

NOV-DEC 2025 / THE BETTER BUSINESS
MAGAZINE FOR AMERICAN PET PROS

THE BIG SURVEY

NOV-DEC 2025 / THE BETTER BUSINESS
MAGAZINE FOR AMERICAN PET PROS

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WILD RIDE

Our **2025 Big Survey** results show how pet indies are doing business in these uncertain times.

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Contents+

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THE BIG STORY / PAGE 38



WILD RIDE

Our 2025 Big Survey results show how
pet indies are doing business in these
uncertain times.

Products+

- 15 **PRODUCT CATEGORIES**
Dog Edible Chews, Cat
Toys & Scratchers, Pet
Beds & Blankets, Veter-
an-Owned Brands, Dog
Waste Products
- 22 **NEW & NOTABLE**
23 products for you to
consider for your store

Business+

- 35 **CANDACE D'AGNOLO**
**From Salesy
to Sincere**
Five actions that will lead
to genuine conversations,
higher sales and a more
engaged team.
- 36 **TERESA MILLER**
Taking Control
When a brand evolves
beyond independent pet,
make changes of your
own to adapt.
- 54 **AMERICA'S COOLEST**
South Bark
Lisa Vella and Donna



Walker's legacy includes
opening one of the first
self-service dog washes in
the country and inventing
the Blueberry Facial.

- 59 **REAL DEAL**
**The Case of the
Off-the-Clock
Manager**
Retailers share how they
would handle an otherwise
perfect employee who works
without pay.
- 62 **SANITY FILES**
Adina Silberstein, Queenie's
Pets, Philadelphia, PA

ALSO INSIDE

- 6 Inbox
- 8 Calendar
- 10 To-Do List
- 12 Hot Sellers
- 34 Tip Sheet



ON THE COVER:
Illustration by
Victor Cantal.

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WHAT'S HAPPENING ONLINE IN NOV-DEC

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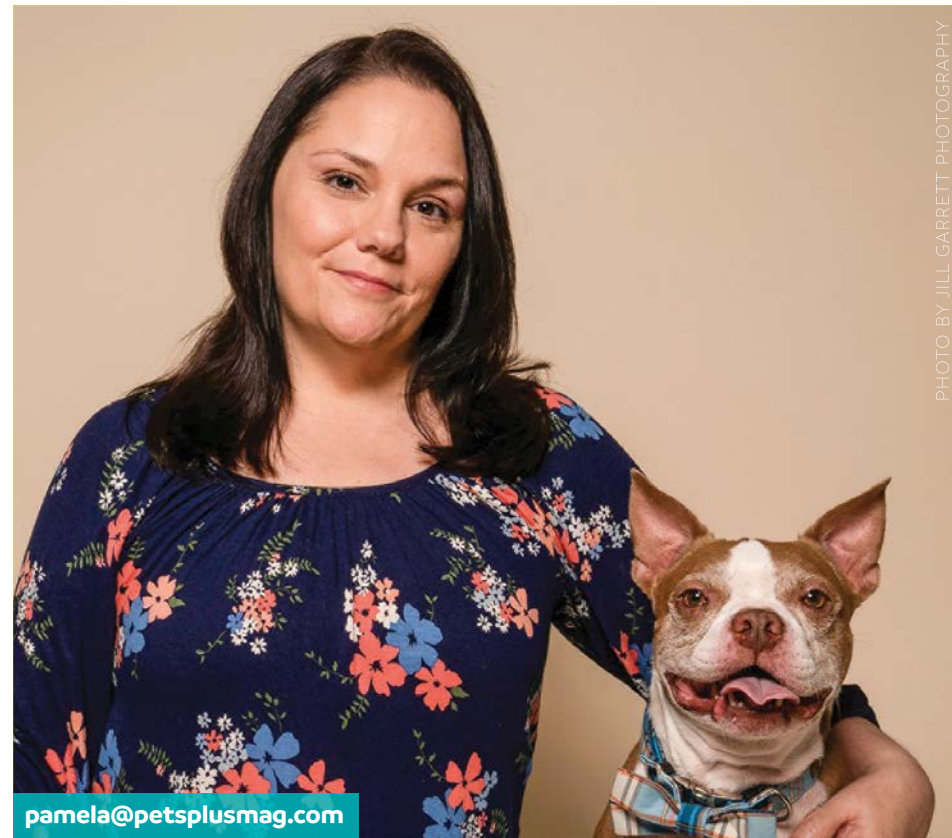


PHOTO BY JILL GARRETT PHOTOGRAPHY

pamela@petsplusmag.com

ENJOY THE RIDE

5 SMART TIPS FROM THIS ISSUE

1 Create a Holiday Bingo card for your customers. (Calendar, p.8)

2 Turn inventory into a party! (To-Do List, p.10)

3 Get specific when thanking your employees. (Tip Sheet, p.34)

4 Reframe selling as helping, which will grow your confidence with customers. (Candace D'Agnolo, p.35)

5 De-emphasize brands who go grocery. (Teresa Miller, p.36)

Welcome to the 2025 PETS+ Big Survey issue! Each year, we ask 75 questions of more than 500 independent pet retailers and service providers in the U.S. (A few Canadians also chime in.) The results, found here on p.38-52, offer an in-depth look at how indies are doing business in the current economic and societal landscape, with its specific challenges and opportunities.

To reflect that current state, we chose an amusement park theme. We can all agree that 2024 and 2025 have been a wild ride amid evolving government regulations, supply-chain disruptions and regular recalls, as well as continuing technological advances such as AI—all of which have impacted the pet industry.

Special thanks again this year to those who join me on the Big Survey editorial team: Group Managing Editor Chris Burslem, Group Design

Editor Victor Cantal and Columnist Candace D'Agnolo. And to the 500+ retailers and service providers who gave us 30 minutes or more of their valuable time! Note: In addition to providing insight and advice on results, D'Agnolo took the Big Survey for the first time this year as owner of newly opened Dante & Dory's Pet Emporium. Congrats! And extra-special thanks to SUPERZOO, our returning Big Survey sponsor.

By the time you've received this print issue of PETS+, we will have begun to roll out digital extras to the 2025 Big Survey on our website and will continue to through November. Be sure to sign up for our Monday-Saturday ebulletin to get those additional insights and advice delivered direct to your inbox each morning. Go to petsplusmag.com/bulletins if you're not already on the list.

Pamela

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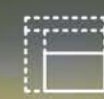
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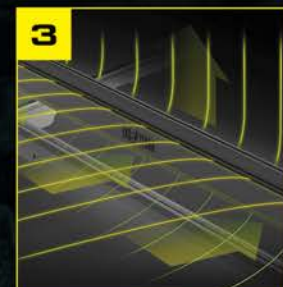
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SEP-OCT GOOD READS

+ Regarding the “Better Together” column by Beth Stultz-Hairston, this is the perfect example of comm-UNITY! Partnerships, referrals and collaborative efforts are the best way to work together. We’re successful when our neighbors are! **Roxane Cann, The Dapper Hound, Mount Airy, NC**

+ I loved the To-Do List suggestion about cleaning up the inactive followers on social media! It was also a great reminder to engage, which is incredibly important to expose your own account. **Stephanie Garza, Pup Pup & Away, San Antonio, TX**

+ I always appreciate “The Case of The ...” scenarios, where different shop owners share how they would handle various scenarios in their business (Real Deal). **Charles Bridges, Blue Ridge Pet Supplies, Black Mountain, NC**

SAMPLE BOX

+ We absolutely love the PETS+ Sample Box. It is always like Christmas when they come. The staff gathers around to see what we got. It is such an amazing opportunity to get new products in our hands with all the information about the product and the detailed list of where to order. **Danyle Morse, Claremont Pet & Aquarium Center, Claremont, NH** We’re glad you love it! November will be the last 2025 box, then we’ll be back with the February 2026 SUPERZOO box! Reconfirm your info at petsplusmag.com/samplebox.



INDUSTRY THOUGHTS

+ It’s interesting to see Stella & Chewy’s moving into grocery stores and big-box stores like HEB and Target. Likewise, with lightly cooked and frozen raw pet foods. It’s getting tougher to find a quality dry food to stock, as it’s difficult for me to see beyond the protein and the carb — lots of marketing and buzzwords to spin in this category to differentiate products. **Cynthia McKinney, Loyl’s Natural Pet Grocery & Groomery, Houston, TX**

+ Are trade shows dead? And why can’t there be something in the middle of the country? **Mark Roberts, Pet Life By Roberts, Salina, KS** To answer your first question, we don’t think so! We’re looking forward to being the media sponsor for SUPERZOO again in 2026. As for your second question, perhaps some of the distributor shows fill that need?

YOU’RE WELCOME

Thank you, as always, for all that you do. We absolutely couldn’t do what we do without your magazine and daily input. **April Meier, Pawsitively Scrumptious Bark Bakery & Boutique, Crestview, FL**

+ Thank you for putting all the time and energy into the surveys and into the boxes. This helps us stay in touch with what is going on in the pet industry. **Lisa Kirschner, Sit, Stay, ‘N Play, Stroudsburg, PA**

+ We love PETS+! Keep up the great work. It is rough out there — we gotta stick together! **Samantha Youngblood, Youngblood’s Natural Animal Care Center and Massage, Wilkinson, IN**

COVERAGE REQUEST

+ Would love to give feedback to companies on their tags. **Laurie Wilson, Teca Tu-A Pawsworthy Pet Emporium, Santa Fe, NM** Great idea. We’ll work that into an upcoming survey.

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SAVE THE
DATE.

Calendar

FRESH PROMOTIONAL IDEAS FOR DEC-JAN

DECEMBER

1 Dogs and cats aren't the only pets who like to get gifts. Full-line stores, kick off the month of **HANUKKAH** (Dec. 14-22) and **CHRISTMAS** (Dec. 25) with pet holiday wishlists like these from Adventure Pets in Mandeville, LA. The store posted on its socials in 2024 a series of graphic-based wishlists for birds, small animals and reptiles, in addition to ones for dogs and cats, helping pet parents ensure all family members have something to open during festive gatherings.

1 Another **DECEMBER** promotion idea: Holiday Bingo! The game not only boosts in-store visits but also sales if you follow the lead of Paddywack in Mill Creek, WA. "Customers love our holiday bingo game," Shane Somerville says. "It's a mix of fun activities (bring us a holiday card, shop in an ugly sweater) and item purchases (buy a freeze-dried treat, a holiday toy). Each column/row/diagonal earns an entry into gift certificate giveaways after the holidays. It's fun and encourages people to try new

things!" Paddywack also takes part in the Holiday Bingo card for its shopping center, further encouraging visits to the store.

2 On **GIVING TUESDAY**, share the many ways your business has given back to the community in 2025 and highlight opportunities for customers to take part during December. Promote your angel tree that allows for donations to shelter pets, remind about the month's "round up at the register" recipient or tout whatever way you facilitate giving back. Last-minute donors, in particular, will appreciate a quick-and-easy opportunity delivered to their news feed or inbox.

24 Serve pet-friendly versions of the holiday favorite on **NATIONAL EGGNOG DAY**. How could a customer resist making a purchase after seeing their dog happily lap up a free sample? If you don't carry ready-made liquid or frozen dog nog, bundle ingredients and attach a recipe card.

31 In the days leading up to and after **NEW**

YEAR'S EVE, promote the calming products you carry with a fun focal display. On Dec. 26, switch your holiday display to one like this at Modern Companion in Chapin, SC. It features calming treats and enrichment toys and mats, plus the brand's festive bows and bandanas for pups who still want to dress up to watch the ball — tennis at this store, not crystal — drop even though they're staying home. FYI, **HAPPY NEW YEAR FOR CATSDAY** is Jan. 2, so be sure to keep kitties in mind so they can celebrate as well.

JANUARY

1 There are endless promotional opportunities during **NATIONAL TRAIN YOUR DOG MONTH** and **WALK YOUR DOG MONTH**, especially with them being January. Appeal to customers with Christmas puppies or other dogs in need of training through a campaign that includes demo videos, specially priced classes, and bundles of supplies that set students up for success. Don't offer training? Or don't sell products? Partner with a business that does!

2 & 27 Educate your customers and outfit the dogs, cats and other animals who vacation with them from **NATIONAL PET TRAVEL SAFETY DAY** on the 2nd to **PLAN A VACATION DAY** on the 27th. A display could include a variety of products, among them shelf-stable food, treats, and supplements (think: pumpkin puree, CBD) in convenient packaging and sizes; a first-aid kit with supplies; carriers,

crates and travel beds; harness and leashes; travel bowls and bottles; plus anything else a pet might need when away from home. Share travel tips throughout the month on your socials and in newsletters.

8 Do you offer a rewards program to your grooming and/or self-wash customers? You should! On **NATIONAL BUBBLE BATH DAY**, introduce and/or promote such a welcome incentive. We love the name that Bath & Biscuits in Granville, OH, uses: the Bubble Loyalty Club. Customers earn 1 bubble for every \$1 spent in a single transaction, with rewards ranging from 175 bubbles for a free bakery cookie to 1,500 bubbles for 25% off an entire sale.

23 On **NATIONAL FUN AT WORK DAY**, invite your customers to join in on the good times at your pet business. Nature's Feed in Spring Grove, IL, celebrated last year with a Carnival Fun Fair, complete with an afternoon of Spin the Wheel, Roll the Dice and Ball Board games. Customers played to win free products from brand partners Zignature and Fussie Cat.

MORE DATES	DECEMBER	JANUARY
	1 National Cat Lover's Month 1 Cyber Monday 2 National Mutt Day 4 National Cookie Day 9 Christmas Card Day 12 Gingerbread House Day 13 National Salesperson Day	15 National Cupcake Day 15 Cat Herders Day 18 National Twin Day 19 National Ugly Sweater Day 26 Kwanzaa 30 National Bacon Day



DECEMBER

1 National Cat Lover's Month
1 Cyber Monday
2 National Mutt Day
4 National Cookie Day
9 Christmas Card Day
12 Gingerbread House Day
13 National Salesperson Day

JANUARY

1 Adopt a Rescued Bird Month
21 Squirrel Appreciation Day
22 National Answer Your Cat's Questions Day
24 National Peanut Butter Day
29 National Puzzle Day



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To-Do List

SMART MANAGEMENT TASKS FOR DEC-JAN



WEEK 1 NOV. 30-DEC. 6

OPERATIONS Replenish store supplies you'll need through December: cleaning products, all the papers (wrapping, receipt, toilet, etc.), ice melt if applicable, staff snacks and so on. Jessica Cooke of Yuppy Puppy Pet Spa in O'Fallon, MO, takes it a step further, sharing, "I order supplies needed through January!"

