

# Need a Business Idea? Here are 55

You can start any of these home based businesses for less than \$5,000.

By Entrepreneur Press & Cheryl Kimball | May 20, 2009

*This article has been excerpted from [55 Surefire Home Based Businesses You Can Start for Under \\$5,000](#) by Entrepreneur Press & Cheryl Kimball, available from [Entrepreneur Press](#).*

Today, tens of thousands of people are considering starting a home-based business, and for good reasons. On average, people can expect to have two and three careers during their work life. Those leaving one career often think about their second or third career move being to their own home. People who have been part of the traditional nine-to-five work force and are on the verge of retiring from that life are thinking of what to do next. The good news: Starting a homebased business is within the reach of almost anyone who wants to take a risk and work hard.

**\$1,500 or less to start up**

## 1. ACCOUNTANT

**Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Create a flier outlining your services. Before you do that, you need to know what those services will be. Do you want to simply do bookkeeping for a small business?

A more involved level of accounting would be to actually work up balance sheets, income statements, and other financial reports on a monthly, quarterly, and/or annual basis, depending on the needs of the business. Other specializations can include tax accounting, a huge area of potential work. Many business owners don't mind keeping their own day-to-day bookkeeping records but would rather get professional help with their taxes.

## 2. BICYCLE REPAIR

In many parts of the country, this business tends to be seasonal, but you can find ways around that. Rent a storage unit and offer to store people's bicycles over the winter after you do a tune-up and any needed repairs on them. If you want to cater to the Lance Armstrong wannabes, you can have business all year round. These road race riders are training through snow, sleet and dark of night. Some of them work on their own bicycles, but many of them don't, so you can get their business all year. And if you keep Saturday shop hours, you can be sure you will have a group of enthusiasts coming by to talk all things cycling.

## 3. BOAT CLEANING

**Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Boats that are hauled out of the water for the winter or even just for mid-season repairs will need the hull cleaned. And depending on the type of boat, it is a good time to give a major cleaning everything else too--the decks, the sleeping quarters, the head, and the holds. Start by approaching homes that have a boat sitting in the yard. Or you could market your services to the marina to contract you to do the boat cleaning it offers to customers.

## 4. BUSINESS PLAN SERVICE

**Has expansion possibilities**

Offer a soup-to-nuts business plan, including market research, the business plan narrative and the financial statements. Plan your fee around the main one that the client will want and offer the others as add-on services.

You can give clients an electronic file and allow them to take it from there, or you can keep the business plan on file and offer the service of tweaking it whenever necessary. Have business plan samples to show clients--and make sure to include your own!

## **5. CHIMNEY SWEEP**

Learning to be a chimney sweep may mean nothing more than apprenticing with someone already in the business. By becoming a chimney expert, you can combine a chimney sweep **business** with a chimney inspection service--covering more than just whether or not the chimney needs cleaning but whether the chimney is in good working order or in need of repair.

## **6. CLEANING SERVICE**

There are many directions you can take this business. If you want to work during hours when no one else does, you can focus on office clients. You can focus on retail **businesses** and keep your customers clumped into one or two blocks. Restaurants are in great need of daily thorough cleaning and can be a great source of steady clients. Perhaps you would be more interested in house cleaning. Many times with cleaning services you don't have to spend lots of money on advertising or marketing because your customers will come by word of mouth.

## **7. COMPUTER REPAIR**

**Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Study the main types of software that system users will want--word processing, photo manipulation software, mail merge, spreadsheet, design and especially security software. Investigate all the components--monitor types in all their varieties; keyboards, from wired to ergonomic to wireless; mouse types; as well as peripheral components like **printers** and scanners. Become completely familiar with all the ISPs (internet service providers) available in the market area you plan to cover. Establish yourself as the guru who can meet the needs of the personal computer user, the small business or a larger corporation.

## **8. CONSULTANT**

**Has expansion possibilities**

To be a consultant, you need to have an expertise in something so you can market yourself as an advisor to others looking to work in that area. Perhaps you managed several large warehouses in your career with a drugstore company, you did all the marketing for many years for a large shoe manufacturer or you set up a chain of beauty supply shops or take-out restaurants. You can use this experience to help others do similar things without making the same mistakes that you made along the way.

