovers in bird-themed magazines. Consider ads in pet industry trade magazines to reach retailers. If you have a genuinely good product, it will take flight only if it's seen and sampled by consumers-and lots of them. Erect a website. Do flea markets and craft shows. Leave no stone unturned.

Climb Every Hartz Mountain

We'll conclude here with a little inspirational story, albeit not of an inventor per se. What follows is an

accounting of a man who took the concept of selling cat, dog, and bird products and ran with it. It's something that you as an inventor and manufacturer of any kind of pet product can do also. And, it's fair to say that you will encounter a more hospitable-albeit more competitive-consumer climate than Max Stern met with in 1926. So, consider yourself ahead of the game.

In that snapshot in time more than three quarters of a century ago, Max Stern left his native Germany for a better life in America. He was virtually penniless when he entered his adopted homeland at the tender age of twenty-six. Stern, however, fast concluded that his faith in America as the land of opportunity was justified. His entrepreneurial success story took flight when a childhood friend of his-a seller of pets in the early American trade-borrowed a substantial sum of money from him, and then couldn't afford to pay it back. Without another option, Stern agreed to accept his friend's alternative form of repayment: 5,000 canaries! He reasoned that it was better than nothing at all.

What does one do with a jungle's worth of birds? An entrepreneur like Max Stern takes the canaries-singing their unremitting lullabies to the days and nights-to New York City and sells them to recoup the dollar amount of the loan that he had bequeathed his financially strapped friend. But he does more than that.

Max Stern's sojourn to the city that never sleeps propels him into the bird accessory business and the Hartz Mountain Company is soon born. Beyond bird supplies, the business quickly adds cat and dog merchandise to its product line and for the decades to come, few variety stores or supermarkets in the United States and Canada are without Hartz Mountain pet products ranging from parakeet seed to rawhide bones to kitty litter.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Martina Barton:

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