



Starting a Career in Pet Grooming

PetGroomer.com eBooks

Demand for Pet Groomers will increase 12% by 2010*. The U.S. pet industry is a \$32 billion a year business noted for being recession resistant. It has steadily grown from \$16 billion in 1992.

* Growth figures represent a ten-year period ending 2010. Source: "National Industry-Occupation Employment Matrix," a publication of The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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Brief Description of the Grooming Industry

Pet grooming has been around for centuries. It's hard to believe that pet grooming could persist for so long a time without becoming more formally recognized as an important profession. Today there is still no vocational licensing of pet groomers although the legislatures of California and Pennsylvania made some moves in that direction in 2005. In the absence of the standardization expected with an organized and licensed profession pet grooming business owners generally "do their own thing." Generally speaking, anyone in the U.S. can hang out a shingle today and do business as a pet groomer without any proof of related training. Consumers rely greatly on the goodwill and nature of pet groomers to properly handle and aesthetically groom their pets, and by and large groomers come through.

We are highly-optimistic about this industry. That optimism has kept us in this industry for over 40 years. We know pet grooming is an important industry to millions of pet owners. They naturally desire clean "family member" pets in their households and know that well-groomed pets are happier and healthier. As members of this industry we need to remember that pet owners have consistently given us something to bark about. We enjoy an industry that suffers little, if at all, during the economic downturns. Our clientele simply doesn't cut back on their beloved pets for basic care. Few professions have that peace-of-mind so consistently.

We entered the pet grooming industry in the early 1960's. The industry was no where near as advanced as it is today by comparison. Grooming services were often located in kennel grooming departments and shops and salons were somewhat scarce. Mobile grooming was years away. Air conditioning was not yet commonly available making the work of grooming truly hot and sweaty much of the year. Force dryers didn't exist by today's standards so you relied on heating elements adding to the hot environment. Today our descriptions of the improvements in tools, equipment and supplies would fill an entire book. Perhaps most important, sources of grooming industry information and education have gone from almost nonexistent to a rich variety.

In the last 10 years there has been a surge of new career seekers leaving jobs in corporate environs and entering the grooming industry to fulfill passionate quests to work with animals. As career consultants to hundreds of them we asked, "Why now?" Their most universal answer is the availability of grooming career information and business planning services. Confidence is derived from information shared with those that have gone before you. Our sharing with them gave them the confidence to "take the plunge" and crossover into a new grooming groomer leaving careers in sales, medicine, insurance, banking, office work, military and dozens more of mainstream professions.

Reliable market statistics for the grooming industry are rare. Unfortunately, the large majority of groomers are not members of grooming associations. The retail and veterinary medical sectors of the pet industry boast large numbers of members in their respective associations. Their associations conduct broad surveys and publish finely documented studies. At PetGroomer.com we are moving in that direction. For several years we have conducted the largest surveys of the grooming industry in its history. You can refer to the [Take a Survey](#) pages at PetGroomer.com for more information. However, we can provide you with some reasonable estimates.

Number of U.S. Groomers:	Estimated between 60,000 to 80,000
Number of U.S. Grooming Businesses:	Estimated between 22,000 to 28,000*

* Includes vets, kennels, day cares and other pet businesses with a grooming department.

Consider this reliable statistic. There are between 4,000 to 5,000 dogs and cats for every grooming business in the U.S. Yet, less than 1% of all grooming businesses groom that many dogs and cats from their *regular clientele*. In other words, probably less than 50% of dog and cat owners are using the services of grooming businesses. However, the grooming business owners continue to find it difficult to maintain adequate supply of skilled employees to meet the demand for grooming services. There are very few pet polls that accurately indicate the actual demographics of grooming demand. The Gallup Poll of 1990 indicated that 43% of pet owners had used the services of pet groomers.

Members of the grooming industry could benefit from increased consumer awareness of what professional grooming offers beyond aesthetic values but also its natural support pet health and happiness. However localized tension among groomers across the U.S. is all too common, Many grooming business owners in the same town avoid one another. This acidic competitive nature holds back the profession from gaining an improved reputation and foments stereotypical operations. Indeed only a few percent of all groomers attend even one manner of continuing education in grooming each year.

When you put this all together and consider that there is an average of 3,500 to 4,000 dogs and cats for every grooming business, and extremely few of them have a *regular* clientele that approaches this many dogs and cats, it is unfortunate that the very large majority groomers are not a member of any national association. Imagine if they were; the association could conduct broad campaigns enlightening consumers with the benefits of regular professional groomer and everyone would prosper. What is the value of the competitive nature of most grooming industry members? There is none.

The most chronic problem in the pet grooming industry is its supply of skilled groomers. Every grooming business owner knows that finding and keeping an adequate supply of groomer employees can be frustrating, and it has been that way for decades. Obviously there is a silver lining and that is, the demand for grooming continues to grow every year making job opportunities available just about everywhere, and in every U.S. state.

A career in pet grooming is a sound idea but to become prosperously employed or self-employed and to protect the well-being of your body from the laborious work of grooming, you need to plan your career in stages and to know the many paths you can follow in the grooming industry. You need to pay very careful attention to your education and to never stop learning. We are fortunate that continuing education is available today and thousands more groomers could benefit from more participation in these programs; they are a gift of opportunity to clearly define ourselves as professionals worthy of a broad public image as such. So from a career perspective we say, "Come on in. The water feels great, but make sure you know how to swim."

Is Pet Grooming Right For Me?

Successful pet groomers have artistic traits. Much like a sculptor sizing up a slab of marble fresh from the quarry and seeing within it a finished statue, groomers aim to style their masterpieces out of the hairy dogs and even some cats. While some breeds only require bathing and drying and a little touchup with scissors or clippers, the excitement of grooming as an art shows best with the styling challenges of many other breeds and mixed breeds.

If you have a keen eye and enjoy color, design and using your hands you have the basic requirements to learn the art of grooming. But there is more and it is an important reality of grooming. You are not working with inanimate canvas or marble. As a groomer you are also the temporary caretaker of living animals beloved by their owners and that means substantial responsibilities revolve around your art and daily working lifestyle.

Pet grooming is never right for anyone without a sincere and humane appreciation of animals and the willingness to consistently express that character in their work performance. Being a pet groomer has significant demands. You are after all caring for living animals beloved by their owners and families. You must have **infinite patience** to work with pets. You must have no abusive tendencies for heated reactions towards pet and people, whether emotional or physical. You must temper your reactions at all times without yelling, scolding or resorting to physical admonishment. You must handle stress well and be willing to work smarter. Is that you?

It may seem incredible to you but as employers we actually interviewed job applicants fearful of dogs and cats. The idea of grooming can be appealing for good reason, but there are realities to properly handling animals that can perhaps only be experienced to be understood. Every grooming employer should ask, "Do you fear household pets?" You may have to groom a behavioral pet that requires a muzzle or other restraint system. Some pets bite. You can protect yourself and a professional knows how to do that safely and humanely and with that infinite patience we previously mentioned. Eventually you can gain the confidence of behavioral pets and your grooming experiences will moderate.

Pet groomers with moderate to severe allergies to pet dog and cat fur and contaminants may find it difficult not only to work as a pet groomer, but to find employment. Hair coats collect weeds, pollens, pests and dust then released by grooming. If you have allergies to these various contaminants but decide to persist in pet grooming, be sure to ask your physician to provide written medical clearance to work in a grooming environment. A medical release may encourage an employer to hire you knowing that you are subject to related allergies.

You must be willing to be inoculated, usually with a tetanus booster. Though you may work in an air conditioned environment the bathing and drying area of a grooming business or van is typically warm and humid. Without adequate air conditioning it can be very hot. Can you endure the heat and don't overlook the sound levels of blow dryers and some barking dogs? Today there are sharp designers developing salons and shops with noise abatement design in mind, and some of their ideas can be found in PetGroomer.com resources, and in mid-2006 this topic will be covered in Grooming Business in a Box™ career resources available at MyGroomingBusiness.com.