MERCHANDISING Speaking of supplies, add bows in holiday colors to your shopping list because as Teresa Scarpace of The Feed Bag Pet Supply in Mequon, WI, reminds: "If you start to run out of holiday toys, everyday toys with a red bow tied to them make great last-minute gifts."

WEEK 2 DEC. 7-13

PRICING Service price increas-

es for the following year are best introduced well before January, and reminders should go out in December. This helps customers budget accordingly.

WEEK 3 DEC. 14-20

TRAINING The holiday season brings with it coaching opportunities. Each day, ask employees to focus on one specific sales behavior. It could be maintaining eye contact, encouraging customers to try items with

their pets or asking, "So, what else is on your shopping list?" Changes in small behaviors can have a big impact on your revenue.

WEEK 4 DEC. 21-27

MINDSET No matter your type of pet business, the holidays can be stressful if only because customers have more on their minds. Morgan Monty of The Cheshire Horse in Swanzy, NH, points out, "A customer who may be easygoing the rest of the year may be extra stressed, so something they are generally understanding of may not go over the same. It's important to stay calm and levelheaded, and not take things personally. Just do your best to provide good service and understand that all are on edge." Keela Huotari of Yellowstone Kennels in Sidney, MT, adds, "If something doesn't pan out and things

aren't perfect, it's OK. It's perfect the way it is!" And Rachel McGinnis of Leo & Lucky's in Parrish, FL, says to focus on the positive: "If you don't have enough holiday merch, be thankful for not having to store it. Or if you have too much, you won't have to buy it next year. It will all work out!"

MERCHANDISING Did you see an adorable reindeer lawn ornament during your holiday shopping? But didn't want to pay full price? Or has your holiday tree reached the end of its lifetime? The next few weeks are an ideal time to shop for 2026 decorations.

WEEK 5 DEC. 28-JAN. 3

PLANNING Put reminders on your 2026 calendar, including one mid-year, to check in and see what you've accomplished so far and what you need to do to get or stay on track.

INVENTORY Does your team dread year-end inventory? If so, then follow the lead of Katherine Ostiguy of Crossbones in Providence, RI. She says, "I do everything in my power to make it fun because I recognize it's a slog. We start the day by ordering from our favorite coffee shop, blast whatever music we're in the mood for (profanity encouraged — hey, we're closed!), have a great lunch delivered, and train our dogs after for a mental break." Heck, we'd volunteer to help Ostiguy's team!

WEEK 6 JAN. 4-10

EVENTS Speaking of fun, commit to making your events even more creative in 2026. Some 2025 inspiration from your fellow indies: Wet Nose

in Geneva, IL, hosted a Hound Bath. The 45-minute sound therapy session by a holistic animal practitioner brought calm to attending pups and their people. The Dapper Hound in Mount Airy, NC, held a Make Your Pet a Beaded Necklace event, presented with a local artisan. And Molly's Mutt House in Houston, TX, offered a full Pirate Adventure Menu to daycare clients. We love the Pirate Booty Obstacle Course that doubled as enrichment and training!

WEEK 7 JAN. 11-17

OPERATIONS A new year also proves the perfect time to revisit your store's return policy. Don't be afraid to create certain rules for certain product categories to protect your bottom line. We love this policy/tip from the PETS+ Facebook Community: To combat attempted returns of opened packages of disposable diapers, Carey Proffitt-Stephenson of Speck's Pet Supplies says, "We hand out a sample with the purchase and tell them they can only be returned unopened."

WEEK 8 JAN 18-24

FINANCES Take stock of your subscriptions as the new year begins. Certain credit card companies and budgeting tools help you find recurring charges and cancel those you no longer need.

WEEK 9 JAN 25-31

MANAGEMENT Institute a weekly email to keep employees in the loop about what's happening in your store, as well as up to date on the industry. Have them sign up for PETS+ daily bulletin, too, at petsplusmag.com/bulletins. It includes useful news and tips to boost productivity and revenue.

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We keep **WHOLESOMES NATURALS** Jumbo Original bone biscuits on our counter and sell them for 49 cents. They're such a great impulse buy, and we sell through three or four of the 20-pound boxes per month. **Danyle Morse, Claremont Pet & Aquarium Center, Claremont, NH**

TALL TAILS Polar Freezable Reward Dog Toy. I got one for my dog (who is always at the shop with me), put goat milk in and froze it. Customers asked what it was, and then they flew off the shelf. I've ordered about four to six a week for the last month or so. **Jennifer Pastorini, Dusty's Den, Sonoma, CA**

Your Go 2 by **ADORED BEAST**. We sold 14 bottles last month, and we never run promotions on it. **Angela Velasquez, The Kitty Bodega, Houston, TX**

New **WOOF** Pet Honest Chews. This company keeps topping itself. Customers love them, especially the antler shape with antler dust inside. **Lauren Gallagher, Everything But The Dog, Reading, MA**

DR. MARTY'S Freeze-Dried Small Breed and Essential Wellness 16-ounce formulas are flying off the shelf! No promotions, just people being pushed to our store from parent company Golden Hippo. We sold 83 Small Breed and 47 Essential Wellness at \$34.99 each in September. **Britt Sturm, Agri Feed Pet Supply, Knoxville, TN**



FOR TINY TUMMIES

We sold 23 cases of **WERUVA** Kitten Chicken Breast Formula wet cat food! This is a totally nuts number for our tiny little store! The full line of Weruva Kitten sells incredibly well, but the pink one outshines the rest! We charge \$20.99 per case. **Adina Silberstein Queenie's Pets, Philadelphia, PA**

Bully Coated Collagen Sticks from **NATURAL FARM** — we sold approximately 300 in September for \$10.99 each. **Julie Sterling, Julz Animal Houz, Marysville, WA**

We brought in Hide A Pill putty from **VET WORTHY** and sold all of it in three days! **Gary Hughes, Gangsta Dog, Norfolk, VA**

PETCUREAN Go! Skin & Coat Salmon & Lamb dry dog food. We paired it with a promotion for our grooming clients who

have dogs with skin/coat issues — really helped increase sales of these products! Our sales



Go Go Turkey Tendons from **ARTVARK PET PRODUCTS**! We sold 7,816 units at 26 cents a gram! **Kat Vander-moss, All Natural Pet Supply, Vancouver, WA**

rep gave us \$-off gift cards, which we paired with samples and info regarding why food matters in coat and skin condition. It was a great way to introduce better pet foods with benefits they can see and feel! **Pattie Zeller, Animal Connection, Charlottesville, VA**

Surprisingly, this was the summer for fish bait. We couldn't keep enough worms in stock. Now that the kids are back in school, it has slowed down but is still popular since there are no bait shops in the area. We sell night crawlers, red wigglers and superworms. **Barbara Clemmens, Aardvark Pet Supplies, Thornwood, NY**

A&E CAGE Java Multi Branch bolt-on perch in small and extra-small. Good markup, good for the bird, no two alike. It seemed like every sale included one or two. We usually have four to six dozen on hand. Sell for \$12.98 to \$14.98. **Paul Lewis, Birds Unlimited, Webster, NY**

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“Thanks to WPA's steadfast dedication to advocating for the pet industry, we've made an unwavering commitment to supporting organizations like the Pet Advocacy Network, NAIA and others. Their ongoing efforts promote healthy pet ownership, making a real difference in our community.”

MICAH KOHLES, DVM, Woodland Animal Hospital / Odyssey Consulting / University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Veterinary Medicine

As a WPA board member, Micah champions events and education programs that fuel excellence and empower pet retailers and groomers.

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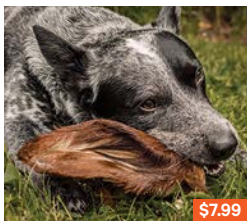


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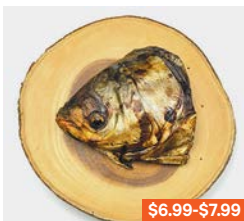


\$7.99

BEEF EAR

FARM HOUNDS

Transparently sourced from 100% pasture-raised, grass-fed cattle, these dehydrated daily chews are highly digestible and humanely raised to support regenerative agriculture methods. Containing fiber and manganese, included ear hair retains natural scent, making dogs even more excited to chew, while also good for the digestive tract. Low fat. For light and medium chewers. Sourced in the U.S. 5-7 in. Family- and women-owned business. **farmhounds.com, wholesale@farmhounds.com**

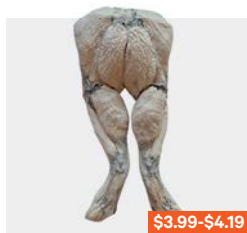


\$6.99-\$7.99

SILVER CARP HEAD

GAINES FAMILY FARMSTEAD

New long-lasting, single-ingredient, protein- and nutrient-dense chew for dogs. Packed with collagen and healthy omega-3s to support skin, coat, joint and heart health. Crunchy texture and fully digestible. Sourced from clean waters. Excess invasive species Silver Carp, supplied by partner fishery, which is then dehydrated for the perfect treat. For medium to large dogs. Sourced in the U.S. 10-12 oz. Family-owned business. **gaines.pet, chandler@gainesfamilyfarmstead.com**



\$3.99-\$4.19

FREEZE-DRIED FROG LEGS

THE BONES & CO.

Unique single-protein freeze-dried dog treat packed with essential nutrients omega-3 fatty acids, calcium and iron. Supports joint health, muscle development, and skin and coat wellness. High-protein source ideal for dogs with food sensitivities or allergies. Low fat. All natural, no additives or preservatives. 35 per bag wholesale/not individually wrapped. Family-owned business. **thebonesandco.com, sales@thebonesandco.com**



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HONEY I'M HOME

Free-range, grass-fed water-buffalo trachea wrapped in buffalo lung and finished with a touch of honey. Grooves and crunchy texture support dental health. Protein packed and loaded with fiber. Made with simple, natural ingredients. No grain or GMOs. Suitable for dogs with poultry and beef aversions. 6 in. Retailer support: seasonal specials, bundle pricing, promotional calendars, sales sheets and quick product-knowledge guides. Women-owned business. **honeyimhome.com, info@honeyimhome.com**



\$11.97/\$15.18

BULLY WRAPPED COLLAGEN STICK

REDBARN PET PRODUCTS

Highly palatable collagen from beef hide wrapped in beef pizzle. Naturally rich in chondroitin and glucosamine to support joints, skin and coat, plus packed with protein. Made from natural ingredients. Single ingredient; no grain, gluten, wheat, corn or soy. Good boredom buster for all breeds and life stages. Medium in 3 pack/large in 2 pack. Family-owned business. **redbarn.com, (800) 775-3849**

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DR. PUSSUMS CAT TEASERS SET

THE PUSSUMS CAT COMPANY

The trio of Maine-made cat teasers all have long wooden dowels, with one feathered (at least three feathers), one fleeced (54 by 1 in.) and one hand braided (32 in. cotton fabric). Colors and patterns vary. The primarily poplar dowels are milled in the U.S., responsibly sourced from Southern U.S. forests, where growth rates exceed harvest. 18-in. dowel. Family- and women-owned business. drpussums.com, whole_sale@drpussums.com

\$19.99

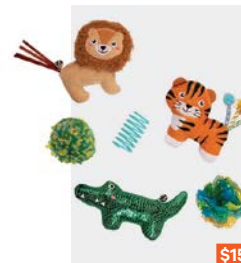


SENSES 2.0 FOOD TREE

CATIT

Turn feeding time into a hunt with this smart toy that entices cats to work for their food, keeping them engaged and entertained. With active pawing, dry food and treats tumble down to collect in a wide, whisker-friendly tray. The interactive slow feeder prevents binge eating by delivering smaller portions at a healthier pace, resulting in fewer stomach issues. Made of BPA-free materials. 10 by 10 by 10 in. Family-owned business. catit.com, newcustomers@rchagen.com

\$21.99



THAT'S JUST GRRREAT

PET SHOP BY FRINGE STUDIO

Six-piece cat toy set features three custom plush toys, plus a plastic spring, string ball and crinkle ball. Ultra-soft plush toys contain North American-grown catnip, with crinkle paper, silver bells, ribbons, and metallic bungees with pom poms. Designed for pounce, bat and chase. Each toy measures 2.5 by 3.5 in. petshopbyfringestudio.com, csreorders@fringestudio.com, (310) 915-6430

\$15



ROO'S ROCK CANDY

DEZI & ROO

Designed by a veterinarian, the 100% cat-safe confection-inspired scent-enrichment chew-and-bat toy comes with its own Cloud Nine silvervine packet. It rolls, spins, is perfect for chewing and comes in a variety of colors. Cats love bunny kicking and carrying it around. 5 in. Affordable, interactive and long-lasting, retailers love its strong margins, easy sell-through and repeat customer demand. Made in the U.S. Women-owned business. deziroo.com, info@deziroo.com, (678) 498-4005

\$4.99

CAT TOYS & SCRATCHERS PRODUCTS+



ZIPPYCLAWS HOLIDAY ZIPPYSTICK

ZIPPYPAWS

Festively fun holiday cat toy features sturdy, eco-friendly bamboo, enticing pompoms, tassels and a long string. Includes three Miniz (Santa, Christmas Tree Cookie and Santa's Milk) that can be switched in and out. Just wave, jerk, flutter, circle or drag the wand around to entice. Allows pet parents to bond with their cat while giving them mental and physical exercise. 10g catnip per Miniz toy. String length 24 in. Family- and women-owned business. zippypaws.com, sales@zippypaws.com, (909) 606-6094

\$14.99



LASER CHASE RECHARGEABLE

PETSPORT USA

The original laser-pointing toy for pets is now rechargeable, no longer needing to replace small lithium batteries. The interactive toy's clip-end cap unscrews to access a USB-C port (cable not included). Handy carabiner allows Laser Chase to clip to keyring, leash or backpack. Great for cats, and even dogs, birds, lizards and fish chase the red light. In red, blue and silver. 5 in. Women- and minority-owned business. petsport.com, mail@petsport.com

\$7.29



KOREAN BBQ CAT SCRATCHER HOUSE

SMILE PAWS

All-purpose cardboard cat house lets cats play, exercise, sleep and scratch — all in one. Wide entrance and spacious interior design allow cats to get in and out easily. 20 by 13 by 21 in. For cats 20 lbs. or less. Easy-to-assemble, comes in a flat-packaging package. Other design themes available: Surf Shop, Tea House, Izakaya Bar and more. Crafted from sustainable materials. Designed in the U.S. Women-owned business. smilepawslove.com, service@smilepawslove.com, (510) 387-2299

\$40-\$45

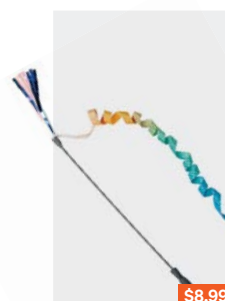


SCRATCH-N-LOUNGE

WARE PET PRODUCTS

Economical and irresistible, the corrugated cardboard scratcher fulfills cats' instinctive need to scratch and relax. They will scratch the lounge to mark their territory and then curl up to sleep the day away. Pet parents can add catnip to watch kitties go wild. Modern look and design. 17.5 by 9.5 by 4.5 in. Family-owned business. warepet.com, (602) 257-8803

\$29.99



DANCE & LURE AQUA CAT WAND

HUXLEY & KENT

Crinkling sound and shimmering iridescent mylar keep cats captivated and active along with the 40-inch-long colorful lure that dances for both fast and slow play. The wand's flexible, ergonomic handle is made with 27% recycled materials and provides bounce, durability and comfort. Crafted with non-toxic materials. Easy to store. Handle 19 in., lure 40 in. Women-owned business. huxleyandkent.com, orders@huxleyandkent.com

\$8.99

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NEW PRODUCTS & BEST SELLERS OF 2025

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NEW!

