

# Top Dog

UK-licensed dog breeders, Furnish Kennels, has secured a new opportunity selling dogs into France with the help of UK Trade & Investment



## FAST FACTS

**Company:** Furnish Kennels

**Country:** UK

**Industry:** Pet Retail

**Website:** [www.furnishkennels.co.uk](http://www.furnishkennels.co.uk)

Furnish Kennels has been a family run business for three generations. The company, which is based in Northern Ireland, is run by brothers David and Jonathan Hamilton. Breeding and selling in excess of 1500 dogs a year, ranging from Chihuahuas to Newfoundlands, Furnish Kennels is widely recognised as one of the largest dog breeding establishments in the UK.

The company prides itself on providing the highest standard of care, giving its animals regular veterinary attention and adhering to a strict protocol of socialisation, vaccination, worming, diet and parasite control. Once a litter of puppies is old enough, they are sold, not to the public, but to recognised, licensed and reputable independent kennels or pet shops.

“The pet market has changed in the last four to five years,” says David Hamilton, Director at Furnish Kennels. “Traditionally people wanted pure pedigree dogs, but now we are seeing a move towards

cross pedigree dogs which can be more intelligent, healthier and more unique in appearance. Our most popular dog is a cross between a Shihtzu and a Pug.”

### Expanding the market

During the early 2000s, Furnish Kennels knew that it was reaching saturation point in Northern Ireland, so in early 2003 the company starting exporting dogs to mainland UK. By late 2007, it was looking for further expansion and it was during a family holiday in France, when Jonathan, David’s brother was talking with some local Frenchmen about his business, that he discovered that the French dog breeding market was quite different to the one back home.

It turned out that French pet shops were being supplied with dogs from small independent breeders, but there was no commercial dog breeding kennels in France. It was apparent that Furnish Kennels could either set up a dog breeding base in

France, or export its dogs from Northern Ireland.

“This was an interesting discovery,” says David. “But we knew if we were to capitalise on this opportunity we needed some help. A relative of mine had coincidentally used UK Trade & Investment’s Overseas Market Introduction Service (OMIS) the previous year when he was looking to expand his business in France. He had such a positive experience, that he encouraged us to contact them.”

### Seizing the opportunity

By December 2008, Furnish Kennels had approached UK Trade & Investment’s partner in Northern Ireland, Invest Northern Ireland, to begin initial discussions about the possibility of entering the French market. At that time, Invest Northern Ireland was organising a trade mission to France in early 2009 and offered the company a place.

Furnish Kennels could not attend the mission, but the company did commission an OMIS report in February 2009 to identify the possibilities for selling dogs in France. When the report was complete, it showed that, whilst pet shops were interested in buying the dogs, there were licensing issues and importing regulations to be overcome.

The report suggested that Furnish Kennels supply its dogs to holding kennels in France, who in turn would sell them on to the pet shops. Six potential holding kennels were shortlisted and the company initially met two of them during its first trip to France in mid 2009.

“We needed to find trustworthy holding kennels in France if this new venture was going to succeed,” says David. “Having no reputation or contacts in France to build on, this would have been very difficult to do alone. Throughout the whole process, we found UK Trade & Investment’s help to be invaluable. For instance, they arranged meetings for us, offered to attend them with us and acted as

an interpreter. They helped us with our sales literature, translating it into French and really organised our time in France so we were as productive as possible. They also negotiated with the French Ministry of Agriculture to help us with our licences. I was really impressed to see the extent of their influence and guidance.”

## The future

As a result of the OMIS report, in December 2009, Furnish Kennels signed a contract with a holding kennel in the north of France and exports dogs there every month. In April this year, the company commissioned a further OMIS, looking for more holding centres across Northern France.

“Our business in France is going well so far, and we have high hopes for the future,” says David. “We hope to achieve our goals with UK Trade & Investment’s help. They definitely give our business credibility and open doors for us. I would highly recommend them to anyone looking to take their business abroad.”

## Helping you to do business abroad

Doing business in another country can be a challenge, so it’s good to know that UK Trade & Investment is there to help you succeed.

Through a range of unique services, including participation at selected trade fairs, overseas missions and providing bespoke market intelligence, UK Trade & Investment can help you crack foreign markets and quickly get to grips with regulations and business practices overseas.

Through our Passport to Export programme we offer new and inexperienced exporters:

- free capability assessments
- support in visiting potential markets
- mentoring from a local export professional
- free action plans
- customised and subsidised training
- ongoing support once you’re up and running

For further information please visit [www.ukti.gov.uk](http://www.ukti.gov.uk)

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### Top tips for working with the French

We have closely linked economies and similar markets but there is no doubt there are differences in our business culture. Here are our top tips to help you make your business visit a success:

- French business culture is still relatively formal. Address people with Monsieur or Madame followed by their surname. Use their first names only when invited
- Write to business contacts in French, using a formal style, and have your literature translated, or prepare a summary in French
- Relationship building is important. Lunches and dinners are good relationship building opportunities
- Use logical arguments rather than the hard sell in your presentations
- Negotiations can be lengthy due to hierarchical business structures
- Quote prices in Euros and use metric measurements



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