When we interview job applicants we also ask how they feel about cleaning up pet wastes. You will have to clean up some pet wastes, perhaps every work day. Some job applicants have halted the interview right there! Did they think we hired someone dedicated to cleaning pet wastes? Okay, so what about blood? Inside of every pet dog and cat nail is a blood vessel. When clipping nails it is possible that you may expose the vessel to the blade and the result is bleeding. Every pet groomer stocks a supply of a powder agent that immediately stops the bleeding. So you may get a little blood on your hands as a groomer, and you will be constantly cleaning and disinfecting areas of the business including floors, counter tops, tables and cages. Does this bother you? If it does you probably won't want to be a pet groomer.

Pet grooming is very physical work. It requires stamina and strength. You should not have serious physical conditions worsened by lifting, carrying and handling pets. Consider that you may groom large pets weighing 70 to 150 pounds. There are self-employed groomers who did limit their clientele by setting weight limitations for pets. Their restriction usually caps the weight of dogs groomed to a low of 25 pounds while more commonly the cap is around 50 to 70 pounds. If your goal is to build a very large grooming business serving 30 or more pets per day you may find weight restricted grooming works against your business goal. Employers are likely to provide you with instruction and assistance when lifting large pets, but that doesn't mean you won't be exerting yourself. If you suffer from repetitive motion conditions in your joints, such as carpal tunnel, the work of grooming pets is almost certain to aggravate your condition. Consider carefully that you will be working several hours each work day holding brushes, combs, clippers and other tools, and using your body to control and position pets. Consult with your physician if you have any questions about your physical abilities to work with pets in a grooming environment. Also, you will likely be standing on your feet for long hours though some pet groomers are able to perform some duties while sitting.

Hopefully your pet grooming training will include procedures to reduce the impact of repetitive pet grooming duties on your physical well-being. You may find a seminar and demonstration on this subject at a pet grooming trade show. It is a folly to consider that pet grooming will ever be anything other than physically demanding. If you take care of your body, it should endure the toils of pet grooming. We know groomers who have worked for ten, twenty or more years without serious health problems, or unusual physical wear and tear. However, they worked wisely maintaining their health awareness.

Now that you know about the less attractive working conditions of pet grooming, and the artistic nature requirements, we want to remind you that we love this profession as do thousands of pet groomers. Every day we look forward to the joy we bring pet owners by miraculously making pets look their best. Adults smile and children giggle with every reunion when picking up their freshly groomed pets. Most pet owners give us immense appreciation for a job well done. Not many other trades can provide so much positive response on a daily basis. In our experience many clients honored as part of their pet's extended family. Grooming is very different from the occasional job reviews in mainstream employment. Count on daily reviews of your performance by pet owners with smiles, laughs, eyes opening wide, perhaps a hug and sometimes monetary tips. No wonder so many passionate animal people are entering the pet care industry.

Attending pet industry and grooming trade shows and competitions is an excellent way to help determine if grooming right for you. Trade shows and competitions are held regularly across the United States. It's a great way to meet other groomers and you can always pick-up grooming tips watching the exciting grooming competitions. In the past decade educational opportunities at trade shows have exploded. You may want to spend 2 or 3 days at major shows because there are that many seminars and demonstrations, and lots of fun activities too. Meander through rows of exhibitors discovering the latest products and equipment. If this excites you grooming may be right for you. If you are opening a pet business and selling pet retail goods there are also pet industry trade shows that concentrate on retail. However, many of them add grooming exhibitions and contests which you can attend. You will find a list of current events at PetGroomer.com by clicking the [Calendar](#) link on most pages.

Finally, estimates show that overall women outnumber men in the grooming field by at least 8 to 1. Males tend to hold more pet bathing positions compared to full-charge groomer positions. It's been that way for a long time. However there are excellent male stylists and you may see some of them in grooming competitions. As consultants we have helped many men to join their wives' grooming businesses. Together couples take their business to an even higher performance level. We encourage men to enter the field. Careers in grooming are right for either sex as long as the individuals have the important qualities of professional groomers we have reviewed here.

The Many Career Paths of Pet Grooming

Unlike many professions pet grooming has an extraordinary number of career paths. Here is a list of the most common career paths:

Employment

You can find grooming employment opportunities in:

- Grooming shops and salons.
- Grooming departments within:
 - Boarding facilities.
 - Veterinarian clinics.
 - Pet day care facilities.
 - Retail pet stores, small and large (PETsMART, PETCO and Best Friends Pet Care).

Self-Employment

Consider these paths as the owner of a:

- Grooming shop or salon in a commercial location.
- Mobile grooming business (grooming van, truck or trailer conversion).
- Home-based grooming business (in your home).
- House-call grooming business (not mobile vehicle, grooming inside homes of pet owners).
- Rent or lease a grooming department within:
 - Boarding facilities.
 - Veterinarian clinics.
 - Pet day care facilities.
 - Self-serve pet wash.
 - Independent retail stores.
- "Rent a table" in a shop or salon (limited availability of this opportunity).

Differences in Employment and Self-Employment Careers

Here is a list of differences between employment and self-employment. Both paths require grooming training whether provided at no charge by an apprenticeship or company job training program or by fee based training. Entering the industry self-employed usually requires fee based training.

- Self-employment.
 - Startup investment capital required.
 - Control over the standards of quality, safety and art of grooming.
 - Potential to grow a large business earning higher income compared to employment.
 - Longer working hours and many additional responsibilities.
 - Long-term commitments generally required in various aspects of operation such as leases, financing and operations.
 - Increased tax reporting and licensure, and liability issues.
 - No employee benefits but similar benefits can be arranged by the business for the owner and staff (if applicable).
- Employment.
 - Generally set working hours and no after work responsibilities related to employment.
 - Employees must adhere to standards of operation including artistic design and pet care set by their employers.
 - Potential for employee benefits (paid time off, 401K, health and life insurance).

Most people entering the industry have no idea there are so many paths. We could write pages on the pros and cons of each path. What is important for now is the good news. There are successful pet groomers on every one of these paths listed above! Before you make your decision we encourage you to study all of the paths, even if you are certain of the one for you at this time. Also, keep in mind that not every groomer you meet has experienced all of these paths like we have. You do want to know their experience but no matter how persuasive they may be, keep an open mind at this point. The employed groomer and the self-employed groomer are very different people. The world of the mobile groomer is very different from the world of the salon groomer except for one common thread. We groom pets for pet owners. So celebrate the diversity of grooming and by the time you have gained your grooming education you will likely know the right path for you.

We suggest you further study career options online at PetGroomer.com. Refer to the large Information Menus section where you will find the [Home, Mobile or Salon Main Menu](#) for self-employment considerations, and [Retail Grooming Main Menu](#) for corporate employment opportunities. Actually all 40 of the [Information Menus](#) should be helpful to career seekers.

You can also learn more about employment opportunities by viewing hundreds of help wanted ads updated daily at [PetGroomer.com Classified Ads](#). If you want to be employed or find an apprenticeship you can place a free job search ad when you are ready. The classifieds also have ads for home study and grooming schools. Thousands of people come each week to find new and used mobile vans and trailers, business for sale opportunities as well as suppliers of tools, supplies and equipment. It is one of the most dynamic marketplaces anywhere in the grooming industry. You can learn a great deal just studying the advertising and linked web sites.