Dig into fun with the ZippyPaws® interactive Snufflerz Stacks Breakfast Sandwich! Featuring 6 foldable fabric panels, the Snufflerz Stacks resembles components that make up a delicious Breakfast Sandwich. Each layer featuring spaces for hiding treats. Its design keeps your dog busy and stimulates their brain. It's Snufflerz Stacks time! **MSRP: \$19.99**



BEST SELLER!

The SmartyPaws Puzzler from ZippyPaws® teaches dogs problem solving skills for a fun and engaging way to receive treats and/or kibble. The 3-in-1 game features different levels of difficulty that entertain and reduce boredom while teaching your pup problem solving skills. Includes a non-slip base to prevent sliding. **MSRP: \$20.99**



Through hide-and-seek play, Zippy Burrow® toys help prevent boredom and promote mental stimulation. This interactive Zippy Burrow® toy comes with 1 "Donut Disturb" coffee burrow and 3 small squeaky Miniz Donutz. With embroidered details and stuffing, this toy will have you saying Mmm... Zippy Burrow® Coffee and Donutz! **MSRP: \$19.99**

The eye-catching Razze Rope from ZippyPaws® adds a little razzmatazz to playtime. Constructed using a durable printed rope, it can withstand hours of fetching and tugging fun! With a custom wavy stripe pattern and bright yellow cotton rope details, it exudes a classic playful spirited Zippy design. **MSRP: \$9.99**

Zippy Paws®



ZIPPYPAWS®

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BUILT TO LAST

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BY MELISSA L. KAUFFMAN



BARKERCHILL + LAVENDER

BARKER BEDS

As an optional upgrade, the temperature-regulating technology BarkerChill+ and lavender are permanently bonded to the top layer of select beds. This design ensures consistent cooling across the sleep surface and eliminates the need for maintenance or replacement. The calming lavender aroma is subtle, clean and designed to soothe restlessness without overwhelming sensitive noses. Available through retailers as an add-on via drop-shipping. barkerbeds.com, info@bigbarker.com, (800) 232-7950



WATERPROOF BLANKETS

TALL TAILS

Crafted with plush Real Feel Fabric, the oversized blanket shields furniture, beds and car seats without sacrificing softness. Includes waterproof inner layer to protect home and cars from wet paws, accidents and everyday messes. Attractive design integrates easily into pet parents' home decor. Easy to clean: Machine wash cold and tumble dry low. For pets up to 90 lbs. In Grey or Khaki. 40 by 60 in. Family-owned business. talltailsdog.com, (914) 461-9800



WOOL CAVE KARMA CAT

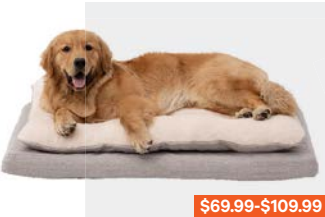
Hand-felted by women artisans in Nepal from nothing more than natural wool, soap and water. Cats and dogs love to hide out in the unique cozy beds that add stylish whimsy to any home. Scent of wool naturally soothes pets. Made of sustainable materials. Odor resistant and washable. For pets up to 20 lbs. In a variety of designs and colors. Strong margins, ready-to-ship inventory and eye-catching POP displays. karmacatinc.com, (845) 876-6331



CANYON SERIES CHILL PADS

PET LIFESTYLE AND YOU

A twist on P.L.A.Y.'s best-selling Original Chill Pad, the Canyon Series mats blend an ultra-soft teddy-velvet top with durable 100% cotton-twill bottom. Eco-friendly PlanetFill filler made from 100% post-consumer certified-safe recycled plastic bottles. Perfect for crates, cars or restful corners. Machine washable and dryer friendly. Zipper free. In earthy hues Nightfall, Mist, Sagebrush, Terracotta and Sunbeam. Family-owned business. XS-XL. shop.playb2bwholesale.com, sales@petplay.com



ORTHOPEDIC PILLOW-TOP BED

TERRITORY

For pets of all ages who need a cozy, supportive spot to relax and recharge, the bed features a pressure-relieving orthopedic foam base topped with a cloud-like pillow surface for restful sleep. Water-resistant liner protects the foam core from spills, accidents and everyday messes for durability and longevity. Machine-washable and dryer-safe removable cover. Two-tone design. S/M (30 by 19 in.), L (36 by 23 in.), XL (42 by 28 in.). territorypet.com, (914) 461-9800



DURAPLUSH BARRIER MATS

CYCLE DOGS

Built for comfort, travel or indoor lounging, the new heavy-duty mat features a soft Duraplush top and waterproof bottom. Fits standard crates and rolls up for travel. Mat feels similar to memory foam but uses sustainable recycled materials: supportive fill made from the company's excess toy material. Machine washable. Built to last. Barrier Water Resistant Dog Blanket also available. Made in the U.S. S-XL. Women-owned business. cycledog.com, (503) 805-9354



CRAZY WARM BED

THE GREEN PET SHOP

Bed features Stay Calm Technology providing pets with immediate warmth, leaving them happy and comfy for hours. Its warming mat contains the naturally occurring mineral tourmaline, which acts as a conductor when it comes into contact with body heat. Also with dense memory foam. Designed to fit most crates. Great for travel, cats and dogs. In Hazelnut. 30 by 20 by 1.5 in. Family-owned business. thegreenpetshop.com, (847) 480-1616



THE MUFFY BOWERS PET PRODUCTS

The new luxuriously soft and fluffy Muffy bed is a retreat for cats and small dogs. With high, plush sides, it creates a cozy, nest-like space perfect for snuggling, burrowing or curling up out of sight. Made with durable, premium, luxurious faux fur. Machine wash and dry. In Fluffernutter, Himalayan, Cherry Blossom, White Bengal, Silver Fox and Leopard. XS (17 in.), S (20 in.). Family-owned business. bowers.com, sales@bowers.com



AIR.BED

ZEE.DOG

Ultra-light elevated dog bed crafted from carbon steel with non-slip rubber feet. Great for both outdoor and indoor use. Breathable mesh fabric cover is easy to maintain and wipes clean. Tool-free setup and easy breakdown, with a storage bag for transport. In Black or Green. For dogs up to 132 lbs. S (27.5 by 26.6 by 6.2 in.), M (35.4 by 27.5 by 7 in.) and L (47.2 by 33.4 by 8.2 in.). zeedog.com, (347) 477-0933

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ROGER THAT!

These veterans continue to serve, inspiring businesses and products your customers and their pets will be thankful for. BY MELISSA L. KAUFFMAN



SEASIDE COLLAR

BAYDOG

High-end collar features 100%-cotton woven rope, oil-buffed leather in a natural finish and tarnish-resistant brass hardware. In S-L. In Clifford Red, Navy, Sunset Pink and Sea Foam. With matching leashes. Founder/CEO Barton O'Brien: U.S. Marine Corps veteran, AH-1W Cobra pilot served three combat tours in Iraq. baydog.com, info@baydog.com, baydogwholesale.com, (443) 808-8664



LICK STICK

SODAPUP

Hand-held interactive enrichment lick sticks. Simply smear peanut butter or other tempting soft food on the lick stick and use it for trick, basic or target training. Promotes bonding between your customers and their dogs. In Yellow Beehive, Pink Ice Cream Cone and Blue Starburst. 11.5 in. Made in the U.S. Family-owned by Adam Baker, U.S. Coast Guard veteran. sodapup.com, adam@sodapup.com



BARRETT TOUGH ETHICAL PRODUCTS

Constructed from solid natural rubber with no seams. Long-lasting, comes with 100% lifetime guarantee. Line includes Barrett Balls (three sizes), Tough Retriever Stick, Ring, Tennis Jumble and Tumbler. 2.5-9.5 in. Developed by James Hayes, U.S. Army veteran, and inspired by his service dog, Barrett. Ethical Products supports The Headstrong Project. ethicalpet.com, (800) 223-7768



ARMSTRONG'S ORIGINAL CRICKETS

ARMSTRONG'S CRICKET FARM-LA

Easily digestible house cricket contains nutrition reptiles need. Gentle, non-biting crickets make mealtime fun. FDA-approved as safe reptile food. Pinheads to adults. Original Cricket available since 1947. Family-owned by Brandon Armstrong, U.S. Marine Corps veteran. armstrongcrickets.com, acheta@armstrongcrickets.com



CBD SOFT CHEWS

FETCH BY EXTRACT LABS

Crafted with organic full-spectrum hemp oil and real bacon flavor, each Calming Maple Bacon soft chew helps pets stay calm and comfortable. 10mg of CBD per chew/300mg CBD per jar. No artificial additives. Carries NASC Quality Seal. Made in the U.S. Extract Labs Founder and CEO Craig Henderson: nominated twice for Bronze Star and awarded the U.S. Army Commendation Medal With Valor. extractlabs.com, wholesale@extractlabs.com, (303) 927-6130



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A modern refresh to disposables with pet parent-first details. Color options blend with fur or personality, while patented Extendr deliver a custom fit. Their WickQuick dryness, CharredBamboo odor defense and up to 83% plant-based content turn hygiene into a guilt-free consumable that drives repeat sales, shopper trust and healthier margins. Family-owned business. S-L (10 count), L (20 count), S-M (30 count). **petparentswhole.com, sales@petparentsbrand.com**



\$25.99-\$46.99

MAX ABSORBENCY PEE PADS

EARTH RATED

Designed with Absorb-Shield+ technology, the pee pad absorbs two times faster and more than regular ones. Includes built-in adhesive tabs and attractants for dogs. Reinforced edges contain liquid and minimize mess while bottom layer safeguards flooring. Pee pad pulp material made from well-managed FSC-certified forests and other controlled sources. For dogs at every stage. Large (22 by 23 in.), XL (28 by 34 in.) and 3XL (36 by 36 in.). **earthrated.com, earthrated.com/pages/wholesale**

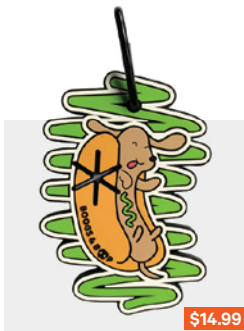


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DOOSCREET

TANJMAN INNOVATIONS

Innovative, hands-free poop bag hider. Eliminates awkwardness pet parents may experience when carrying around full poop bags, keeping them discreetly from public view until a proper disposal container is found. Collapsible. Clips to dog's leash. For small- and medium-sized dogs. Made in the U.S. 3.5 by 5 in. 1.6 oz. **dooscreet.com, (203) 572-3335**



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HOT DOG LOVER HANDS-FREE WASTE BAG CARRIER

BOOGS & BOOP

The perfect solution for dog parents who are tired of holding onto smelly bags during walks. Made from durable rubber, it's designed to securely hold used waste bags until a trash bin is found, keeping hands free. The waste-bag carrier clips to a leash, with the used waste bag slipped into the slot. Dachshund-themed design combines playful style with everyday practicality. Woman-owned business. **boogboop.com, (347) 454-1350**



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YARD ODOR ELIMINATOR

NATURVET

Sprays on any outdoor surface to eliminate stool and urine odors. Can be used on real and artificial grass, plants, shrubs, patios, patio furniture, kennels, dog runs, swing sets, fences, block walls, or any other surface where odors arise due to pets. Should be tested first on fabric. Concentrated formula allows for dilution. Children and pets should be kept from sprayed area until dry. Made in the U.S. 31.6/64 oz. **naturvet.com, naturvet.com/pages/contact-us**



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TUSHY WIPES

EARTHBATH

Safe and convenient way to keep pet tushes fresh, clean and odor free between baths. Gentle and non-irritating, the plant-based wipes neutralize unpleasant odors with rosemary oil, baking soda and odor-eating enzymes. Mild cleansers remove stuck-on messes and stains, while chamomile soothes skin. Professional groomer's choice to express anal glands. Safe for daily use on all animals over 6 weeks old. Made in the U.S. 100 count. **earthbath.com, sales@earthbath.com**



\$8.99

THE DOOLOOP

DOOLOOP

A simple, one-hand solution for carrying full waste bags. New design with bag-roll holder. Made in the U.S. with recycled, non-toxic, formerly medical-grade plastic and assembled by workers paid a fair wage. Packaging is 100% recyclable. In a variety of colors. Eye-catching, compact product for point-of-sale or leash displays. Minimum order flexibility. Individually carded, can be hung or displayed in POP box. **thedooloop.com, beth@thedooloop.com, (207) 712-5453**