## **9. DOG BREEDER**

**Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Before finding the appropriate mate for your female dog, you need to make sure she is in impeccable physical condition for her mothering responsibilities. You need to be sure you have an adequate and safe place for her to have her puppies and what to do if something goes wrong. And you need to know all about raising puppies. You could raise a male dog that you use as a stud. This is not as easy as it may seem. In order for your male dog to command any kind of worthwhile stud fee, you need to get him starting out at a young age to earn points in competition. But your stud will have to have been incredibly well bred himself and earn his name in the world before you can ask high prices for breeding fees.

## 10. EBAY ASSISTANT

Do you have items lurking around your household that you could sell on eBay? Figure out your asking price and decide whether to auction it or put it in your eBay store. Then decide if you want a minimum bid and how long you want the auction to last. You will want to establish a [PayPal account](#) to use for transactions. The eBay website provides all the information you need to know to get up and running with an eBay business.

## 11. EDITORIAL SERVICES

### Has expansion possibilities

Here are some of the editorial services you can provide from the quiet of your own home:

- **Copyediting.** This is where fact checking takes place, and where grammatical, stylistic and typographical errors are caught.
- **Proofreading.** This is the last stop for a “finished” piece. The proofreader makes sure the copyediting changes have been properly made and no new errors are created in the process.
- **Indexing.** There are indexing courses available and you can get indexing software.
- **Developmental editing.** A developmental editor works with a manuscript on big-picture things like organization and content issues.
- **Book doctoring.** This is an editorial service provided for manuscripts written by experts. They create a manuscript as best they can and then a book doctor puts it into publishable shape.
- **Ghost Writing.** As a ghost writer, you actually do the research and write the book and someone else's name is attached as the author.
- **Copywriting.** Also known as business writing, this is writing that promotes a product or a service.
- **Book writing.** Do you have an expertise in something professional, such as accounting or interior decorating? Or personally, like knitting? Why not write a book about it?
- **Magazine article writing.** Magazines and newspapers are a great way to get your writing published before tackling the daunting task of writing a whole book.
- **Web page content provider.** Providing content for a web site is a good way to make some money writing.

## 12. ELECTRONICS REPAIR

### Has expansion possibilities

This business is similar to the computer repair business, but you will take on all sorts of electronic equipment besides just computers. With smaller electronics, you will need to be prepared to have customers bring their repair projects to you, as you would have difficulty recovering the cost of driving around picking up broken equipment and returning it. You may also want to encourage people to give you their old electronics so you can use them for parts.

## 13. EVENT PLANNING

### Has expansion possibilities

One of the first things you need to do is visit every potential event location with which you plan to work. Work with the marketing manager to tour each site and learn what is available at each location. Start a database that will allow you to sort venues by varying features--the number of people each site holds, if there is AV equipment available on site, will you need to arrange for rental chairs, etc. Then when you are beginning to plan an event with a client, you can find out what the key parameters are for the event and easily pull up the three or four sites that meet the basic criteria. and engagement parties, etc.

#### **14. EXPERT WITNESS SERVICE**

##### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

One way to make money in this field is by being an expert witness yourself. If you have an expertise that could be useful in legal cases, you can market yourself to attorneys to act as an expert witness. Another way to be active in the expert witness field is to play a sort of matchmaker, matching attorneys up with expert witnesses for their cases--either for the defense or for the prosecution. Expert witnesses for big money cases can be expected to fly anywhere to testify. There's no reason your database of witnesses can't be from all parts of the country.

#### **15. FINANCIAL PLANNER**

##### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

To start, you should go through the certification process so that you can label yourself a CFP (Certified Financial Planner). Your certificate shows that you have expertise and credibility, and this differentiation will help people choose you as their financial planner.

#### **16. FLEA MARKET**

##### **Has expansion possibilities**

People love to spend weekends rummaging through tables full of other people's unwanted items, looking for treasures. Make sure to change your layout and put new stuff out for sale often. You want people to come back time and again to see what's new. You don't even have to have that much new stuff to make things look new. Just moving an item from a table to the top of a bookshelf might get it noticed, even though the item has been in your inventory since you first started having sales.