How Education Plays a Role in Your Career Path

Before you march down your career path you have vitally important considerations and then decisions to make. At this point in your career this is one question that prefaces all other decisions. What is your plan for education? Consider these related questions. How are you going to learn to groom pets? Which form of education is right for you? Does your education plan help you with your overall career path in grooming? For example, your plan is to open a business once you complete your grooming training. Where is your business training? Did you locate a course that included grooming and business training? Here's another example. Your goal is to get as much hands-on training as possible because you plan to open a business by yourself after graduation, and that means you won't have support training from other experienced groomers. Shouldn't you then take the longest course possible or arrange to stay after graduation for extra school hours until you are confident in your readiness to work alone? Here's yet another example. Are you counting on an apprenticeship for your training? Have you located potential apprenticeship positions? Have you considered training opportunities with both independent groomers and the major chain pet stores that offer grooming training? What are the differences in their training programs? How long does it take?

Feeling confused? Good. It's just temporary. As grooming career counselors we have learned from years of experience that it is important to keep reiterating to career seekers, "This is a very diverse industry and there are many implications resulting from that diversity." In fact, career seekers from 12 foreign countries in addition to U.S. and Canadian citizens have visited our offices in the last 2 decades for a ["Private Consultation."](#) Together we create a personalized career path for them based on 16 hours of intensive consultation. Few of our career plans are ever the same. Of course, not everyone can have our undivided attention. Your numbers are in the thousands. So let us advise that you always keep your education plans at the top of your career plans.

Good news is coming in the next chapters. We are going to help you make more effective career path decisions that span your entire career from beginner to veteran groomer, and possibly business owner. We are also going to help you find which career path supports your financial needs. Don't be ashamed to expect to make a living from grooming and to talk about money earned from grooming. There is a time and place for these discussions. You will find groomers who make every effort to avoid talking about money from grooming; it may seem greedy to make money from helping animals, at least to

them. Grooming shouldn't be "all about the money." However among us are business owners and employees with families to support and dreams to fulfill. On one end we know people with grooming incomes adequate to buy new homes, raise large families and send children to college. On the other end we know groomers satisfied with modest incomes and simple lifestyles. Yes, the many career paths in grooming can satisfy all of their financial needs. However, as the demand for larger incomes increases, career path choices decrease and groomers are required to dedicate more time and motivation to their ventures usually involving self-employment.

Isn't this an interesting industry? Everyone is different and so are their choices. There is no right or wrong. The common glue we share as a body of professionals is "the care of pets." Now let's see what choices are available to meet your financial goals.

What Can I Earn as a Pet Groomer?

Just as there are diverse career paths in pet grooming so are there diverse ranges of incomes. In fact the ranges are extreme for self-employed groomers. Before providing you with financial statistics we believe you should first understand how groomer wages are calculated for employed groomers. Also keep in mind when we use the term “groomer” we are not referring to “pet bathers” a.k.a. “bather/fluffers.” Pet bathers do not perform “finish styling.” Therefore when we say “pet groomer” or “pet stylist” we are referring to someone with complete abilities to groom dogs and cats from start to finish.

Pet bathers commonly perform pre-bath duties such as brushing, combing, dematting, ears and nails. Then they bathe and dry pets. If they are being styled the finish work is completed by a stylist or groomer. Today most pet bathers are paid hourly, and their pay range is commonly between \$7.00 an hour to \$12.00 an hour. The midrange is the most common. To give you a historical perspective of pet bathing it was very common to pay bathers by piecework in the 1960's and 1970's.

Now let's take a look at groomers/stylists. They have the “high-end” skills necessary to perform artistic styling often termed “finish trimming” or “finish styling.” Finish work requires the most expertise and experience and typically earns the high employment compensation.

Employed groomers are paid in at least four different ways. They are:

1. Hourly wages (with or without a minimum guarantee of hours in any one pay period).
2. Salary wages.
3. Commission wages.
4. Hourly/Salary plus commission wages.

Confused? It can be very confusing. Compensation plans are also controversial for many members of the industry and misinformation abounds. We have our opinions on compensation formats, but unlike others we provide written backup because “accurate numbers don't lie.” They tell the truth that banishes mere opinions. Without a doubt everyone that enters the grooming industry has an opinion on how to make the best wages. So will say, “This method is the only way to go,” and others say, “You will lose money if you don't pay employees this way.” We have one response, “Interesting proposal. Can you show us the numbers that back your point of view?” Well, after nearly 2 decades we are still waiting for someone to back their opinion, whatever it may be, with a set of numbers. We would probably buy them flowers in a rush of excitement. Honestly, this is the environment of this industry when you review the topic of compensation.

Commissions

Today thousands of groomers are convinced commission based wages earn them the highest incomes. There are no such absolutes. There are grooming business owners on the extreme that offer \$800 to \$900 a week through guaranteed salaries, and that is far higher than what most groomers are earning by commission. Our point is this; don't adopt the absolute point of view because you may miss out on great opportunities. Every employment offer should be considered and you should “work the numbers” before coming to a conclusion. Only by working the numbers will you know the monetary truth of any employment opportunity involving commission based wages.

Historically, commission wages were first put into place by the owners of grooming businesses. Many thousands of today's groomers do not realize that keen fact. They simply don't know the history of the field because where do you find that written history? Today, a slowly shrinking majority of groomers desire (or demand) commission based wages and a growing number of business owners don't favor commissions. How is that for a turnaround? It is a ball of confusion. It doesn't have to be if everyone would just study the numbers. Many speakers at trade shows have learned to avoid this topic because if the average member of the industry doesn't know how to conduct a financial comparison of wage

compensations formats, they are speaking to a room of groomers and business owners that are simply going to stick with the comfort of their opinions. I don't think anyone else other than PetGroomer.com would ever share this information with you career seekers, and we are committed to showing you how to make comparisons because accurate numbers don't lie. So how do commissions work?

Groomer gross wages calculated by commission work this way. First, the most common range of commission rates is 50% to 60%. To earn the commission the groomer usually grooms the pet start-to-finish. The groomer is privy to how much the business owner is charging the pet owner for the grooming service they performed. The owner multiplies the commission rate times the total service fee and the result is the gross wage for the groomer employee for that one grooming service. Subsequent grooming services are calculated similarly and compiled into a paycheck representing gross wages, subject to payroll deductions (employed groomers).

Example 1. A pet owner is charged \$40 for the grooming of a Bichon Frise. The groomer's commission rate is 55%. Therefore the groomer's gross wage for grooming the Bichon Frise is \$22.00. The owner retains \$18.00 for overhead and *potential* profit."

Only highly-experienced groomers earn 60% commissions and some employers don't ever offer 60% because after overhead there is little remaining profit.

Now here's the puzzle. Why would some business owners favor commissions while others adamantly say no commissions?

The answer explains why business owners created commissions decades ago. The answer is "risk." Many were then paying bathers by piecework and so something other than salaries was developed for groomers. There was no risk in paying a bather by piecework. No baths today, no pay today. Similarly the owner had no risk paying a groomer for work not performed with commissions either. If the owner had kept the appointment filled most of the year, there would be no risk with salaries for full-time employees but most owners really didn't market and there is still some truth to that statement today. So in this light we can see why commissions entirely favor the owner. What about the groomer? Doesn't the groomer have a household budget to manage including rent, utilities and the like? Yes. You can only hope that the employee chose to work for a busy business with steady demand for grooming services. Today massive numbers of people in any trade could not endure the whims of an owner who cannot keep demand steady.

Example 2. Today there are 6 grooming assignments in the appointment book for Cathy, a pet stylist. She is comfortable doing 6 start-to-finish assignments in 8 hours. By 9 A.M. she discovers that 1 customer with 2 pets is a "no-show" and 1 regular client is ill and cannot keep her appointment today. Cathy is only paid for grooming 3 pets losing about one-half of her income. What will happen tomorrow?