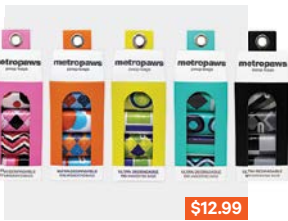


\$19-\$25.99

WASHABLE DOG PEE PADS

LUFTPETS

Reusable pee pads feature adorable paw print and leakproof four-layer design, combining style and functionality. Fast drying, absorbs liquids in just 30 minutes. Nonslip gel dots ensure pads stay securely in place. Machine washable — designed to withstand more than 300 washes. Retailer support: POP and demo materials, social media, ongoing product training and merchandising. Women-owned business. In 2 packs: 18 by 24 in. and 24 by 36 in. **luftpets.com, (503) 998-6750**



\$12.99

ULTRA DEGRADABLE POOP BAGS

METRO PAWS

Created with the planet in mind, these designer poop bags degrade up to 25% in 30 days, but not until after use. (ASTM 5511 compliant.) In Pink, Orange, Yellow, Seafoam and Black. Eight rolls per package and 20 bags per roll (160 bags total). Available for retailer purchase: The acrylic POP Metro Cube that looks great on countertops and entices customers to buy individual rolls. Woman-owned business. **metropaws.com, (347) 948-7297**

product spotlight

SPONSORED CONTENT

1. P.L.A.Y PET LIFESTYLE AND YOU

Feline Frenzy Kickers are a feast of fun and quality, these plush toys entice cats with irresistible crinkles, kicks and eco-friendly materials. Handcrafted with durable construction, filled with PlanetFill® from recycled bottles and sprinkled with USDA-certified catnip. **MSRP: \$11.50**
E: sales@petplay.com
P: (855) 300-7529
W: shop.play2bwholesale.com

3. PETKORE

The KOREflex Dog Ball & Tail is the ultimate playtime toy—combining a durable natural rubber ball with twin tails for tugging, chasing, and kibble-stuffing fun. Designed by PetKORE with 50 years of expertise, it promotes interactive play, big-bite satisfaction, and long-lasting durability for dogs of all sizes. **MSRP: \$21.99**
E: info@petkore.com
P: (720) 674-6600
W: petkore.com

5. WHOLISTIC PET

Wholistic Pet Allergy & Immune Soft Chews support seasonal allergies and overall wellness. With Colostrum, Turmeric, and a Mushroom Blend, they strengthen immune response and promote gut health. Cold-pressed and air-dried to preserve nutrients for maximum bioavailability, giving dogs natural, whole food support every day. **MSRP: \$39.99**
E: orders@wholisticpetorganics.com
P: (603) 472-4300
W: wholisticpet.com

7. ELLEVET SCIENCES

ElleVet Calm and Comfort maximum strength, situational use chews provide calming support for situations like fireworks or vet visits. For best results, give 1.5 hours before the trigger event. Each Calm and Comfort soft chew contains 46 mg CBD + CBDA. Keep Calm and Comfort on hand for emergencies! **MSRP: \$20.00**
E: info@ellevetsciences.com
P: (844) 673-7287
W: ellevetsciences.com

2. HEALTH EXTENSION

Health Extension Gently Cooked Recipes are shelf-stable, slow-simmered meals crafted with real meat, veggies, and superfoods – no refrigeration needed. Ready to serve any time, anywhere for fresh-food taste, complete nutrition, and convenience in every bowl. **MSRP: \$1.99 – \$4.99**
E: info@healthextension.com
P: (631) 392-0606
W: healthextension.com

4. NATURAL FARM

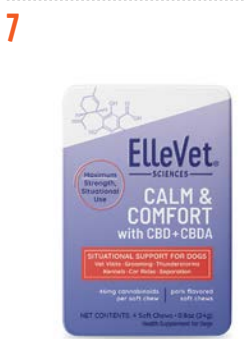
Natural Farm Freeze-Dried Food comes in Beef and Chicken recipes, made with 96% raw meat, organ proteins, fruits, veggies, and probiotics for balanced, species-appropriate nutrition. Supports energy, organ health, and digestion while reducing bad breath and stool issues. Grain- and gluten-free to ease itchy skin, ear issues, and digestive upset. **MSRP: \$9.99 - \$49.99**
E: sales@naturalfarmpet.com
W: naturalfarmpet.com

6. VIRTUOUS VITTLES

Bountiful Land Food for Dogs is 100% plant-based morsels-in-gravy formulated by a board-certified veterinary nutritionist for complete and balanced nutrition and urinary health. Made with human-grade, whole food ingredients in the USA. Bountiful Land™ is more than a meal—it's a mission. Delicious, nutritious, and Good for Every Living Being on the Planet™. **MSRP: \$6.99**
E: pawtners@virtuousvittles.com
P: (213) 324-2259
W: virtuousvittles.com

8. PETS GLOBAL, INC. (FUSSIE CAT)

Fussie Cat Super Premium Chicken in Goat Milk Puree is real chicken with nutrient-rich goat milk in a velvety texture cats can't resist. Added Vitamin E, skin-supporting sunflower oil and up to 86% moisture. Formulated without grain, and ideal as a creamy topper, these easy-open purees can be incorporated into cat's favorite Fussie feasts! **MSRP: \$3.49**
E: contact@pets-global.com
P: (888) 897-7207
W: fussiecat.com



New & Notable



\$24

LICKABLE WELLNESS

Delicious, nutrient-packed Licks from **SMALLS** help cats feel their best. Each lickable functional treat contains prebiotics and omega-3s, with Digestion Support in Bird and Fish promoting a healthy gut and with Skin & Coat Support in Fish supporting a shiny coat and healthy skin. Free from artificial flavors, corn, wheat, soy, preservatives and gums. In 3-count packs of 8 treats. small.com, meow@small.com



\$21.99

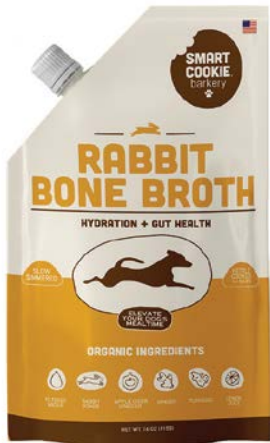
FLIP & SERVE

PUPPINGTON's Collapsible Dog Water Bottle makes on-the-go hydration easy with a built-in, flip-and-serve bowl made of soft, food-grade silicone. Lightweight, leakproof, BPA free and dishwasher safe, it fits in most cup holders and clips for travel. Packs small and expands to hold 18 oz. In six colors, including Basil (shown here). ISO discounts, digital asset library, live and virtual training, and responsive reps available. puppington.co, wholesale@puppington.co, (646) 600-8319

BIG KITTY

Meet **FLUFF & TUFF's** newest XL toy: Kali Cheetah. She boasts a sleek, ultra-plush fabric as beautiful as it is durable, designed to withstand enthusiastic play. Her long paws and tail are perfect for hours of engaging fun. And her eye-catching design will stand out in a display and attract customers. 18 in. long. fluffandtuff.com, info@fluffandtuff.com

\$34.50



\$12.99

HOP INTO HYDRATION

SMART COOKIE BARKERY simmers its Rabbit Bone Broth in kettles for more than 14 hours to extract maximum flavor and nutrients. The functional, hydration-boosting meal enhancer for dogs uses gentle, easy-to-digest rabbit protein along with ginger and turmeric to help calm the digestive system and reduce inflammation, promoting overall gut health. 12 oz. Also in Bison, Fish, Duck and Turkey. ISO and GAP programs, Astro Loyalty offers and frequent-buyer programs encourage repeat sales. Ongoing support and product training help to ensure staff can confidently recommend and sell the products. smartcookietreats.com, tammy@smartcookietreats.com



\$8.99-\$29.99

KEEPING CATS & WILDLIFE SAFE

DOOG enters the cat category with its CAAT Collection, offering products that enable supervised outdoor exploration that doesn't compromise nature's balance. The lightweight, quick-release Cat Collars with gentle bells and free-to-roam Outdoor Harness & Leash Set allow kitties to sniff and explore — while helping to prevent harm to themselves and to birds, reptiles and small mammals. Available through Gralen Distribution. doogusa.com, sales@gralenco.com, (800) 523-7979

NEW & NOTABLE PRODUCTS+



\$83.75

PLANET-FRIENDLY FEAST

Bountiful Land by **VIRTUOUS VITTELS** provides a nutrient-rich, delicious alternative to meat-protein pet food. The plant-based morsels in gravy are a shelf-stable, human-grade meal good for dogs and the planet. Formulated by board-certified veterinary nutritionist Sarah Dodd, PhD, the recipe delivers high-protein, whole-food nutrition that exceeds AAFCO standards. Made in the U.S. with carefully selected, globally sourced ingredients. 12-pack of 12.5-oz. containers. Coming in 2026: Bountiful Land for cats. virtuousvittles.com, lisbeth@virtuousvittles.com



\$18

SPOT CLEANER

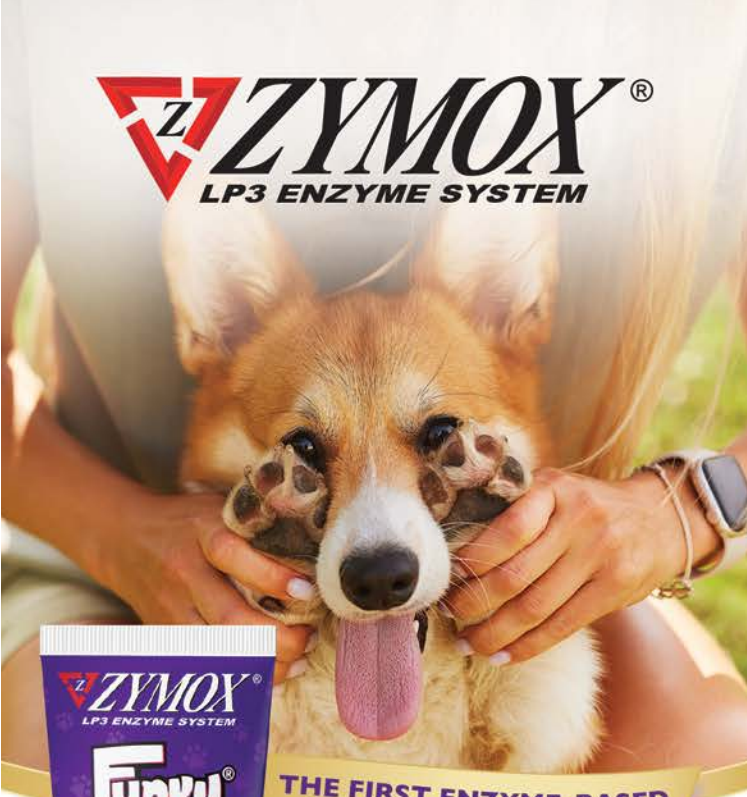
Dogs and cats will appreciate that **PRIDE+GROOM's** DOGDAYS Waterless Shampoo offers a quick alternative to bathing. The fresh-smelling foaming cleanser proves perfect for touch-ups, face cleaning, and keeping puppies and seniors fresh between grooms. Also great for post-op pets. Gentle yet effective with aloe vera, coconut oil and calendula extract. Made in the U.S. 8 oz. POP materials, ISOs, and support and training available. prideandgroom.com, bark@pridegroomnyc.com



\$9.99

NOW WITH PROBIOTICS

PUP CUP! Probiotic Frozen Yogurt builds on the success of the brand's whipped cream. Made with healthy ingredients and formulated with dog-friendly probiotics, the fro-yo serves as a delicious and gut-friendly treat. In Bacon Cheesecake and Muttter Butter. 3.5 oz. in 4-pack. pupcuppup.com, sales@pupcuppup.com



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ACCESSIBLE SUPPORT

PAWFORD aims to make premium-quality, natural supplements accessible for more pet families, giving retailers an affordable and trusted option for their customers. The science-backed, functional ingredients in the company's Natural Soft Chews support a dog's health in tasty Allergy Immune, Calming and Hip & Joint formulas. Made in the U.S. with no artificial fillers. 90 soft chews per jar. Wholesale incentives, shelf-ready packaging, and marketing support including educational materials on ingredient benefits are available. **pawford.com, nikki@pawford.com**

\$29.99



\$14.99



LAUNDRY DAY

Designed for households with pets, **POOCHIE-PETS** Poochie Suds Enzyme Laundry Detergent tackles odors from urine, feces and dander while safely refreshing beds, blankets and gear — without harsh chemicals or scents. Concentrated, booster free, one 16-oz.-bottle cleans up to 32 loads. Made in the U.S. **poochiepets.net, cheryl@poochiepets.net**

\$9.99-\$24.99

BUILT TO TUG

TALL TAILS introduces five new designs to its Natural Leather Tug Toys line: Big Foot, Squirrel, Trout, Chipmunk and Fish. Crafted from natural, non-toxic leather, the toys are built for durability and interactive games of tug-of-war, with jointed styles for extra movement and smaller options for everyday play. Each toy balances function with appeal, giving retailers versatile options for customers seeking long-lasting, interactive play products. 12-16 in. **talltailsdog.com, (914) 461-9800**



\$14.99-\$59.99

TOUGH ON MESSES, SOFT ON PAWS

Proudly made in the U.S. by **BMP AMERICA**, washable Magic Carpet Crate & Kennel Liners feature recycled, puncture-resistant materials that are tough but also soft and comfortable. They protect crates, cars and floors from spills, scratches and muddy paws, creating repeat customers who return to buy additional liners for different spaces. In S (19.25 by 10.75 in.) to XXL (44.75 by 26.75 in.). Fast shipping, POP displays, and even custom sizes and branded mats are available — create branded versions to use as store demos! **magiccarpetusa.com, ftilleli@magiccarpetusa.com, (585) 445-3996**

\$21.99-\$46.99

JUST ADD WATER

NOW FRESH Good Gravy recipes for adult cats satisfy even the pickiest eaters. The only kibble made from 100% fresh meat coated in bone broth, which turns into a rich, hydrating gravy when mixed with water. Formulated by pet nutrition experts, each recipe includes nutrient-dense fruits and veggies for balanced nutrition and irresistible flavor. In grain-free Chicken and Salmon recipes. 3 and 8 lbs. **nowfresh.com, customer@petcurean.com**



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We're more than pet treats—we're a movement. Our mission is to deliver the best nature has to offer for pets while safeguarding the planet. With a focus on sustainability, ethical sourcing, and community empowerment, we're redefining the pet care industry.