#### **17. GOLF COACH**

##### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Let the local public courses know about your coaching business. Cultivate relationships with the staff and encourage them to recommend you as a coach. Another place to look for customers is the corporate world. Golfing is a game that business people use to develop relationships outside the office. You do need to be a better than average golfer to develop a reputation as a golf coach. You also need to be a good teacher, know how to be motivational and be willing to work with many different types of people.

#### **18. HOME ENERGY AUDITOR**

##### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

All homeowners are always on the lookout for ways to save on their utility bills. You can come to their aid by providing them with an audit of their house and giving them a breakdown of how they could accomplish real savings in heating, cooling and electrical use. You can go one step further and do the implementation and installation of some of your suggestions in their home yourself. Do a complete appliance audit, with efficiency ratings and calculations based on the age of the appliance. And don't forget the water heater!

#### **19. HOME INSPECTION**

##### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

In order to be successful, you will want to establish contacts with real estate agents who can recommend your services to customers. The home inspection field is one where you will need to do constant updating of your education and knowledge. New products are constantly coming out on the market--if you only know

about decks made of wood, you will not know how to inspect and assess the new materials on the market, such as composites that are made to look like real wood. Also keep apprised of all safety updates of materials and issues with things like off-gassing, carbon monoxide production, and other chemical precautions.

## **20. HOUSEHOLD ORGANIZER**

### **Has expansion possibilities**

You can choose either to do the organizing work or to come in to a home and consult on the things the homeowner could do to better organize. Have a portfolio of different organizational scenarios in different rooms in the home and talk with the homeowner about the style he or she likes. Create checklists and questionnaires to understand how the family uses the home. Are the kids wildly busy with after-school activities? Or are they usually home after school and want access to their toys? Do they share rooms? All of these things will help you tailor an organizing plan and become the family hero.

## **21. IMPORT/EXPORT SPECIALIST**

### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

If you don't already have work experience with importing and/or exporting, you will have a longer learning curve. You can start by learning the basics and hosting educational sessions to teach others what they need to know to get started in import/export. That alone would probably gain you your first couple of clients. If you keep going with educational seminars and expand your reach to outside your immediate region, you could probably develop a sufficient and ongoing customer base very quickly, but be careful not to outpace your learning curve!

## **22. INTERIOR DECORATOR**

### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Market your talents to building contractors. People purchasing new homes can often be overwhelmed with the choices and possibilities in home decorating. Design some questionnaires for each major element and each major room in the house. Find out how the homeowner will use the home--are there children? Pets? Does the woman of the house wear high heels? Etc.

## **23. JEWELRY MAKING**

### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

There are many different ways of getting into the jewelry business and many different types of materials with which you can work. Working in metal will probably require the most in the way of specific tools. You need to be able to heat the metal to manipulate it, and you need metalworking tools to cut and engrave it. But there are many other materials that you can work with to make jewelry--glass, plastic, beads, feathers, even wood, to name just a few.

## **24. MARKETING COPY WRITER**

### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

If you can write copy that gets people excited about purchasing what your client has to sell, you can make good money in this business. Unless you are highly experienced from working in the copywriting field, take a course. There are online courses or classes at community colleges & universities that can give you a leg up in getting savvy at writing copy for brochures, catalogs, advertising and marketing copy for the web.

## **25. NOTARY PUBLIC/JUSTICE OF THE PEACE**

### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

In most states in the U.S., a notary public is a state officer who is authorized to witness and attest to the legalities of certain documents by signature and stamping a seal. Most states require that you pass an exam and a background check. It costs very little to become a notary and your income from notary work is negligible. A justice of the peace typically performs wedding ceremonies. States have varying rules and procedures for becoming a JP and performing services. Becoming a JP and/or notary public does not cost much money. And it is not a big moneymaking venture! Many states set the fees you can charge for JP services. JPs can add additional fees, and often do, including travel and hourly rates for additional meetings such as rehearsals, other prep time and any special requests.

## **26. PERSONAL CONCIERGE**

This business is for someone who is supremely efficient and has the ability to make things happen. People who hire you will expect things when they want them and you need to be able to come through with not only what they want, but with a personal touch and a smile on your face. The most likely clients for a personal concierge service are top executives who find themselves at the office by 7 a.m. and are there most nights until 9 p.m., leaving them very little time to do all those things that often need to be done during those very hours.