Many groomers come to understand that working on commission is nothing less than stressful and in the long run they usually do make less than an annual guaranteed salary working for a well-managed salon or shop. Our forte as consultants to grooming business owners is to show them how they can maximize their business to stop living in fear of guaranteed salaries for key personnel and to keep the clients coming back again and again and growing a business at the same time. It's not all about saving payroll expense for the business; in fact a guaranteed salary might pay a little more. It is about keeping key employees out of living in day-to-day survival and pleased with their employment. That can lower chronic employee turnover notable in too many pet grooming businesses today. We have hundreds of business owner clients doing just that today using our resources at MyGroomingBusiness.com are for these business owners. Ironically thousands of groomers have yet to experience these type of businesses and have no idea of the value of the peace-of-mind that comes from working on a guaranteed salary until they experience it.

We will take the odds that you are going to hear proclamations to never accept anything other than a commission basis wage. You may be told that you always make the greater wages this way. No, that is

not true. Before you accept that look the big picture and review at least a full year's payroll history as many of these proclamations come from people simply living in the moment of their experience. That's where the opinions can quickly turn to dust and as we previously mentioned. Numbers to back their opinions fail to appear.

We always paid part-time employees hourly and guaranteed salaries to our full-time employees. They enjoyed the peace-of-mind that comes from knowing they would have a stable paycheck year round. We had the marketing expertise to eventually be booked 7 days-a-week and you were more likely to be offered overtime than to see your hours cut. We were the place where excellent groomers came when they were done with riding the roller coaster of commission based wages.

There is one critical reason why some employers pay by commission. They are not skilled at supervision of pet groomers. You can lose money as an owner using guaranteed salaries if you allow employees to "slow down" for a myriad of reasons. The owner and the employee must agree on a set productivity level that is tied into their wage level. The owner isn't asking the employee to rush, lower quality and all the other criticisms that anti-salary people may foment. Ask the employee, "How many pets a day are you comfortable grooming *on average*?" Sizes and complexity of grooming assignments can cause variations. Base the salary offer on 6 a day and note that in their job description and job agreement contract (see samples in the book [From Problems to Profits](#) by Madeline Ogle, PhD) and you have every reason to expect that the salaried employee will complete an average of 6 grooming assignments a day, and anything less is probably a "slowdown" move by the employee, or a breach of contract. What we are saying is that this is an easily managed situation but many owners are not effective managers and fall back on commissions to motivate employees to groom a desired amount of services. Lax owners use commissions then as a crutch for their poor performance as an operations manager, and so the stress of commissions is once again forced upon employees who most often think it is the only way to work the grooming industry.

Indeed commission versus salary is the subject of frequent debate. We are writing online courses and a new book on the subject for a 2006 release in a new package called [Grooming Business in a Box™](#).

You have just been given more in-depth insight into the personnel management of grooming businesses than most groomers have as insight today. You are going to meet some owners that you know more about management than they know in this regard. At this time it is important that you remember how to calculate wages if you are going to be paid by commission. The next most important factor is to have a clear awareness of your productivity because it certainly affects your compensation.

Graduates of grooming school can rarely do more than 3 to 5 start-to-finish pets in 8 hours following graduation. In fact, the most experienced, productive stylists working alone average 7 to 8 pets in an eight-hour workday, and some would tell you their average expectation is lower, more like 6 to 7. It's not a right or wrong thing. It's their choice, so it is not to be judged. Keep in mind that some workdays you will groom fewer pets because of external factors like poor coat condition, special care requirements or large dogs with substantial coats and styling needs.

It's important to remember to use the term "average" as we do. (Note that mobile and house call groomers may do less pets per day on average because they have travel time between grooming appointments.).

Here are some very important formulas related to calculating commission wages:

$$\text{Service Fee} \times \text{Commission Rate} = \text{Grooming Fee}$$
$$\text{Add Daily Grooming Fees} = \text{Gross Daily Wage}$$

To project an estimate for what you can earn daily you simply have to know how many grooming services you can complete in one working day. Therefore productivity is important to determining your

potential income. If you can only groom 3 pets in 8 hour work day you will of course earn half as much as the groomer who can groom 6 pets in 8 hours. Increasing productivity yet retaining quality is one of the most important goals of every groomer.

Imagine for a moment that we know the average service fee for your employer. Some grooming businesses are well-managed and their owners can provide you with accurate average service fees generated by their businesses. The importance of the accuracy of those numbers is not to be taken lightly. You can easily over or underestimate projected wages if you are provided with inaccurate numbers. Assuming we have a good estimate, we can better estimate the income you may earn on an average day, in a week or month, and even in a year (assuming the grooming demand of pet owners is stable year round). The formula to calculate your projected annual compensation is:

$$\text{Avg. Service Fee} \times \text{Commission Rate} \times \text{Avg. \# of Pets Groomed Daily} \times \text{\# Days Worked Annually} = \text{Estimated Annual Gross Wage (prior employment taxes)}$$

Let's assume the average service fee is \$35 per grooming and you earn 50% commission. If you work 5 days a week year round, you work 260 days a year less two week's vacation, or 250 days a year. Finally the owner suggests that the business can provide you with an average of 6 grooming assignments each work day. Now fill in these statistics.

$$\$35 \times 50\% \times 6 \times 250 = \$26,250 \text{ a year prior employment taxes (gross wages)}$$

Many employed groomers with a year's experience will find this a reasonable estimate of their projected wages and work performance (where there is steady demand). Can you earn a higher income as an employed groomer? Yes. In general, you will need to work full-time for a business that can provide you with plenty of work year round. You must be productive and the average service fee should be above-average in your area. There are employed groomers with experience earning \$40,000 to \$50,000 a year (gross wages before employment taxes) in some "upscale" regions of the U.S. You will occasionally see wage offers in this range in the [PetGroomer.com Help Wanted Classified Ads](#).

A small percentage of employed groomers in upscale areas do even better. Currently they top out somewhere in the low \$60,000's a year (gross wages prior taxes). However, the more common reality of employed groomers is an annual income of \$25,000 to \$35,000 (gross wages prior taxes). Keep in mind that employee benefits may be provided in addition to these projections. Some groomers will take a slightly lesser paying job in return for employee benefits being provided.

Let's complicate matters (smile).

It's actually important that we do so that you may learn more about the confusing world of projecting your wages from commission earnings. If one business offers you 55% commission while another offers you 50% commission, and both offer the same amount of grooming assignments, are you sure you will make a higher income from the 55% commission? You would think so. It does sound quite logical. However, if the business offering you 55% commission has a lower average service than the business offering 50%, you can actually earn less!

$$\text{Shop 1:} \quad 50\% \times \$40 = \$20 \text{ commission wage for grooming assignment}$$

$$\text{Shop 2:} \quad 55\% \times \$35 = \$19.25 \text{ commission wage for grooming assignment}$$

In the example above a full-time employee doing 6 grooming services a day, 5 days-a-week would actually make over \$1,170 more a year on the lower 50% commission! So *why do groomers boast about their higher commission rate and not the average service of the business they work for?*

Now are you beginning to see how critical the average service fee is to your projections? Most groomers make a serious mistake thinking that a higher commission earns them more. The average

service is just as critical as the rate of commission. The problem gets worse; many business owners cannot or do not give you an accurate average service fee to do your projections. Don't let that keep you from asking them when you apply for a position.

Commissions are confusing for everyone, the employee and the owner. Even business financial projections for grooming businesses are less accurate when based on commissions versus salaries. So as a tool we prefer salaries, and our employees preferred salaries. No one can say we didn't pay well either as their form of radicalism against salaries. Our salary wages were very competitive and often our employees were among the highest paid in our area because we were also booked solid most of the year.

As a career seeker you are going to be faced with commissions if you are employed, even if just through job offers. That's OK. As we said in the beginning, "Work the numbers!" You have the formulas now. You decide if working for them on commission is likely to meet your needs. It just may work out if you have considered all of the advice of what has been presented to you here.