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www.roampets.com



\$4.99-\$18.99

PSL&XL

PROJECT HIVE PET COMPANY gets in on the season's love for all things pumpkin. Pumpkin Hive Chew Sticks feature a nutrient-rich, tasty pumpkin center and a crunchy ridged exterior to clean teeth, with honey and cinnamon to freshen breath. Compatible with Hive Chew Toys for long-lasting play. Large comes in 7-oz. package. New XL for larger dogs comes in two convenient packages for flexible merchandising: 18.3-oz. pouch with five treats (six units per case) and XL Singles (24 units per case). Singles are individually wrapped, perfect for driving trial and impulse purchases at checkout. Made in the U.S. In-store signage in a variety of sizes and formats available. Every purchase directly helps establish healthy bee habitats through non-profit partners. projecthivepetcompany.com, info@projecthivepetcompany.com



\$49-\$109

PET PRO PLANNER

PET BOSS NATION's Candace D'Agno — also a PETS+ columnist — packed her 2026 Pet Boss Annual Planner with proven frameworks, business-specific KPI trackers, marketing checklists and promotion-planning tools to help pet business owners turn big dreams into bold action. Whether you run a pet store, pet-sitting service or grooming business, the 300-page planner provides structure to move from uncertainty to clarity, from planning to profit. In printed and digital formats (or a bundle of both), it also includes bonus stickers and exclusive access to live workshops. petboss.com/pbnplanner2026, (234) 738-2677

FOR THE PUPPIES

Puppy Turkey & Cranberry Entree joins the **NUTRISOURCE** Pure Vita lineup. The grain-inclusive, limited-ingredient formula crafted with sensitive pups in mind helps identify triggers and build feeding confidence. Formulated with gut-focused support at its core, this food features a proprietary blend of probiotics and patented prebiotics to strengthen immunity and reduce inflammation, starting where health begins: the gut. 4-25 lbs. nutrsourcepetfoods.com, (800) 525-9155

\$20.89-\$84.69



\$7.99

CUBES FOR CATS

OPEN FARM introduces its first cat treat, Kitty Cubes. Freeze-dried raw to preserve nutrition and taste, they are perfectly sized for cats and feature up to 92% meat and organs from Certified Humane, Global Animal Partnership-certified or Ocean Wise-recommended sources. In Chicken & Turkey, Salmon & Mackerel and Surf & Turf, each recipe uses non-GMO superfoods sweet potatoes, cranberries and pumpkin, and offers guaranteed omega-fatty acids plus probiotics. Grain and legume free. Made in the U.S. 1.5 oz. Merchandising, POP materials and training tools available. openfarmpet.com, support@openfarmpet.com



\$29.97/\$39.97

EAT LIKE MIA

MIA NUTRITION's high-potency functional treats were inspired by founder Josh Haygood's dog Mia, who at age 15 was diagnosed with cancer. He leaned on his experience in human nutrition and cellular biology to create a mixture that might help her live longer — and she did, to 18! The potent blend of plant extracts, medicinal mushrooms, clean proteins, and natural vitamins and minerals designed to build up a dog's health from the cellular level is now available in treat form. In three standard flavors, including Grass Fed Beef & Boar, and three higher-potency double-coated flavors. Made in the U.S. Free samples, one-on-one training demos via video, bi-monthly chats, and where possible in-person visits are available. eatlikemia.com, wholesale@eatlikemia.com



\$23.99

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

Sparkle & Joy, the newest scent from **PET HOUSE BY ONE FUR ALL**, captures the magic of winter cheer with sparkling fruits, icy berries and a twinkle of sugared delight — perfect for the holiday season. All of the company's plant-based wax candles neutralize pet odors, do not contain dyes, phthalates and parabens, and are cruelty free. Available in 9-oz. candles, mini candles and wax melts. onefurallpets.com, info@onefurallpets.com, (954) 361-5255.



\$5.99

TASTY BUBBLES

The Bubble Lick Holiday Assorted Bubbles collection from **BUBBLE UNIVERSE** offers festive fun with North Pole Nog (egg nog), Jolly Ginger (gingerbread), Mistletoe Mint (peppermint) and Ho Ho Cocoa (hot chocolate) flavors. Safe for pets and kids, they use food-grade ingredients, are allergen friendly and leave no sticky residue. Can be used indoors and outdoors. Made in the U.S. 2.5 oz. Discounted shipping. bubbleuniverse.com, sales@bubbleuniverse.com

HICC PET

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textured surface for a deeper clean

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- Freshens breath
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now in peanut butter flavor!

- ✓ Helps remove plaque
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- ✓ Supports long-term oral health

available in the following flavors:

unflavored peanut butter mint

get the dental wipes pet parents can't stop raving about:
sales@hiccpet.com | hiccpet.com



SUPER SIMPLE

TICKLED PET's new single-ingredient SUPERTREATS line for cats combines quality and value. Available in Feline Fins sardine and Cod Bites, both sustainably sourced and high in omegas, and in Feline Fluffs beef lung, made and sourced in the U.S. and high in protein. 2.5 oz. Samples available. tickledpet.com, (845) 472-3298

\$6.99



\$22.99

REFILL & REFRESH

By eco-friendly customer request, **WEE AWAY ENTERPRISES** introduces the Wee Away Urine Stain & Odor Destroyer Refillable & Reusable Starter Kit. Each kit includes a refillable spray bottle plus two refill pods in calming Lavender or warm Sandalwood, letting customers refill forever and reduce plastic waste. This bio-enzymatic formula breaks down urine stains and odors naturally, without dyes, sulfates or parabens. Made and sustainably sourced in the U.S. Eye-catching POP materials, training materials, product education and field support to help drive sell-through. weeaway.com, (844) 933-2929



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P: (833) 626-0378

W: npicpet.com



NPIC N-BONE® MEGA-BONE LONG-LASTING CHEWS PEANUT BUTTER & JELLY FLAVOR

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MSRP: \$9.99

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NPIC N-BONE® MEGA-BONE LONG-LASTING CHEWS BLUEBERRY & PUMPKIN MUFFIN FLAVOR

N-Bone® Mega-Bone is a long-lasting chew for medium and large dogs, made with simple, digestible ingredients. Rawhide-free and by-product-free, it features fun, human-inspired flavor combos for a tasty and satisfying chew.

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Our best selling pet Dental Finger Wipes are an easy-to-use solution for daily brushing to help alleviate stinky breath and plaque. Made with natural and effective ingredients. Vet recommended.

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This gentle mist instantly freshens breath and inhibits plaque with a comprehensive enzyme-rich formula. Perfect for pets with dry mouth, bad breath and periodontal disease.

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W: zymox.com



PET KING BRANDS
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BRUSHLESS WATER ADDITIVE

This flavorless concentrate is designed to be added to a pet's drinking water, providing powerful yet gentle treatment that promotes oral hygiene. Effortlessly maintain dental health by reducing plaque and freshening breath with every sip.

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W: zymox.com



PET KING BRANDS
ORATENE® ENZYMATIC
BRUSHLESS TOOTHPASTE GEL

Pleasant-tasting clear gel maximizes enzyme contact with teeth and gums, effectively combating odor-causing bacteria and inhibiting plaque formation. Requires no brushing, making daily oral care effortless for both pets and pet owners.

MSRP: \$17.99
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W: zymox.com



FERA PETS
DENTAL SUPPORT FOR DOGS
AND CATS

Fera Pets Dental Support is a powder supplement for cats and dogs that combines postbiotics, enzymes and botanicals to promote healthy teeth, gums and fresh breath while supporting a balanced oral microbiome — no brushing required.

MSRP: \$29.95
E: sales@ferapets.com
W: ferapets.com



TEEF FOR LIFE
LICKABLE DENTAL TREAT
POWDER

TEEF's lickable treat powder is a delicious addition to any meal, treat, lick pad or toy. Premium freeze-dried protein powder meets award-winning dental technology to provide easy and enjoyable daily dental support.

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earthbath® Tooth & Gum Wipes make fresh, clean mouths easy by removing plaque, tartar & odors with a minty, plant-based formula free of parabens, alcohol & nasties. Made with FSC®-certified materials.

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LOVING PETS
ORA-BONE™ DENTAL TREATS
FOR DOGS

Ora-Bone™ Dental Treats for Dogs fight bad breath with parsley and mint, made in the USA. They feature ribs, channels for mouth movement and nibs on heart-shaped ends to scrape the tongue and refresh breath.

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LOVING PETS
TOTALLY GRAINLESS® FRESH
BREATH MINT DENTAL CARE

Totally Grainless® Fresh Breath Mint Dental Care treats feature a unique pinwheel shape that helps clean teeth, remove tartar and massage gums. Made in the USA and free of grain, wheat, gluten and corn.

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P: (609) 655-3700
W: lovingpetsproducts.com



LOVING PETS
TOOTHSTICKS DAILY DENTAL
TREATS

Toothsticks Daily Dental Treats in Mint Flavor are made from high-quality chicken and infused with mint, parsley and alfalfa. Their pinwheel shape aids in maintaining your dog's oral health and is available in two sizes.

MSRP: \$8.49
E: sales@lovingpetsproducts.com
P: (609) 655-3700
W: lovingpetsproducts.com



FOUR LEAF ROVER
ORAL HEALTH - DOG DENTAL
POWDER

Four Leaf Rover's Oral Probiotic is a science-backed dental powder for dogs that supports a healthy mouth microbiome. No synthetic flavors or unnatural additives — just clean and effective ingredients that works with a dog's body.

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A CoQ10 & Propolis Chewable Tablet to support Dental & Periodontal Health, and help Freshen Breath. Research shows CoQ10 to be a strong defender of dental health, especially helpful for periodontal support. Beef Liver Flavored.

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2-PACK - SEAHORSE AND LOBSTER

ZippyClaws® Mesh Mates include two adorable aquatic animals — one Seahorse and one Lobster! Featuring a layer of mesh material, they gently clean soft plaque and tartar off teeth as cats chomp and chew.

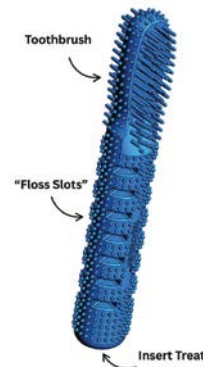
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TOOTHBRUSH**

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W: getchewmate.com



**CHEWMATE™ ORAL CARE AND WELLNESS
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The award-winning Cat TreatBrush is a cat enrichment toothbrush toy that brushes and flosses a cat's teeth and gums as they chew and play. The ultimate dental solution for cats and pet parents!
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P: (877) 677-5277
W: getchewmate.com



**PURE AND NATURAL PET
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Our USDA Certified Organic tooth gel naturally cleans and freshens breath with sweet potato, cinnamon and papaya leaf extract. Rich in vitamins and amino acids, it doesn't contain any harmful sweeteners, chemicals, dyes or preservatives.
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E: bsommers@pureandnaturalpet.com
P: (844) 698-4367
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TOOTHBRUSH & ORGANIC TOOTH GEL**

Our Dental kits are essential to help freshen a dog's breath, remove tartar and fight plaque without any preservatives, dyes or chemicals. Includes an eco-friendly Bamboo Toothbrush and USDA Certified Organic Tooth Gel. Available in two sizes for small and large dogs.
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Pet Dental Health Month is the perfect time to introduce customers to Yummy Combs — the #1 dental treat in oral care, nutrition, and safety. Stock all five sizes so pet parents can find the right fit.
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Maximize impact with 16oz Yummy Combs bags — 33% more for the price of 12oz. This tower holds 72 bags in both flavors. High visibility, compact footprint, and packed with all five sizes. Dealer unit only.
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P: (866) 944-4567
W: petsbestlife.com



**PALZ&CO
MOODOG CORIUM COLLAGEN ROLL**

Moodog Corium Collagen Rolls are premium corium collagen chews that are safer and more digestible than rawhide. Available in six flavors: Yak Cheese, Bacon, Bone Broth, Probiotics/Oat, Pumpkin & Oats and Goat Milk. Sizes: 5", 7" and 11". All-natural and oven baked.
MSRP: \$8.99-\$14.99
E: grace@palzandco.com
P: (323) 916-2026
W: palzandco.com



**ADORE PET
COMPLETE ORAL CARE SPRAY
AND GEL**

From the founders of PetzLife, this vet-endorsed no-brush formula naturally freshens breath, removes even hard tartar and is 100% guaranteed. Trusted by professionals, loved by pet parents everywhere and proudly made in the USA.
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P: (888) 559-4344
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**PROJECT HIVE PET COMPANY
PUMPKIN HIVE CHEW STICKS**

New! Pumpkin Hive Chew Sticks in Large and XL sizes for larger dogs. Vegetarian dental treats feature a nutrient-rich pumpkin center and ridged exterior to help clean teeth — creating a flavorful and functional treat dogs love.
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COMMUNICATION WRITE YOURSELF A REJECTION LETTER

Is fear of rejection stopping you from approaching your bank, a prospective business partner or even a potential customer? Well, don't wait any longer — crush your hopes yourself. It sounds like mental self-flagellation, but writing a letter to yourself listing the reasons why your proposal should be turned down will reduce the pain, Dan Pink says, citing psychological research showing that after people experience pain they are less afraid of it in the future. Too lazy to write a letter? Go to the Rejection Generator Project at tinyurl.com/klh7upg. Just choose your favored style of repudiation, type in your email, and you'll receive a dream-destroyer in your inbox.

MANAGEMENT GET ANTI-FRAGILE

To state the obvious, the world has become a more uncertain place. That doesn't mean you can't take preparatory action, notes Nicholas Nassim Taleb, the Lebanese American statistician and author of *The Black Swan*. "Not seeing a tsunami or an economic event coming is excusable; building something fragile to them is not." If you have yet to do some scenario planning (expected case, best case, worst case), get busy!