## **27. PERSONAL TRAINER**

### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Advertise your services in places where everyone goes, like restaurants and grocery stores. Having a website is a good idea--people want some privacy in their decision-making when it comes to getting fit. They can go to your website and determine if your approach to personal training is an approach that would work for them. It is important to emphasize the safety aspect of using a personal trainer. You can help clients get fit and avoid injury.

## **28. PROPERTY MANAGEMENT**

Your job, in the case of rental units, will be to make sure the property is running smoothly. For seasonal properties, you will most likely spend your management time making sure the property is ready for seasonal visits and well-maintained when no one is around. If the owners go away for six weeks in the winter, the property manager makes regular checks on the property. You will be the contact number if the security system operator needs to contact someone about a breach in security.

## **29. SMALL ENGINE REPAIR**

### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Most community colleges offer some level of engine-repair courses. Another way to learn would be to take a part-time position at a repair shop or a rental facility where you could learn on the job, although you will want to be open about your plans. You should be prepared to work on push-behind lawn mowers, riding lawn mowers, generators, garden tools such as rototillers and edgers, chainsaws, wood chippers and snow blowers. You need to decide whether you'll want to take on bigger jobs, such as tractors, snowmobiles and ATVs; space may be your decision-maker.

### **30. SOLAR ENERGY CONSULTANT**

**Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

**Has expansion possibilities**

As a solar consultant, you can basically conduct a home inspection and give clients a report on their solar options for their particular home and site. This can range from full-fledged general solar installations that generate electricity to simple solar walkway lighting. You might want to start by working in a solar products company to become knowledgeable in the solar energy field. However, to be a consultant, it is often best not to be affiliated with any one company or product and be able to recommend products and options across the field of solar energy.

### **31. TAX PREPARER**

**Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Most tax preparation franchises offer courses, seminars, and training to get you ready to work for them. You will learn a lot about tax preparation while working for them before going out on your own. There is a lot of educational support out there to learn tax preparation and all its complexities. And there are lots of individuals and businesses willing to spend a few hundred dollars a year to have someone else prepare their taxes and keep watch for tax breaks or tax burdens on their behalf.

### **32. TAXIDERMIST**

**Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Today's world of taxidermy isn't exclusive to preserving real specimens. Taxidermy also refers to recreating a specimen using completely artificial materials. Taxidermy schools where you can learn the trade are located almost throughout the country, typically as courses over several weeks specializing in certain levels of expertise, from beginner to master's level. Like any enterprise, there are taxidermy conventions that you can attend and learn about the latest techniques and materials.

### **33. UPHOLSTERING**

If you have a knack for sewing, upholstery repair might be a perfect business for you. One of the best ways to learn how to upholster is to get some discarded upholstered furniture and start tearing it apart. Many books and some videos are available to help you learn this trade. Often furniture ready for upholstery will also need repairs. Have a list available of furniture repair people you can recommend to your customers. Or you can take the piece in, have repair people you work with do this work for you, and add it to the overall cost. You can also learn to do this work, especially minor repairs, yourself.

### **34. USED BOOK SALES**

Almost everyone has a few boxes of books stashed away in the house somewhere. Why not make a business out of them? In order to gain customers--especially repeat customers--you will need to have some regular shop hours. Make your shop known for something—a specific category (or two) of books, having some first editions for sale, all paperbacks a dollar and all hardcovers two bucks, and/or a swap program. Maps, illustrations, postcards, greeting cards and magazines are good sidelines to include in your shop.

### **35. WEDDING PLANNER**

You will need to be up-to-date on wedding trends and fads, dress styles, color trends--almost everything under the sun! Offer your customers an ala carte menu of services, from helping pick flowers, the wedding

gown and bridesmaid dresses to picking the venue and hiring the caterer. Before you open your business, shop at all the wedding shops, and even pretend you are a bride-to-be to see what kinds of services the wedding gown shop provides and how they treat potential customers. You need to know every detail of the business to give the accurate impression that you are the go-to person for anyone planning a wedding.