Employee Benefits

For many people employee benefits are very important if not a requirement of being employed. The majority of independently owned grooming businesses offer little in the way of employee benefits. Their businesses usually don't generate enough volume to offer employee benefits such as health and life insurance but you are more likely to accrue some paid time off. Veterinarian clinics with grooming departments are more likely to offer employee benefits. Larger chain pet stores such as PETCO and PETSMART commonly offer the most complete employee benefits packages in the grooming industry for qualified employees.

Independent Contractor Status Confusion

This may be the most important career information you ever read from a financial point of view. It is alarming to a degree how many employers advise you that you will be hired on an independent contractor basis, and the arrangement doesn't meet the legal requirements for a true independent contractor basis. Trouble often comes knocking on the doors of these establishments, even if it takes 10 years to arrive.

The independent contractor basis reduces the employment tax load of employers by removing you from being classified as an employee. If you are not an employee they don't have to pay you wages subject to payroll taxes. Without a doubt if you accept an independent contractor basis your tax burden will significantly increase as you must pay self-employment taxes, most of which would have been paid by the employer.

This subject requires an entire article by itself. However, we know we needed to insert some information in the career starting guide because your finances are at risk if you don't know how to execute an independent contractor agreement and to pay local, state and federal taxes associated with being an independent contractor. We can assure you that you will have to pay self-employment related taxes out of your contracted earnings. You need the sound advice of a bookkeeper and/or accountant if you accept an independent contractor position; you may even have to pay quarterly estimated tax payments to the Federal, State and Local government. Typically you will receive no employee benefits because you are not an employee. How then are you prospering as an independent contractor? It's possible but very uncommon. Beware is our best advice.

Now it gets worse. From our experience as consultants for nearly 2 decades we will drop a bombshell here. And it is a bombshell when the authorities get involved, and sometimes they do. Most grooming businesses hiring you as an independent contractor (which typically favors their "bottom line" and not yours) are doing so incorrectly. Generally if you come to work on their property, and they ask you to show up at a certain time, and you cannot take your work home with you, you are an employee and not

an independent contractor. You can confidently determine the veracity of your status by completing a Form SS-8 with the Internal Revenue Service. Also there are similar procedures with the state government in which you work. You need to meet the approval of both federal and state jurisdictions, not just one. Don't assume the prospective grooming business owner has done all the required verifications. In most cases they are looking only at the bottom line savings and take the risks associated with setting up employees as independents.

Now it is possible that you may be an independent contractor working at a grooming business. They are very few in numbers. If you are advised by a potential employer that your status will be an independent contractor, be skeptical and become thoroughly informed of your extra responsibilities. We have consulted with many independent contractor groomers who got into serious trouble with tax authorities for underpayment and untimely payments, and in the end their actual "employers" became embroiled as well with the tax authorities. As consultants we do not accept these clients. Tax avoidance is tax avoidance. We simply advise them to come clean and seek professional help from a lawyer and accountant and go forward in compliance.

Self-Employment Income

Surveys indicate that about one-half of all groomers eventually become self-employed. Some return to employment because self-employment does require more work than grooming. Managing a business you own requires plenty of extra duties including financial planning, personnel management (if you have employees), client relations, supervision, repair and maintenance, bookkeeping and tax compliance and more. However, there is an incomparable thrill and pride of owning your own business that makes the extra work acceptable if not even pleasurable.

Potentially the highest annual incomes earned by groomers are derived from large businesses with employees. However, self-employment does NOT automatically assure you of a higher income than if you were employed. A shop or salon with several employees should naturally be earning extra gross revenue "rung up on the cash register" which will hopefully after operating costs add to the income of the owner.

A large number of self-employed groomers do not have employees. For example, there are thousands of one person mobile grooming businesses. The out of pocket cash required to start a mobile grooming business is relatively low when compared to opening a new salon or shop in a shopping center. Many of these mobile owners enjoy not having to hire and supervise employees and the pride of being their own boss. Mobile grooming surveys have shown the average income for a full-time, 5 day a week, mobile grooming business owner is typically \$25,000 to \$38,000 a year after they deduct their operating expenses.

In self-employment it is not only what you accumulate as gross sales income that matters when determining your personal income from the business. There is saying, "It's not what you earn, it's what you keep!" For example you may sell \$60,000 worth of grooming services in one year. After deducting operating expenses (rent, utilities, supplies etc) what is left over is usually funds you can allocate to your personal income from the business (prior personal income taxes and self-employment taxes).

The bigger the business the more the owner makes?

It is more than possible (we have many consultation clients in this category) for a business owner of a large salon to generate \$300,000 or more in gross sales of services and after deducting operating expenses have as little as \$30,000 for themselves (prior taxes). There are one-person grooming businesses where the owner earns a higher personal income from their business than the salon owner bringing in \$300,000 or more in gross sales. Each and every grooming business is a unique situation. As a rule of thumb the owner/manager of a grooming should strive to retain no less than 20% of the gross and better yet 30% of their gross sales income. In other words, if the gross sales income of the business is \$300,000 the owner's personal income after deducting operating expenses should be \$60,000 to \$90,000 when the business is well-managed and financially prepared to succeed. We can

assure you through our actual performance and many consultation clients that this is reasonable anywhere that a business can establish clientele to generate the \$300,000 or more. Quite a few businesses meeting or exceeding this performance have been sold through the [PetGroomer.com Classified Ads](#).

Here's an important fact not to forget. Most groomers do not know highly successful grooming business owners. Decades ago our company founder's grooming business generated a six-figure personal income (before taxes). Today there are exceptional grooming business owners besting our records, and many are our clients too. Yes, they do exist. Quite a few have asked to help them write their business plans to buy their commercial buildings, add boarding, add daycare, add training or become a school of grooming. As our company founder Madeline Ogle, PhD says, "Become the businessperson that grooms." Anyone with the will to learn small business management as well as grooming expertise and the will to grow a large business can earn a six-figure income (before taxes). If this interests you we suggest you access our grooming management products and services at MyGroomingBusiness.com (www.mygroomingbusiness.com). However, even the small one person grooming business will find our products suitable for them. Even the one person business has the same responsibilities for larger businesses outside of personnel management.

At this point in starting your career it is simply enough for you to know that self-employment in grooming can earn you a greater personal income than being employed, but you will have additional duties and probably work longer hours. You will have to grow a business and manage it well. To make the highest incomes in the industry you will have to hire employees as you grow the business. You must accept the duties and responsibilities of being not only a business owner, but an employer, manager and supervisor. We have clients that even go on to own 2 or 3 salons. It should be good news to you as a career seeker that we can just say to you, "The sky's the limit for effective owner/managers motivated to grow large pet care businesses."

So once more we come back to what we said early on, pet grooming is a diverse industry on many levels. There are many career paths and associated incomes. Most pet groomers still fall into the category of average earnings ranging from \$25,000 to \$35,000 a year in gross wages before taxes. If that was their goal they are successful people. Some people will write to tell me they don't earn that much. I understand, we used the word "average" which means that the range still includes groomers earning less than \$25,000 and some greater than \$35,000.

What you will earn as a pet groomer is entirely up to you because we have shown you how low incomes and very high incomes exist today. You only need to adapt yourself as required to your goal income, and again, more is not better. What is right is that you choose and no one judges your performance but you.

In closing, here are a few tips for those that want to increase their earning potential. Generally the more "upscale" the area served by your employer, or your business, the better. It is generally believed that the more moderate the climate the more the more likely you will have steady business year round. During harsh winters business may slow and my Canadian groomer friends really tell us that is true especially in rural areas. Finally, if your goal is \$60,000 or more a year for personal income (before taxes), you almost certainly have to operate your own business and to grow it well. Allow at least 3 to 5 years to build up such a clientele, sometimes longer. You certainly should have a formal written business plan to act as your road map to that level of performance.