MANAGEMENT 'HOW DO YOU LIKE TO BE MANAGED?'

You may have wondered why your staff hasn't figured out the way you like to work — how you like to receive information, your best hours, what small things are

important to you, your values ... The reason is likely because you never told them. And the same applies to your employees. They have their own way of getting things done, their own values, strengths and performance modes. If you haven't yet, ask them at their next review. Peter Drucker, the OG of management studies, called taking responsibility for relationships in this manner an "absolute necessity" for an effective workplace.

CUSTOMER RELATIONS BUDDIES FOR LIFE

In his book *Predictably Irrational*, behavioral economist Dan Ariely notes that if you go the "I'm your buddy route" in retail, you need to maintain it. Companies that ask customers to make a purchase as a social transaction ("Join the family!") but then treat the deal after as a purely economic matter ("You should have read the fine print.") provoke enormous enmity with their former "BFF," he says.

COMMUNICATION IF IT WASN'T FOR YOU ...

According to a Gallup and Workhuman study, fewer than 40% of employees feel appreciated enough. Yet hearing "Thank you" just once a week from a manager was shown to cut disengagement in half. In *Meaningful Work: How to Ignite Passion and Performance in Every Employ-*

ee, authors Tamara Myles and Wes Adams say one particularly powerful way to show gratitude is by using "If it wasn't for you" messaging. Example: "Thank you for helping to close up on Friday. I would have missed my friend's dinner party if you didn't come through for me."

MANAGEMENT SOFT ON THE PERSON, HARD ON THE PROBLEM

In a difficult situation, the best approach involves separating the person from the problem, or in the words of productivity coach Ben Meer: "Be soft on the person and hard on the problem." This approach — which involves active listening, understanding the other person's perspective and avoiding accusations, while also being decisive in addressing the issue and its root causes — allows for a more productive and less emotionally charged interaction, Meer says on his blog.

SALES FLOOR FOCUS ON BENEFITS, NOT FEATURES

A University of Kansas study found that one of the reasons people are more reckless with credit than cash is because they feel free to focus more on product benefits and less on costs. Similarly, avoiding product attributes and focusing instead on narrative and emotional triggers led to significantly less activation of rational thought centers. "When marketing bypasses these parts of the brain, (shoppers) are likely to make impulsive decisions," study author Clay Warren says.

CANDACE D'AGNOLO ON SELLING

FROM SALESY TO SINCERE

These five actions will lead to genuine conversations, higher sales and a more engaged team.

Your fastest path to cash isn't brand-new customers, it's getting existing customers to spend more. Here are five biz-tested actions you can implement today to boost sales — without feeling salesy. They're pulled from recent live training sessions I led with clients.

1. SHOW, TELL & ASK IN EVERY INTERACTION

Don't point to or hold the merch — put it in their hands. Have them squeak the toy, feel the padded leash handle, spritz the coat spray so they smell it. Then tell a quick benefit story: "Because this toy is extra durable, it lasts longer and saves you money." Finally, ask "Want to take one home today?"

2. REFRAME SELLING AS HELPING

If selling feels "icky," you're not alone. Many store owners (and team members) avoid sales conversations because they don't want to appear salesy and/or they fear rejection. The mindset shift is simple: You're not selling, you're solving a problem. That harness isn't just a harness — it removes pressure

on the trachea. That nail trim isn't just a service — it's stress-free movement. When you frame selling as servicing, your confidence grows and customers welcome your recommendations.

3. CLOSE THE LOOP BY OFFERING CHOICES. THEN ZIP IT!

After you've matched a solution, invite the decision: "Shall I grab the medium bag or the trial size?" or "Friday or Saturday for that nail trim?" Offer two clear options, then pause. Don't talk yourself out of the sale. When they decide, keep momentum with one add-on: "Would you like pumpkin to help with the food transition?"

4. TURN "NO" INTO THE NEXT STEP

Objections aren't rejection; they're curiosity. Use the four A's: Acknowledge, Ask, Address, Ask again. For example: (Acknowledge) "Totally get it — price matters. (Ask) What do you usually look for first in food — price, quality or convenience? (Address) You'll feed less on this food, so your per-meal cost is

lower. (Ask again) Want to try the smaller size today?" Use this for "We buy on Chewy" or "We're just looking."

5. MAKE SELLING A GAME FOR 7 DAYS

Pick a high-margin product or service of the day and give your team three talking points. Track wins visibly — whiteboard, jar of poker chips or a group-chat tally. Small, same-day rewards work wonders (gift cards, extra break time, first dibs on new swag). Add variety with sales bingo. Celebrate effort, not just results — confidence grows with repetition.

PROMPTS TO USE

- + "Let me show you how this works ..." (demo)
- + "The great thing about this is ..." (benefit story)
- + "Would you like the three-pack or six-pack?" (choice close)
- + "I hear you. May I ask what matters most about ___?" (objection open)
- + "Amazing — thank you for supporting local. Let us know how it goes!" (gratitude)

Implement using these actions today. Put something in customer hands, reframe selling as helping, offer a choice, re-invite after objections, and keep it fun with a simple game. Small wins stack up — and so do transactions, tips and totals.



CANDACE D'AGNOLO has started, scaled and sold three pet businesses, and now mentors thousands of independent pet business owners through her business-coaching company, Pet Boss Nation. Get more tips like these at petboss.com.

ASK THE PETS+ FACEBOOK COMMUNITY

Stores that sell animals: I understand a customer wanting to gauge a pet's temperament before buying, but there needs to be a way to do this keeping the animal and the customer safe. Suggestions? **Jennifer Marshall, Northwood Pets, Rhinelander, WI**

+ Employees supervise, and most animals are held in their enclosures in case they try to squirm away. With some, we simply say, "You can pet them, but they prefer not to be picked up." One of my go-to lines for hamsters is, "They're like a bar of soap. If they jump, they're gone." Our rabbit and guinea pig

enclosures have signs on the doors, which we have to open, that say, "Please ask before picking us up! We are just babies!" It turns a few customers off, but most understand and now we don't have people trying to walk upstairs with baby bunnies in their hands. **Lauren Davis, The Pet Works Inc., Longview, WA**

+ We have signs on enclosures that say, "Please ask a team member if you would like to hold or pet us." Because enclosures are locked, they actually have to ask. We allow every animal to be held with supervision. We have at least a 48 hour-waiting period after an animal arrives before it can be held at all. Sometimes it's up

to four days, depending upon how the animal is adjusting. This allows the animal to adjust, and we can make sure it's eating and pooping like it should. **Rachael Creech, Adventure Pets, Mandeville, LA**

EDITOR'S NOTE: All answers printed with permission, edited for clarity and length. Join the private PETS+ Facebook Community for retailers and service providers at facebook.com/groups/petsplusmagcommunity.



TRUE TALES SO SWEET

We have a regular customer who gets to know the staff and is a lot of fun to help whenever she comes in. One day she stopped in and brought all the staff ice cream. Customers like that really make the hard days worth it! **Joanna Shaw, All Pet & Equine Supply, Mountain Home, AR**



Anonymous ventings from pet professionals

It really bothers both my team and myself when people tell us that we are a dog's last chance. They are usually older dogs who have been able to practice unwanted behaviors for years, and the people want immediate results. It is truly heartbreaking for us.

TERESA MILLER ON BUYING

TAKING CONTROL

When a brand evolves its channel strategy beyond independent pet, adapt by making changes of your own.

Walk into any independent pet store and you'll quickly notice something special: shelves lined with emerging brands you won't see everywhere else. These products are what make independents stand out. They offer fresh ideas, better quality, and real solutions for pets and their people.

Innovation thrives in the independent channel, with independents helping to build many a brand. But as more of these brands expand into D2C, grocery and big-box, independents face a pivotal moment. The question becomes: What to do when a brand we've championed shows up in PetSmart, Chewy or the supermarket aisle? Here's my advice as the owner of Treats Unleashed and board president of IndiePet.

SHIFT TO EXPERIENCE

When this happens, the power dynamic changes. It's no longer just about what's in the bag or bottle — it's about expertise, experience and trust.

Pet parents don't walk into your store simply to buy food or get services. They come for your advice and the confidence that they're making the right choice for their pet. That's your edge, and no mass retailer can replicate it. So don't panic. Instead, take control.

MAKE THESE 4 MOVES

- 1. De-emphasize the brand**
 - + Scale back promotions for brands that shift their loyalty elsewhere.
 - + Cut weaker SKUs and keep only what sells.
 - + Redirect your energy toward brands that support independents and align with

your mission.

2. Reallocate shelf space

- + Showcase fresh, innovative brands that your customers won't find at big-box stores.
- + Use prime placement to highlight products that represent your values.

3. Refocus your marketing

- + Shift staff picks, social features and promotions to the brands you want to grow.
- + Tell the story: why these products matter and how they put pets first.

4. Lean into your expertise

- + Host events, workshops and one-on-one consultations.
- + Be the go-to guide pet parents trust — not just a place to buy food.

CHOOSE RIGHT

The upside of losing one brand is gaining space to bring in another. IndiePet board members recommend looking for this when evaluating new partners:

Brand Values & Mission

- + Do they put independents first?
- + Are they transparent, sustainable and health-driven?
- + Ask peers about their experiences with the brand.

Profitability & Support

- + Are margins strong enough to sustain your business?
- + Do they protect you with IMAP pricing?
- + Are training, samples and marketing available?

Product Quality & Innovation

- + Are ingredients premium

and traceable?

- + Does the product solve a real problem for pets?
- + Is there existing or growing demand in your market?

Distribution & Reliability

- + Is the brand everywhere online?
- + Can the brand deliver consistently as your business grows?

Category Gaps

- + Are customers asking for it?
- + Does it fill a hole in your assortment?

EMBRACE YOUR REAL POWER

Independent retailers don't succeed by carrying every product. They succeed by curating the right brands loyal to them — and by pairing their products with expertise customers can't get anywhere else.

Our deep product knowledge, ongoing training, and ability to translate complex nutrition and wellness information into clear, personalized guidance set us apart. Grocery stores may offer shelves of products, but they can't match the conversations we have with pet parents daily.

When they want the very best for their companions, pet parents are not just looking for a product on a shelf — they're looking for us: trusted advisors who know the brands, understands their pets' needs and can guide them with confidence.



In 2002, **TERESA MILLER** launched Treats Unleashed, a fun, community-focused pet destination offering healthy supplies, top-tier grooming, local delivery, personalized nutrition and scratch bakeries. Now with 25 stores across Missouri, Kansas and Iowa, Miller also serves as IndiePet's board president, championing independent neighborhood pet retailers nationwide.

petsplusmag.com

SAVE THE DATE

Mark it down: August 2026 is going to be huge. That's when SUPERZOO, North America's most comprehensive pet product marketplace, returns to Las Vegas. And trust us when we say you'll want to be there.

Get the first look at product debuts, discover the industry's emerging brands, keep up with new retail strategies and connect with your pet pro peers. (Plus, there's the return of the popular Swingers Mini Golf networking event and the annual SUPERZOO Beach Party.) Come for the business, stay for the memories. We can't wait to see you in 2026!



August 12-14, 2026

Education: August 11-12, 2026

Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas, NV

22,000+

Pet professionals participate, including:



10,000

buyers—the most in North America



1,200+

exhibitors



3,300+

buying companies

Largest Industry Show Floor

350,000
square feet

Source: 2025 SUPERZOO website

WILD RIDE

By Pamela Mitchell, Chris Burslem, Candace D'Agnolo & Victor Cantal

Welcome to the 2025 PETS+ Big Survey! Or perhaps we should say, welcome to the PETS+ Amusement Park! After all, this past year has been a wild ride for independent pet retailers and service providers because of elements well beyond their control — evolving government regulations, supply-chain disruptions and regular recalls, just to name a few factors contributing to uncertainty in the industry.

Despite it all, though, the more than 500 independent pet retailers and service providers who took our survey reported plenty of happiness, fulfillment and profitability. We thank each and every owner and top manager who gave us their time. Your input has allowed us — for the fourth year in a row — to take an in-depth look at how pet indies are doing business. And special thanks to returning sponsor SUPERZOO!

Pick the amusement park ride that best describes how you like to run your business:

32%

FERRIS WHEEL I prefer to maintain a slow, steady pace on a familiar route.

12%

BUMPER CARS I try to avoid being hit, but enjoy “bumping” challenges out of my way.

27%

ROLLER COASTER Hands in the air! I embrace the unpredictable ups and downs and twists and turns at varying speeds.

2%

DROP TOWER AAAAAAAAAAAAAA
AAHHHHH!

27%
TEA CUPS The ride may be rotating, but I excel at controlling my business's speed and direction.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- 40 Performance
- 43 Selling & Buying
- 46 You, The Pet Pro
- 48 The Future
- 50 Giving Back
- 52 The Basics



PERFORMANCE

Most respondents report strong profits, in 2024 and well into 2025, reflecting indie spirit and optimism despite economic and legislative pressures. The dog category continues to dominate.

What has been the most valuable “prize” your business has won in the past year?

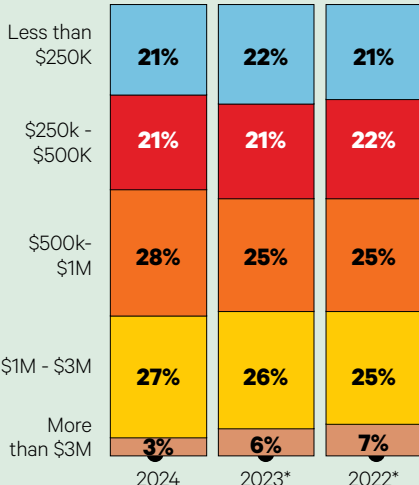
So many of you enter — and win — community recognition awards. Congrats! Other “prizes” that made indies proud:

- + “Just being successful is a prize. Prices are way up, the government is in turmoil, customer attitudes are all over the place, you can buy dog toys everywhere, and indie brands are selling us out left and right. If your doors are open, you are winning.”
- + “Getting more and more customers on raw diets.”
- + “Opening! We had to endure major renovations to the building, which we own, and we started the business from scratch — all while running other businesses/jobs and raising a toddler.”
- + “My most valuable ‘prize’ would have to be the

- shout-outs on social media from rescue/shelters I help and from our customers. Seeing those makes me feel good about my ‘why.’”
- + “Getting a certificate in geriatric pet grooming.”
- + “We donated a large amount of supplies and food to rescues in North Carolina after the hurricane and received two letters of thanks from state representatives.”
- + “Removing a toxic manager and thriving through the chaos.”
- + “I’ve had several customers over the last few months tell me that I literally saved their pet’s life with my nutrition recommendations. You just can’t get better than that!”
- + “We hired two groomers who are just fantastic, and we look forward to their growth and ours — finally.”
- + “We have helped get hundreds of cats spayed and neutered at our locations.”