**\$1,500 to 3,000 to start up**

### **36. APPLIANCE REPAIR**

**Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Every household has a number of appliances, large and small. You can work on your own or on contract with appliance stores to cover their warranty service calls--or, best of all, you can do some of each. Plan to start slow and build your customer base on recommendations and referrals based on work well done. Consider developing relationships with contractors to be the go-to person to install appliances in newly constructed houses.

### **37. COMPUTER TRAINING**

**Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

**Has expansion possibilities**

If you are proficient in both Macintosh and PC, you should offer training in both types of computers. You could probably make a living helping seniors learn how to use the internet and e-mail to keep in touch with their loved ones, who are now commonly spread around the country. Err on the side of caution in this business. People do not want to know all the details about what makes a computer work. If you overload them with information from the beginning by explaining bits, bytes, and megapixels, they will stick to their paper and pencil forever.

### **38. DESKTOP PUBLISHER**

**Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

You can use desktop publishing software to create newsletters, magazines, books or even marketing materials. You can create the content for your desktop publications, or you can pay a writer to create the content for you. Alternatively, you can advertise your desktop publishing services to design and create newsletters and books for others with their content.

### **39. FENCE INSTALLATIONS**

Fences are everywhere. And they don't last forever, so they need to be repaired and replaced with a certain amount of frequency. The most common fence material is wood. However, vinyl has become a popular fence choice due to its longevity and relative freedom from maintenance. Wrought iron is another common fencing, especially in urban environments. You can have fun shopping for vintage wrought iron fencing at salvage yards.

### **40. FREELANCE GRAPHIC DESIGNER**

**Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Despite the proliferation of the internet, print media is here to stay for the foreseeable future! Fliers, newsletters, magazines, information sheets, letters and advertisements are just a few of the types of print media that business hire freelancers to create for them. Websites and online advertising need graphic design services as well. Even if your expertise is only in design, offer the works for potential clients, including the

editorial creation and the printing and even mailing of the final piece. You can line up regular freelancers for those parts of the job you can't do.

#### **41. GIFT BASKET SERVICE**

##### **Has expansion possibilities**

Finding a niche is the best way to start out in the gift basket business. Are you a dog lover, horse lover, or exercise guru who could put together baskets that hold the things that people with this interest would like? Do you already create a product that a gift basket could be built around? Have you made your own soaps for the past 10 years? A gift basket that included one or two of your soaps, hand lotion, a scrub brush and manicure kit could be a lovely basket to receive.

#### **42. GRAFFITI REMOVAL**

Create an arsenal of cleaning products that can clean almost every kind of product (paint, chalk, markers) from every kind of surface (cement, wood, pavement). The best way to conduct a graffiti service is to offer a subscription-like arrangement. Once a month or whatever interval makes sense for your clients, go around to their property and clean off the graffiti. Charge them a monthly or quarterly fee and make it simple for everyone--they don't have to think about graffiti, and you just do your job.

#### **43. HAIRSTYLIST**

##### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Hairstyling is a popular business that can be quite lucrative. Generally a home based hairstylist business is likely to be started by someone who has already has a cosmetology career and wants a change. If you already have your cosmetology training and license, and loads of experience under your belt working in a hairstyling salon, you probably have a following that will follow you right home without any hesitation.

#### **44. HERBAL FARM STAND**

You need to decide whether you will sell your herbs as live plants, picked or cut in bunches and packed, or dried. If you plan to market to cooks instead of gardeners, you will want to sell your herbs either fresh cut and packed in sealed bags, or dried and sold in baggies. You can also consider a "pick-your-own" arrangement; however, be aware that herbs are more delicate than most P.Y.O products. You may save your garden a lot of strife and your plants a lot of wear and tear if you do the picking.

#### **45. LANDSCAPER**

##### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

If you have a knack for this type of work, a degree won't be necessary. Most people want their yards tidied up in the spring, their lawns mowed in the summer, their leaves removed in the fall, and their shrubs and driveways ready for winter snow. You will also want to offer garden work such as spring planting of annuals and perennials; vegetable garden preparation, planting and fall cleanup; pest control and watering. You can offer tree care service. There is plenty to do in the yard that has nothing to do with plants: stone wall restoration, fencing, irrigation system installation.