The Stages of a Pet Grooming Career

If you envision a long-term career in pet grooming, whether employed or self-employed, you will progress in stages evolving from entry-level to advanced levels. Not everyone follows the same path or completes all of the stages we present here. We must generalize in this diverse industry and people make different choices.

For example, grooming industry associations will test and certify your skills once you have had adequate education and experience. Each association creates their own standards and supplementary training and testing which is required for them to certify you. Once you achieve their certification you should of course be proud for nowhere is this certification required in the pet grooming industry. You set certification as your personal goal and go the extra distance because it is important to you. Once certified you can usually add a title to your name which usually includes the words "master groomer."

If [certification](#) interests you it is something you will need to learn more about at PetGroomer.com, and you can contact the providers directly. Their contact information is available in the Grooming Associations section of [GiGi](#), the Grooming Industry Guide International by PetGroomer.com (<http://www.searchgigi.com>). The most popular associations are:

- National Dog Groomers Association of America (NDGAA)
- International Society of Canine Cosmetologists (ISCC)
- International Pet Groomers (IPG)

Before you are ready to be certified you need training and experience. We mention certification here because if you plan to be certified you need the best quality education you can acquire during the first stage of a grooming career, the Training Stage.

Training Stage

Pet grooming requires extensive training. You can expect to keep learning the finer details of grooming for many years. Even when you know how to groom you will benefit from learning productivity to groom smarter and easier and to produce the same work in less time with sacrificing quality. The most popular sources of training for entry-level career seekers are:

- Apprenticeships
- Schools
- Home Study

Apprenticeships and Training Programs

Finding an independent pet grooming business owner willing to accept you as an apprentice is possible but not overly common. All too often in this industry business owners have quickly lost groomers they trained as an apprentice. Not long after gaining the competence of a groomer they leave their employer who has invested so much in them, often to start their own business.

It can be a significant loss to the owner who invested time and money in your training. In fact, there have been so many afflicted owners savoring the sour taste of these experiences and sharing their plight other business owners, doors have closed on apprenticeships. However, you will still find apprenticeships being offered on occasion in the [PetGroomer.com Help Wanted Classified Ads](#). It's not a lost cause. By the way, you can place a free apprenticeship wanted ad there as well.

Beginning in the 1990's career opportunities with major chain pet stores like PETCO and PETSMART started to reshape the industry for career seekers. Today you may qualify for one of their training programs. Refer to their web sites for grooming career information. Drop by one of their locations and

talk to the person authorized to assist you with grooming career information. Thousands of groomers have entered the industry this way. At [GroomerTALK Radio](#) you can listen to on-demand radio show conversations we have had with corporate recruiters. In fact, there are many radio shows awaiting you that will help your new career.

We encourage you to honor the education provided by your owner-employer-educator and provide them with extended loyalty and adequate notice if you depart their employment. Keep in mind they invested in you. Further don't follow the experience of others who open up a competitor business down the block. Yes, it happens. In our experience it's a questionable tactic that rarely works well in the long run.

How long does an apprenticeship last? That's hard to answer. It really depends upon the amount and content of the training being provided, and how quickly you progress from lesson to lesson. As a general rule of thumb we would suggest at least one year and perhaps longer before you would consider yourself as having moved past the apprentice stage. Apprenticeship training isn't necessarily as quick and intensive as going to a school. They are not the same methodology. Being given a broad encompassing education on a strict schedule is the role of a school program. As an apprentice you may work as a pet bather for weeks and slowly learn the skills of a full-charge groomer. However, you are getting plenty of hands-on experience and that is fantastic. Keep in mind the graduate of a grooming school still has months of post-graduate experience to become a highly-productive, well-skilled experienced groomer similar to the apprenticeship route.

Let's take a moment aside here and we will explain why we are providing you with such a weak answer on how long you must apprentice. The odds of providing you with a clear answer would be in our favor if pet grooming was a vocationally licensed profession wherein the standards of education were adopted in legislation, but that hasn't happened yet. As a result grooming business owners create unique apprenticeship programs by their design. They're all different. How else then could we speak in anything other than general terms? Our final advice is something to remember when you locate an apprentice position. Your apprenticeship can never be greater than the degree of achievement of the business owner acting as your teacher, and your motivated response to the opportunity.

Schools

Attending a reputable school or institute of pet grooming is great advice. There are significant resources at PetGroomer.com to help you locate and select a school. [GiGi – Grooming Industry Guide International](#) lists over 90 schools worldwide.

Now there is a bump in the road. We have to fall back to the problem mentioned above relating to the lack of written educational standards adopted by the pet grooming industry. You are going to find significant variations in school curriculums and the length of their curriculums. That means you have plenty of homework to do before you enroll in any school of grooming. PetGroomer.com does its best to give you the information you need to make a more informed decision in selecting a grooming education that meets your career goals. One of the ways we are doing that is with this free eBook.

Do we have opinions about school programs? Yes. Some schools offer perfectly fine 200 to 300 hour programs. We prefer 500 or more hours for serious groomers. There are 1,000 hour programs out there as well and its doubtful you could go wrong getting the additional experience for the career of a lifetime. We understand that not everybody can attend the higher hour programs. Next, don't expect to be a "full-charge" pet groomer after any beginning school course. If you hear some tell you that you will be at that level in such a short time it is likely to be a sales pitch!

Never approach an employer after your graduation with the attitude or bold statement that you are a full-charge pet groomer. Most business owners will refute it, post haste. Could you possibly be hired in the role of full-charge pet groomer after graduation? Yes, it does happen regularly. In general, retail stores, boarding kennels and veterinarians adding pet grooming departments to their businesses will often consider hiring a graduate who has successfully completed an extensive and professional

vocational school program. Then again, there are exceptions to that statement. The more curriculum hours you complete the more experience you have to market, and when it comes to experience, more should be better in pet grooming training as long as the program is a dynamic one.

After graduation you will need plenty of additional experience. This does not mean that you cannot become self-employed right away and go for it. If you envision becoming a highly-skilled pet groomer and perhaps gaining optional certification you will gain additional experience with few exceptions. In general, experienced owners and stylists are likely to hold the point of view that the average graduate is an “advanced beginner” until they get another year or more experience completed.

Few grooming schools invest significant time and money in preparing a proprietary textbook, but most of them provide some course materials and have a related library facility. In 1996 Stephen, the PetGroomer.com Webmaster and Madeline B. Ogle, PhD wrote 48 proprietary course handouts for a school of pet grooming. Even these were expected to be supplemented with additional how-to pet grooming books. When you interview a school owner ask what written support materials are included in your tuition. You will certainly refer to them once you are out in the business world.

If you have few or no how-to grooming books and videos get to our bookstore today! Here's more good news. In the last two years revised and updated, and entirely new how-to grooming books, have come on the market. They are excellent! It's vital that you acquire them for your library and we've made it easy. The [PetGroomer.com Bookstore](#) has our recommendations and they are reviewed in the [Library Reading Room](#) at PetGroomer.com. You need books with illustrated grooming styling information on generally all AKC recognized breeds, and perhaps more. Groomers with no experience and available guidance for a particular breed grooming will refer to a picture of the breed well-groomed in a book or on the Internet and emulate it. Your library is vital; don't overlook it.

Recently new advancements have been made in marrying both online and onsite hands-on grooming training into one program. The [Nash Academy](#) of Kentucky and New Jersey is the leading provider of this development. You can choose to complete classroom portions of their school curriculum online and then attend one of their school locations or an authorized grooming business location to complete the hands-on portion of your program. The latter is referred to as an “externship.” If you want to reduce the time away from home to attend a school out of your area this type of program is worthy of serious consideration.

More information on how to select a school that meets your individual needs is included later in this publication and in [GiGi – Grooming Industry Guide International](#).