- + “We hit \$2 million in sales.”
- + Celebrating 50 years. We have proven ourselves year after year!”
- + “I became a certified Pet Health Coach.”
- + “Building new relationships with veterinarians in our area to work together helping more pets.”
- + “Being recognized in public like a celebrity when I’m not. LOL.”
- + “Celebrating 30 years in business and retaining many of our original customers — and now their families!”
- + “That our Google reviews are all 5 stars.”
- + “Paid off our SBA loan!”
- + “The money we raised for rescue through our Love Four Paws program.”
- + “Being financially stable enough to close for two weeks in order to have new floors put in for the downstairs playgroups.”

What were your total sales in 2024? If you have multiple locations, give your top-performing location only.



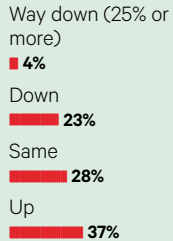
*Historical data based on previous Big Surveys

Candace D’Agnolo Tip: There are so many variables that impact sales — store size, age of the business, visit frequency and sales channels — so take the gross number with caution. While total sales give helpful industry insight, profitability is what truly fuels longevity. Many pet businesses thrive in the \$500K-\$1M range when margins are healthy and expenses are managed. Prioritizing sustainable profit over top-line growth creates stability, supports owner pay, and funds future investments to keep your business thriving.

Were you profitable in 2024? Do you expect to be profitable in 2025?



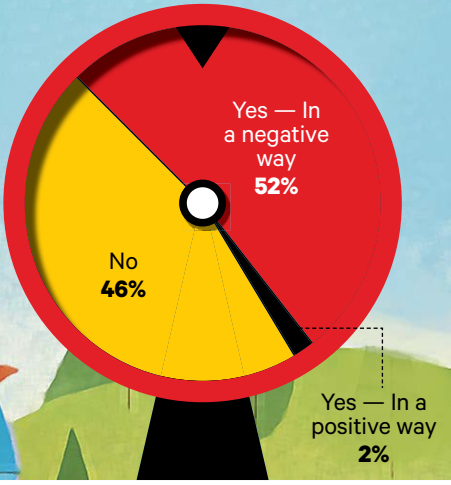
Based on the first eight months of this year, how do you expect your total sales for 2025 to compare with 2024?



Way up (25% or more) 8%

Candace D’Agnolo Tip: This is fantastic! It’s so encouraging to see more businesses expecting growth or stability despite ongoing uncertainty. This shows the resilience and adaptability of independents. While external factors may feel unpredictable, savvy pet bosses are leaning into strategy, tightening operations, and finding new ways to grow profitably even in challenging times. This is what makes indies awesome!

Has legislation and/or a government policy impacted your business’s performance in 2025?



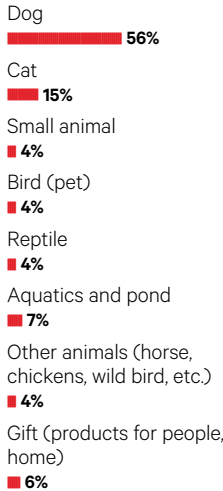
Please share what made the impact and the result.

- + “Tariffs. Prices have gone up on so many consumer goods, which is causing people to cut back on discretionary spending overall, typically on higher-margin categories and on healthy add-ins for diet.”
- + “The federal layoffs caused some of our regular daycare clients to dis-

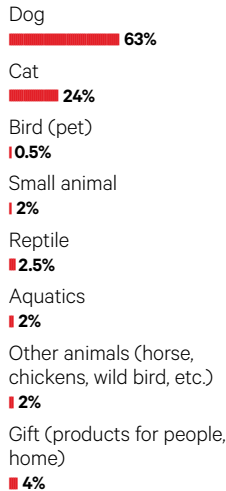
continue services because they lost their jobs and are home with their dogs.”

- + “I believe in fair trade, and wish the tariffs would have been explained better, rolled out better, and that both political parties and the American public would look at the long game. If you get past the headlines, the U.S. does get taken advantage of by most countries, and the consumer pays for it.”

Broken down by percentage, what were your product sales by category in 2024?



In which product category did you see the biggest sales growth in 2024?



- + “The ban on the sale of dogs and rabbits in New York has decimated our business. Not that we sold many, but with our services and loyal clients we were able to be profitable. Now we are down 40-60% and circling the drain.”
- + “We import many tropical fish from Asia and supplies from Europe, and tariffs have made us reconsider some offerings.”
- + “The FDA recently seized and destroyed an order from Canada. It was just collagen chews. There was no explanation.”
- + “The increase of ICE presence and illegal deportation/detention in Los Angeles made lots of folks stop coming out to shop. It didn’t matter people’s race; everyone was scared of masked unidentified people grabbing them.”
- + “We are a divided state and, while some customers understand and accept price increases as the cost of doing business, others express that we are raising pric-

es ‘because we can’ and not because tariffs have increased.”

- + “We have lost a couple of our Canadian vendors as they will understandably no longer ship to the U.S.”
- + “Zoning laws, harsher laws on breeding and keeping dogs. I have been in and out of court and in front of boards and commissions for the last year.”
- + “Credit-card processing and legislation around the rates impact small businesses, which is leading to and contributing to inflationary pressures. The percentage of reward card use in overall transactions increases and leads to price increases on top of commodity inflation.”
- + “The tariffs have been a little trying and some of the out-of-stocks because of slow shipping have put a damper on things, but over all it has been minimal.”
- + “The minimum wages continue to increase as well as city/county/state taxes. So the cost of doing business is significantly higher.”
- + “A portion of our customers are immigrants, and they are no longer buying like they did in the past. We

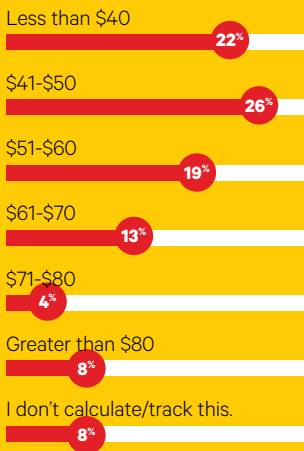
hardly ever see them now and/or they have cut back drastically.”

- + “The state of Illinois now requires all businesses, no matter the size, to provide paid sick leave/PTO that accrues per the employees’ worked hours. Employees no longer have to provide notice or reason to call off of a shift. Illinois also requires us to provide/offer 401k, medical insurance and other benefits that are just NOT affordable for a business that has a maximum of five employees, including owners.”

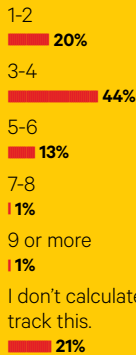
- + “We have seen sales come to a snail’s pace, but traffic is the same. We’re in a tourist town, and foot traffic is steady, but no one is spending. People are tending to hold on to their money and are not spending on pets.”

Candace D’Agnolo Tip: Legislation can feel like a moving target, and these responses really show why preparation and pivoting matter. We can’t control policy, but we can control how we respond. Diversify your vendors, adjust your product mix, revisit pricing and deepen customer relationships. A little agility goes a long way in turning outside challenges into opportunities for resilience and growth.

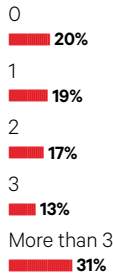
What was your average retail sale per transaction in 2024?



What were your average retail items per transaction in 2024?



How many months of operating costs do you have in your business savings account?



How often do you meet or exceed your sales goals?

Always
■ 6%

Usually
■ 46%

Occasionally
■ 31%

Almost never
■ 5%

I don't set sales goals.
■ 12%

Candace D'Agnolo Tip: These results show that many pet businesses hit their goals regularly or at least occasionally — which means there's a huge opportunity to push further. Don't sell yourself short. Get bold and intentional when setting targets. A little more strategy and stretch can unlock growth you didn't even realize was possible. Show, show, show until they say no! You never know what's possible. What you focus on grows!

Tell us about your largest revenue day:

Survey respondents said special events boost sales, with anniversary celebrations, Neighborhood Pet Store Day and holidays among the wins. There were also looks back at pandemic panic buying.

“Depending on the duration of our annual anniversary event, we could generate \$75,000-\$200,000. It generates, on average, what we would typically sell in a month.”

“I did 13 dogs in a day and do not recommend it. It creates burnout and possible injuries. Our sales increased by 20%.”

“Our largest revenue days are usually when we release a new month's worth of training classes.”

“About \$15,000 during a cage sale with the distributor on site, double a good Saturday.”

“During an adoption event on site, over 50 cats and kittens were adopted in a three-day span. Sales increased by 45% for the same period over any other year.”

“We are in a lake community, and weather and holiday weekends are the best indicators of a good Saturday. We will get on social media and show pictures of dogs with our products. Last year, we had a picture go viral (220,000 views and 605 shares) and

give us record sales.”

“For us, it was simply luck, a bunch of transactions taking place on the same day totaling over \$12,000. None were atypical; they're just usually spread over multiple days.”

“There were two Mondays in August that were killer. The average cost of dog boarding is \$75 per night, but with add-ons and grooming upcharges, the average cost coming in per night was \$128.”

“We made over \$12,000 in sales on a Black Friday! This was thanks to a very successful day of selling daycare passes (“Buy a 30-Day Pass, Get a 5-Day Pass for Free!”)

“Our largest revenue day ever was mostly all services, but the biggest factor to help us achieve it was, surprisingly, walk-in nail trims! We had over 50 that day!”

“We had a community event focused on aquatics, and it drew customers from all categories. We did nearly \$19,000. It was a nearly 600% increase over average days.”



What in your business/the industry feels like a rigged carnival game? Meaning a high level of skill does not ensure a win.

“Pricing tiers offered by distributors provide an unfair advantage to larger, corporate-owned retailers. We need the support of our distributors. Not to be told our prices are increasing because we cannot afford to buy, nor have the space for, huge bulk amounts. Our loyalty should be worth something.”

“Customer satisfaction! A lot of owners with high-maintenance dogs don't understand the work that goes into keeping their coats in top shape. If they go four months without grooming and the dog needs to be shaved, they place blame everywhere but on themselves.”

“Competing with Chewy, Amazon, big-box, etc. and how many previously indie-loyal brands are branching into direct-to-consumer shopping.”

“Dog and cat food sales. No matter how much I try to educate the customer, they often have the mindset that if the same ingredients are in a high-end food as a low-quality food, they will stay with low quality and go elsewhere. They do not consider the sourcing of ingredients.”

“Making sure we are in the MAP pricing when the competitors don't have to be.”

“New customer acquisition. We have spent thousands of dollars on different types of marketing, our customers rave to their friends and family about how great we are and the level of service we provide, but yet the majority of our new customers just happened to be in the plaza or walking by.”

Yelp reviews. Why are all the grumpy people on Yelp? But all of the nice people are on Google?

“Hiring employees is like rolling dice. You can have a great work environment, competitive pay and strong training, and it's still a crap shoot.”

SELLING & BUYING

In-store experiences and expertise remain the top way indies compete with big-box and online-only stores, with fair wholesale pricing and responsive reps making for strong brand partners.

What drives sales most in your store?

Customer experience
■ 47%

Knowledgeable sales team
■ 30%

Competitive pricing
■ 9%

Product lineup
■ 11%

Loyalty programs
■ 2%

Coupons and deals
■ 1%

Candace D'Agnolo Tip: It's no surprise that customer experience and a knowledgeable sales team top the list. These are the areas where independent pet businesses shine brightest against big-box and e-commerce competitors. Investing in staff training and creating memorable in-store experiences can turn everyday shoppers into loyal, long-term customers.

What's the main way you compete with e-commerce pricing?

By offering expertise not found online
■ 33%

Through an amazing in-store experience
■ 28%

Loyalty programs
■ 9%

Price matching
■ 5%

I don't even try.
■ 14%

Other
■ 11% (please specify)

Many “Other” respondents said they compete by carrying items not available online — or not easily available online/affordable to be delivered, such as frozen and refrigerated products.

On average, how many customers walk in your door every day?

Fewer than 5
■ 2%

5-10
■ 9%

11-20
■ 21%

21-40
■ 23%

41-60
■ 16%

61-80
■ 8%

More than 80
■ 15%

I don't track this.
■ 6%

Candace D'Agnolo Tip: Daily traffic is one of the clearest growth levers in any pet business. Even a small increase

in walk-ins — or improving conversion rates — can have a big impact on sales. If you're not tracking traffic, start now either with a door counter or by hand on a spreadsheet. Also consider counting phone calls. You can't grow what you don't measure, and these metrics are gold.



Do you sell any special occasion-only treats? Meaning not healthy for everyday consumption? Think funnel cakes at the amusement park.

Yes — Pets deserve to indulge from time to time.
■ 72%

No — We don't carry anything I wouldn't feed my own pet daily.
■ 28%

Which would you rather have?

A loyal customer who only shops every 6 months — They stock up during special-event sales.
■ 11%

A loyal customer who only shops once a month — They come in to replenish food, treats, etc. for the month.
■ 37%

A loyal customer who shops every week — They like to visit the store weekly, so they only buy what they need for that week.
■ 59%

Other
■ 3%



What's the wildest reason you've heard for a product return?

More than a few respondents answered this question with variations of “The customer said the harness just ripped (despite being obviously chewed)” and “My cat wouldn't eat the food (despite the bag being almost empty).” To those retailers we say, you haven't heard anything yet. These reasons are truly wild.

“Someone brought back a thawed pinky mouse that they said their snake wouldn't eat because its feet were facing in the wrong direction.”

“Litter ‘clumped’ too hard.”

“Canned dog food because the customer said it had maggots in it. It was the rice in the food!”