## **46. MASSAGE THERAPIST**

### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

You will want to become certified in massage therapy to be able to effectively market your services. Courses that lead to certification include not only information on human anatomy and physiology and the effects that massage has on both, but also on how to make a business out of the field of massage. You could do either a certification program or an associate's degree and stay within the \$5,000 scope of this book.

## **47. MOVING SERVICE**

Lots of people who are moving want to hire someone to do the heavy lifting for them. You can leave the large-scale, long-distance moving to the big moving companies. Your work can be the local, moving-across-town or to the town-next-door jobs. These are the ones that people start off thinking perhaps they could do themselves, and it will be your job to convince them otherwise. Your signs around town will tempt them to let you take care of that part of the move, while they are busy taking care of those other 500 items on their list.

## **48. MUSIC LESSONS**

### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

You want to stick to the instrument(s) you know, but you may be a skilled enough musician to offer lessons on several different instruments, or those in a particular class, e.g., stringed or woodwind. You can decide to take on individuals or classes, depending on space and availability of instruments. Public schools are continually reducing their commitment to art and music classes for students, so you can try to work with the public school system to supplement their efforts in those areas.

## **49. PHOTOGRAPHER**

### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Making money as a photographer can be done in a number of different ways. You can specialize in one area, the most common being weddings. There are niches you can explore for photography: portraits of people and their pets, families, and homes; photographs of holiday events, birthday parties or Christmas cards; the possibilities are endless.

## **50. RUG CLEANING**

You will need to learn how to work with all kinds of carpet fabrics, from synthetic to wool carpets. Decide whether you will take on valuable antique carpets and family heirlooms; if so, you will want to get specialized training in how to handle these carpets and the specialized ways of cleaning them. Learn how to get tough stains and odors out of carpets--such as dog and cat odors--and your services will be in great demand.

## **51. WEBSITE DEVELOPER**

### **Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Many courses exist (many of which, logically, are offered online) where you can learn the language of website creation and can learn about the details, like how to set up shopping cart systems, security concerns, etc. You will, of course, need to learn about each company you design for. What is the atmosphere of the company that you need to reflect in the website design--is it wild and contemporary, meaning brilliant colors and fun graphics? Or will more classic colors like black, navy blue and maroon be more appropriate?

**\$3,000 to \$5,000 to start up**

## **52. BED AND BREAKFAST**

Do you have a room that has its own bathroom and is private from the rest of the living space? Are you near attractions such as a tourist area, sports stadium or venue for a large annual event? Or is your home in the country with spring peepers, summer crickets and crisp fall nights that could give a city-dweller a weekend of peaceful living? Say you can rent the room for \$150 a night for Friday and Saturday nights 48 weeks a year--that's \$14,400 in revenue! Utilize what you have and create a unique experience.

## **53. CHRISTMAS TREE SALES**

If you want to start a Christmas tree farm, you need to plan ahead. It takes approximately seven years for a Balsam fir--perhaps the most traditional Christmas tree--to grow from a small sapling to a 5- to 6-foot tree. Selling your trees yourself is the best option. Consumers come to the property, pick the one they want, and you harvest it for them. The other option is to buy your trees from a wholesaler and sell them either in your yard or in a vacant lot that you rent from Thanksgiving to Christmas.

## **54. DAY CARE**

**Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Perhaps you love children. Perhaps you have children of your own and the idea of taking care of a few more for part of the day appeals to you. Child-care needs continue to soar in the United States. Many people prefer the option of their child being cared for in a home environment while they are at work, opposed to a more institutional-like setting. These things mean that a homebased childcare business can get off and running immediately.

## **55. PET SITTING**

**Experience, training or licensing may be needed**

Starting a pet sitting service requires almost nothing in start-up costs. You do need some general credentials that will cost little or nothing to acquire. Your list of credentials should probably include personal pet ownership--if not currently, at least in the past--as well as other pet-related experience, including working at a pet food store, an animal hospital or other animal-related business. You will need to spend a little to become "bonded." This is known as "honesty insurance," and ensures your clients that you won't get their house keys and make off with their valuables (or that they'll get their money back if you do).