Home Study

There are several home study opportunities to satisfy your pet grooming training objectives. Some are online only, some are home correspondence only, some include videos and tests and some include it all. Like all other training programs you need to do some homework to find the one best for you.

Perhaps the best attribute that all groomers can agree on is that home study is a great first step to help you decide if pet grooming is right for you. If you want to go further be sure to take the most complete course(s). Some home study providers make themselves available by telephone so that you can ask questions as you learn because unlike a school or apprenticeship you don't have an instructor onsite with you. Of course you will need to locate pets to groom and they will assist you with sources for these pets.

We asked Kathy Sanders ([Groomadog Academy](#)), past owner of grooming schools and now a home study course, her experience with students of home study. She advised, “I owned 2 residence schools for 12 years and I can say from experience that my correspondence students are doing just as well if not better. The correspondence student has an advantage over the residence students. They're already over their fear of grooming without instructors. My students graduate with confidence. People

should also realize that home study courses can be very different so they need to choose wisely. Some courses are videos and a book. Some are much more than that. My home study graduates open shops, win competitions and go on to get their masters with NDGAA. We have groomers take our home study course to expand their training experience. However, by all means I recommend that all students, residence or correspondence go on to further their education and get experience.”

Many groomers have shared with us their satisfaction having started with home study. Like apprenticeships and schooling you need to realize the same thing, you will need plenty of additional experience following graduation. Plan now to seek continuing education for the first several years of your career. PetGroomer.com has sources for home study programs for your consideration in [GiGi - Grooming Industry Guide International](#) and in the front cover of this publication.

Post Graduation Stage

After your training is completed you have some important decisions to make. Will you:

1. Become employed working for an employer?
2. Become self-employed opening a:
 - a. New mobile or house call grooming business?
 - b. New pet salon or grooming shop.
3. Become self-employed leasing or purchasing an existing:
 - a. Mobile or house call grooming business.
 - b. Pet salon or grooming shop.

These are the most popular choices facing graduates. There is nothing unreasonable about working as an employed groomer after graduation. In fact some groomers find it controversial to expect a graduate to become self-employed immediately following school. Yet it is done in the face of skepticism. Skill levels can vary greatly among graduates since every school independently sets its own curriculums, and the focus and commitment of each graduate to excel during the education period often varies. Logically graduates of a 1,000 hour course should be more prepared for a self-employed grooming career compared to those taking a 100 hour course. Perhaps now you can better understand why the timing of self-employment can be a controversial topic. Let's take a closer look.

Self-Employment

We know successful groomers that have become self-employed right after graduation. Are they missing out? Graduates that become employed are more likely to work in an environment with other experienced groomers who would hopefully assist new groomers with their early field experience. Self-employed groomers operating one-person businesses have less convenient access to the benefits of working with experienced groomers providing tips and constructive criticism. However, there are exceptions. Here's a creative path we encourage for school graduates going into self-employment. Purchase an existing business and retain one or more of the grooming staff who can assist you with reinforcement training.

Today, many graduates are most comfortable with self-employment as a mobile groomer. Generally it is easier to setup a mobile grooming business compared to a salon or shop. While having a written business plan is always a good idea, financing a mobile van or trailer usually doesn't require one. The groomer applying for a bank loan for a business almost certainly will be required to present a formal written business plan. At PetGroomer.com you will find an [Information Menu](#) for Business Plans. Writing a formal business plan can take weeks or months and some aspects of them like the Financials are beyond the skills of many people. You typically need professional assistance to write one.

From a financial viewpoint purchasing an existing mobile, salon or shop grooming business may have advantages. If you retain all or most of the existing clientele you have the built-in cash flow right from the start whereas when you open a new business it may take many months to build up a similar

clientele, sometimes longer. Some groomers selling their businesses offer private financing and they may stay employed with you for a short time to train you to run the business. We suggest you refer to the [Information Menu](#) for Purchasing Existing Grooming Businesses.

Generally it is good advice for graduates to get a year or two of experience as an employed groomer before opening a new shop or salon. During that time they can study business plans and business opportunities and most of all, learn the art of management as well as the art of grooming. Some grooming schools offer exposure to business training and that is good. However, it is not complete when you consider that every grooming business owner should have a written business plan in their hand before they open the doors of a new business or takeover an existing business. You will find that [MyGroomingBusiness.com](#) has significant information and resources for groomers becoming self-employed.

Employment

Honestly it can be difficult for graduates to find employment if their outspoken motive is to become self-employed in a year or two. Prospective employers may ask you about your career goals. What they may be trying to determine is "How long can I expect you to stay in my employment?" Be truthful and maintain a clear conscience. Many pet grooming business owners across the U.S. have been "burned" by employees they thought would stay for a year or more and didn't only to go into self-employment. If an employer knows that your goal is to be self-employed it will clearly not encourage them to hire you. However, if they know you will stay for a year or more, you have the character to give them extended notice, you won't open a competitor business and you will help them to replace you when the time comes, you might get the job.

We want to state this warning again. You will immediately turn-off prospective employers if you go into an interview with the attitude that you just graduated from school or completed a home study course and you are ready to work as a full-charge groomer. No matter how famous the school or program it won't work! Every experienced groomer knows that even after a few years of grooming there are still things to learn and productivity to improve. The ongoing need for continuing education is actually part of the fun of working in this field.

Your search for employment can be boosted by a school's "placement program." Many schools maintain a list of grooming businesses willing to consider graduates for employment. When you interview prospective schools ask if they maintain a placement program and how many graduates are placed. Some U.S. states require vocational schools to maintain a specified placement ratio or their state licensing status will be reviewed and possibly revoked. We are familiar with a school that has maintains a list of 200 employers nationwide willing to consider its graduates for employment.

If your desire is to become a career employee try to work for the most professional grooming business in town. Whether it's a pet salon, or a grooming department in a pet care business, work for the business with the best reputation, facilities, and employment policies. To maximize your income it helps to work for a stable business that is busy throughout the year. You may expect January and February to be "slow" where winters are harsh. If you are paid by commission only and business is slow, your income from grooming will likewise lower. Ideally, you want to work for a business that is not affected by seasonal influences.

In the working world there always seems to be drama, and grooming has characteristic drama as well. When owners lose management control of the businesses, senior full-charge groomers (usually working on commission) execute a takeover of sorts. Actually it's the owners' fault so we are not entirely criticizing the employees. Your worse case scenario is to become employed by a business where each groomer builds a "mini-empire" within the overall business. Typically your senior co-workers will claim all or most of new customers to boost or pad their clientele and the newbie gets the leftovers. Newbie groomers working in poorly managed businesses often feel beaten down by the lack of teamwork. They learn the hard way that it will take time to gain enough seniority to prosper. There is a lot additional drama in these environments that we will leave well enough alone.

As very experienced consultants we advise you. There are too many businesses operating without proper purposeful organization under the control of a manager. We have helped dozens of owners to resume the control they should have never lost or sublimated. Perhaps it is reason for chronic turnover in some businesses. Many groomers depart employment into self-employment simply to be free of the competitive environments. Wasn't it supposed to be a dream come true to know the joy of working with pets? Teamwork is not common in pet grooming and we celebrate the owners who make it a reality.

Long-Term Planning

With over 40 years in the field of grooming we know what to expect from an extended career in pet grooming. Financial planning is a key aspect of long-term planning. We encourage you to plan for the long-term now whether you intend to be employed or self-employed.

Generally, employed groomers have limited employee benefits for the long term provided by their employers. However, PETCO and PETSMART and some independents do offer qualified employees with an attractive package of benefits that cover long term plans such as retirement accounts. If your employer doesn't offer these type of benefits get professional assistance to set up a retirement account for yourself no matter your age. It's never too early to set one up since you benefit from contributions made many years before retirement. Your accountant may show you some related tax advantages as well.

Self-employed groomers have unique options. They can setup benefits programs for themselves and/or their employees. There are other unique long-term strategies for self-employed groomers. Two of the greatest contributors toward their financial health is the sale of their business when they retire or change careers, and how they invest the profit of their business over many years before retirement. In our experience many newly successful self-employed groomers increase their debt load with new cars, RV's, pools and the like. We suggest they look toward owning their commercial building if applicable, and other investments suggested by a financial planner and/or Certified Public Accountant.

We encourage self-employed salon or shop owners to build a larger business than they may be planning now for reasons other than money. Grooming is physical work and the associated wear and tear accumulates as the years go by. The larger the business the more likely the owner can retire from full-time grooming and work as an owner/manager of their business without a loss of income. Managing a grooming business involves far less bodily wear and tear. It can be very enjoyable to work with the clientele most of the work day. Sometimes the presence of these owners on the front reception counter actually encourages the business to grow even larger and to become noted for its client relations expertise. Indeed, that was one of the keys to our founder's success in building one of the world's largest grooming businesses.

You must build a very successful business for this latter plan to work. It is a great benefit that you create for yourself, and you should celebrate your success and wise planning. It really pays off when you consider that the physical wear and tear of pet grooming has forced some grooming business owners out of grooming when they stopped grooming because they didn't have a business large enough to cover their salary as an owner/manager managing a moderate to large grooming staff. It's a sad situation and it does happen.

Although you may be planning a salon or shop the future is starting to appear across the United States. What is it? As consultants we are writing a tremendous number of business plans for groomers expanding successful grooming businesses into "pet care centers." We predicted this trend as far back as 1989 in our book [From Problems to Profits for Pet Grooming Businesses](#).

Imagine adding a specialty retail boutique to a grooming business. How about a pet bakery? A line of holistic pet food is a key too. Plus some are adding pet massage, day care and dog training. Our advice is always the same. Don't lose your focus on the grooming because its clients come back regularly whether every 4 to 8 weeks or even 12 weeks, but the fact remains most of them come back with a predictable frequency. You must write a comprehensive business plan to manage such a

venture and many are. We are very excited for them and the designs for these places are wonderful. This is the future we predicted and it is here today! That is what long term planning is all about.

Selecting a Grooming School

The choice of your grooming school couldn't be more important. Your education backs a career of many years or even decades. Grooming is how you intend to earn a living and how you may expect to earn the reputation of being a professional. You've probably noticed that most professionals of any trade advise the public where they received their education with diplomas and certificates hanging on the walls of their offices. Isn't the same discerning attitude appropriate for you? Are you not going to be caring for living animals beloved by their owners? Are you not going to be operating advanced tools and machinery and to be expected to potentially groom everything tall and small in the canine world and perhaps the feline world as well? Won't your clients expect expert styling, safety, humane treatment and proper handling? The answer should be "Yes" to all of these questions. Indeed, your grooming education is most important.

"Caveat emptor" is Latin for "Let the buyer beware." That adage applies to the broad variety of educational opportunities in grooming. Be aware once again that grooming is a profession without vocational licensing in any U.S. state. The implication is the liberty then given to every grooming school owner to design a curriculum for grooming totally "their way." When a school is state licensed the government doesn't certify that the program is the best program to learn pet grooming, but based on factors of the experience of the owner and their compliance with reporting and some standards of operation the school is likely to provide you with a reasonable curriculum and training experience. Therefore, we assure you that curriculums vary greatly from school to school; no two are the same. Our intention is not to scare you. Most grooming schools are reputable. However, not every program serves the needs of every new career seeker. Be very clear and know what your educational needs are before you enroll.

If you were to ask us the most common mistake students make in selecting a school, we wouldn't lose a beat and say, "Choosing to attend a school solely based on its location is the closest one to where you live." That is the number one determining factor of career seekers based on our experience as counselors. The odds that the curriculum right for you is in your neighborhood wouldn't take you far in Las Vegas.

We have heard every excuse why someone cannot travel outside of their area to attend school for several weeks. Some are very good excuses too. It is your choice and we are just giving you our best advice to find a way to get the best education to meet your career goals. We also hear buyer's remorse from students that wish they had found a way to go to their first choice of a school outside of the area in which they live. So there you have it. Let's move on.

Here's our best advice.

Ensure that the institution you select is properly approved to provide pet grooming vocational education in accordance with the laws applicable within the jurisdiction where it exists. Except for a small handful of U.S. states, "vocational schools" must be "state approved" or "state licensed" by an agency of the state in which they reside. It is your responsibility to ensure your school is currently state licensed (where required by law) before you enroll in the institution. Several U.S. states require vocational schools to provide all prospective students with the name and contact information for the state agency which licenses them. You can contact that agency to ensure if the school is in good standing. Most schools outside the U.S. are not formally licensed like most U.S. vocational schools, but sometimes they are certified. Do your investigation please.

Note: "Accreditation" and "state licensing" are different. Achieving accreditation usually requires the school to have been successfully state licensed for at least 2 consecutive years. The school creates a working relationship with an accrediting agency and completes a great deal of paperwork to meet the standards required for accreditation by the agency. School owners seek accreditation to qualify for offering their students state or federal financial aid and various occupational or rehabilitation programs. Many top schools are not accredited

because they do not offer government related financial aid, and instead they may offer private financial assistance.

Your first step is to contact schools that interest you and request their brochure (sometimes called a "catalog"). Once you've reviewed their materials try to narrow your candidates to 2 or 3 schools. Call them and schedule an interview and tour of their facilities. If you need housing be prepared to visit those facilities as well. Some U.S. states require that you take a tour before you enroll. In fact some states require you to sign an acknowledgement that you did indeed take a tour. Now what does that tell you about the importance of touring a school before you enroll? Always tour an institution before you enroll whether required or not.

Here's another important piece of advice. If several courses are offered always take the longest course. As we have said before you will find that pet groomers continue to learn during the first several years of their careers. There are so many breeds and mixed breeds it can take some time before you have had the opportunity to groom all of the breed groups and the dozens of various mixed breed types. The longer the training period the more likely you will have a valuable variety of experience.

Questions to Help You Interview Schools

We allow schools worldwide to list their institutions at PetGroomer.com in [GiGi - Grooming Industry Guide International](#). This doesn't mean we endorse them. We do not endorse grooming schools. We provide information to help you locate and learn more about grooming schools. To help make your interview of the institution more thorough we suggest you ask all of the following questions:

Is the institution "approved" or "licensed" as a vocational education institution? Schools outside U.S. may have an alternate form of approval or no approval may be required. Inquire with the school if they are subject to governmental approval. A few U.S. states do not license vocational education institutions.

What is the field-related background of the institution's owner and instructors?

How many instructors are there per student? What is the enrollment limit per class?

Is the institution accredited?

Do they offer government related financial aid?

Do they offer private financing or payment plans?

Does the institution provide references from graduates?

Do they provide textbooks, handouts, videos or other forms of course materials?

Will you learn to groom multiple breed groups and various types of mixed breed pets?

Will you learn to groom cats?

How are the course hours divided between classroom and hands-on pet grooming?

Is the size of the institution's pet owner clientele, and average number of daily grooming appointments, adequate to supply all enrolled students with pets to groom every school day?

Do you have to share pets for grooming assignments with other students? If you do share pets how often can you be expected to share them?

Does the institution offer a job placement program and statistics for their actual placement success?

If you intend to be self-employed after graduation, will you learn pet grooming business management instruction as well as pet grooming skills?

If you are attending from out of the area, do they offer housing assistance?

Are you responsible to purchase a “toolkit?” What is the cost?

What happens if you are ill and cannot attend a class?

If you decide that grooming is not for you and you want to terminate your enrollment, are you eligible for a refund?

If you want to add more training hours at the end of the program in which you are currently enrolled, can you add more?

Do they provide field trips to trade shows or other extracurricular activities?