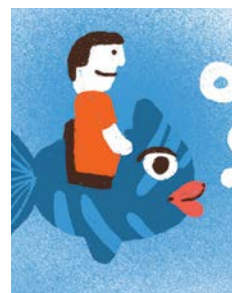
“I had a customer try to return a used coat from the previous year because her dog outgrew it.”

“This shirt didn't fit my child! It was a dog shirt!”

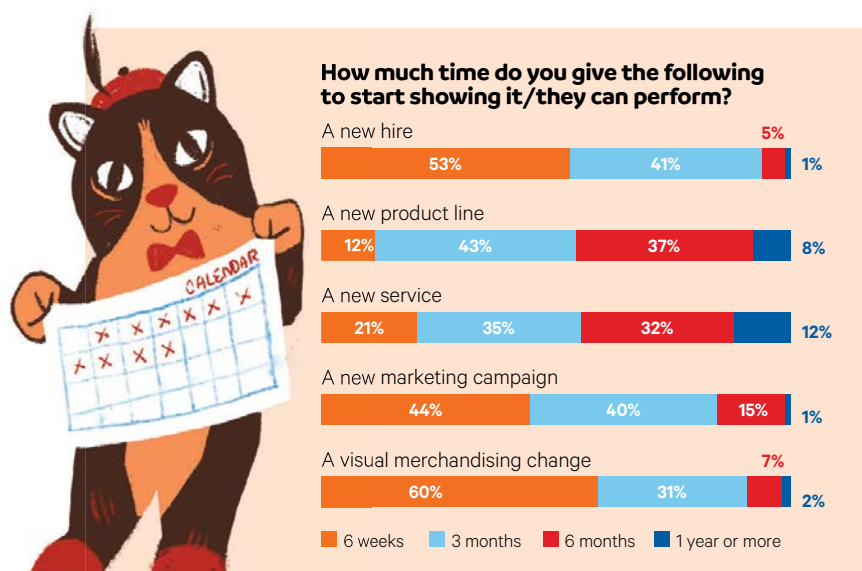
“My dog is scared of the pig ear.”

“A customer returned a small stuffed deer because they didn't want their dog to start chasing deer.”

“A fish being returned because its color clashed with the decor in the aquarium.”



▶ CONTINUED ON PAGE 44



Candace D'Agnolo Tip: I spent a lot of time reflecting on this question for my own pet business and was curious to see how others would respond. From a business coach's perspective: A new hire deserves about three months to show their best self — sometimes the breakthrough is just around the corner. But marketing campaigns and merchandising should deliver faster. If you're not seeing results within six weeks, it's time to reevaluate and adjust your strategy.

▶ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 43

“Their pet died ... four years ealier.”

“One person dropped a glass aquarium down their stairs and wanted to return it because it broke. Another left 100 crickets in his truck in below-freezing weather while he was at the bar for two hours, and they died!”

“Bought two birds, said one died and one is mean. Bitched at me for five minutes, then realized she was in the wrong store.”

“A customer returned food because their dog died, but then booked a groom for him.”

“Dog wouldn’t stop humping it.”

“Squeaker sounded funny.”

“I just can’t feed my dog pork” — while exchanging it for something with bacon.”

“A request to return a grooming brush that was very used looking, saying that his cat didn’t like the brush and it was the brush’s fault.”

“Her dog was allergic to chicken, and the prod-

uct had chickpeas. She thought chickpeas and chicken were the same thing!”

“It’s not wild, but insulting: ‘I need to return this bag of food. My Chewy order came in after all!’”

“A customer tried to return an item because their pet had peed on it.”

“The dog didn’t like the harness, which was purchased to keep the dog from pulling the owner down the street.”

“Years ago, we sold a rather large iguana and it was returned a few days later because it was chasing

the customer’s kids down the hall!”

“Husband thinks the fish-formula dog food smells like his favorite sandwich, and now he can’t stand the smell.”

“The dead mouse found in the open bag of food kept in the barn on their property.”

“This light bulb didn’t work.” So I started putting dates on the bulbs.”

“A feeder that attached to a pet bird cage. ‘I only needed it for when I was on vacation.’”

“The customer didn’t like the texture of the food when they tried it. Yup, they try everything the pet eats.”



What specific support do you get from vendors? Check all that apply.

Raffle prizes
45%

Free samples
88%

Special promotions outside of regular deals
68%

Actual money toward my funding requests
11%

Credit toward merchandise for funding requests
29%

Employee feeding programs
47%

Employee meals or special outings
15%

Additional discounts on ISOs or other show specials
58%

Nothing. I’ve never asked!
10%

Other (please specify)
6%

Credit for end-cap placement, T-shirts and tiered buying status. “If we spend more than X number of dollars in a year, we get a discount on our everyday price,” were common “Other” answers.

How much inventory do you buy?

What fits on the shelf — I have no storage.
28%

What fits on the shelf — I don’t have funds to buy deep.
22%

What I will sell in 2 to 3 months
43%

What I will sell in 6 months
6%

What I will sell in 1 year
1%

As expected, the bigger the business, the more room they have to buy, store and display their inventory. Interestingly, the larger businesses (those doing more than 100k a year) appeared to have better turn rates, with close to 80% of these stores buying goods for a two-to-three-month turnaround period.

Rank these purchasing qualities in a brand partner, from most to least desirable:

Fair wholesale pricing/margin potential
3.80*

Low order minimums
3.31

Availability through distribution
3.08

Not available on Amazon, Chewy, etc.
3.05

Net terms greater than 30 days
1.78

*Weighted average score based on ranking 1-5

Rank these support qualities in a brand partner, from most to least desirable:

Dedicated and responsive rep
3.64*

Willingness to replace product not selling
3.57

Strong marketing support
2.84

Participation in loyalty programs
2.61

Online and in-store training for employees
2.34

*Weighted average score based on ranking 1-5

Candace D’Agnolo Tip: These results show that while all brand support qualities matter, a dedicated and responsive rep stands out as most valued. And for good reason — great reps can unlock extra margin, training, promos and real partnership opportunities. If you’re not getting that level of support, ask for it. Brands want strong retail partners, too, and that conversation can open doors to better programs and profitability.



Which product categories do you private label? Check all that apply:

Food
7%

Treats
24%

Chews
11%

Accessories
12%

Gifts
9%

Toys
7%

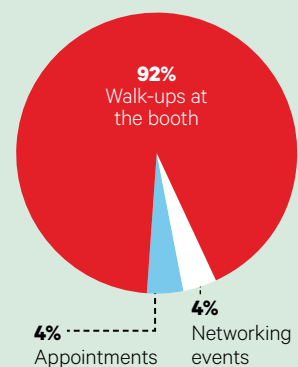
Collars, Leashes
6%

I don’t private label any products.

65%

Candace D’Agnolo Tip: Private label is a huge missed opportunity for many independent pet businesses. With 65% not offering it, there’s plenty of untapped potential. Treats and chews are an easy entry point with low minimums and great margins. Plus, customers can only get your private label products from you, increasing loyalty and repeat visits. Even testing a small launch can set your store apart and strengthen your brand.

How do you prefer to connect with new-to-you vendors at a show?



How important are show specials in your decision to place an order?

Very — I only place orders with brands that offer them.
30%

Somewhat — A good special can sway me to place an order.
56%

Not at all — If I want it, I buy it even without a special.
14%

How much of your buying happens at or because you attended a trade show?

0% — I don’t go to trade shows.
15%

1-20%
49%

21-40%
19%

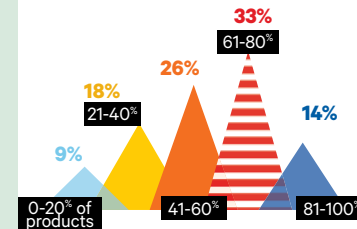
41-60%
10%

61-80%
5%

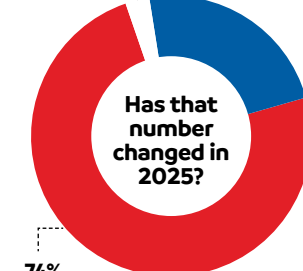
81-100%
2%

As a general rule, the larger the pet business, the more of their inventory they buy at trade shows. Most stores doing less than \$100k a year in sales said they source less than 20% of their inventory from trade shows, while for larger businesses (more than \$100k), a significant portion do 40% or more of their buying at trade shows.

What percentage of the products you carry are made in the U.S.?



3% Decreased
23% Increased



The bump most likely stems from tariffs increasing the wholesale cost of products made outside the country.

What has been the single biggest investment you’ve made in your pet business?

Buying their buildings

and/or remodeling existing spaces were common as was the cost of POS systems. Of those who shared ROI, equipment supporting fresh food sales and grooming services have paid the highest returns.

“I recently brought in groomers and had to upgrade my self-serve dog wash area to make it more usable for them. I’ve spent around \$5k, but they have already brought in \$150k in sales, so I see it as a win!”

“New turf in the play yards: \$230k.”

“Inventory consultants: \$1k per store per month. We learned a lot, but it did

not pay for itself so we let them go.”

“Paying for trade shows as a business expense. The return has been ten-fold, in finding out about new products and wholesalers.”

“I moved our bakery, expanded it and added wholesale: \$200k.”

“Thera-Clean Microbubbles: \$8k.”

“Rebranding with updated logo, colors, mood board, story and guidelines: \$100k. Took a year to complete and two years to pay off. They did a fantastic job, but I believe it cost more than

it should have.”

“A forklift during Covid: \$39k.”

“Our walk-in freezers: \$150k. They give us the ability to carry more inventory, dodge distributor stock-outs, have better stock rotation and storage of kitchen items.”

“We joke that our floors are the most expensive part of our store: sealed concrete, \$20k-\$25k.”

“Shelving for three stores: \$75k due to tariffs.”

“Repaving our parking lot: \$13k.”

“Our work van, bought

new and vinyl wrapped. We service aquariums, so it’s mainly used for that. It’s been great to have, and people love seeing it!”

“\$12k on a business mastery program. I did not get the information and outcome I was expecting, but I left with a much stronger understanding of my finances, and that probably

prevented my business from shuttering, so in hindsight, I guess it was worth it!”

“A 30-by-60-foot pole barn to have indoor space for the dogs. Cost around \$60k in materials, but my

“Addition of boarding rooms: \$10k investment that we recovered in one year.”

partner built it himself.”

“Glass-front freezers, \$5k each. Sales of fresh-food products have doubled.”

“E-commerce: \$125k a year. Results: fastest growing part of our business.”

“\$50k to replace our digital store sign.”

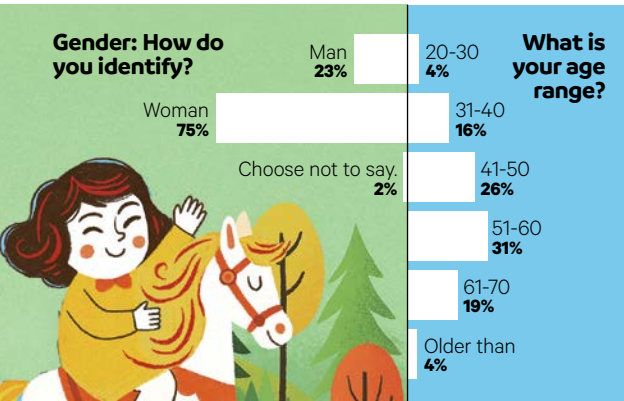
“We replaced/upgraded most of our freshwater and saltwater fish selling/holding systems. Over \$100k. Results have been healthier fish (less loss), more inventory space (more selection) and MORE SALES!”

“\$160k a year to hire a manager I can trust. It has allowed me to basically retire, as the only things I am responsible for are paying the bills and paying the employees.”

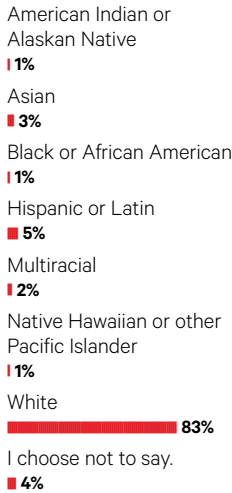
“A special food printer for our bakery: \$5,500.”

YOU, THE PET PRO

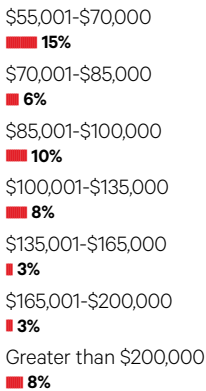
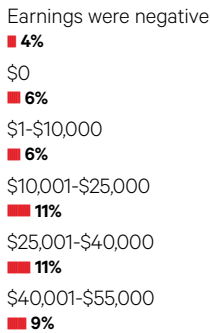
Again this year, women ages 41-60 dominate our survey group. They are deeply committed to the industry, and are seeking profitability, balance and smarter operations over mere survival.



Race or ethnicity: How do you identify?

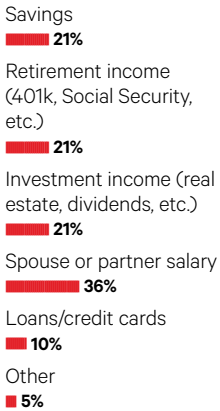
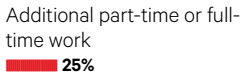


If you are the owner, what did you earn (salary + share of profit) in 2024?



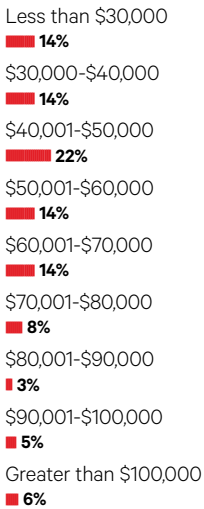
It seems logical to think respondents with higher-earning stores would prefer the comfort of the Ferris Wheel or Tea Cups during times of economic insecurity (see question on p.38-39), but that wasn't necessarily the case. A slightly higher share of those earning \$100,000 or more in 2024 selected the Roller Coaster to represent how they prefer to run their business, when compared to those earning less (32% vs 29%). The one ride where the two cohorts differed most visibly was the Drop Tower. The higher earners want to totally avoid that thrill.

If you are not earning a living income from your pet business, what is/are your source(s) of funds? Check all that apply:



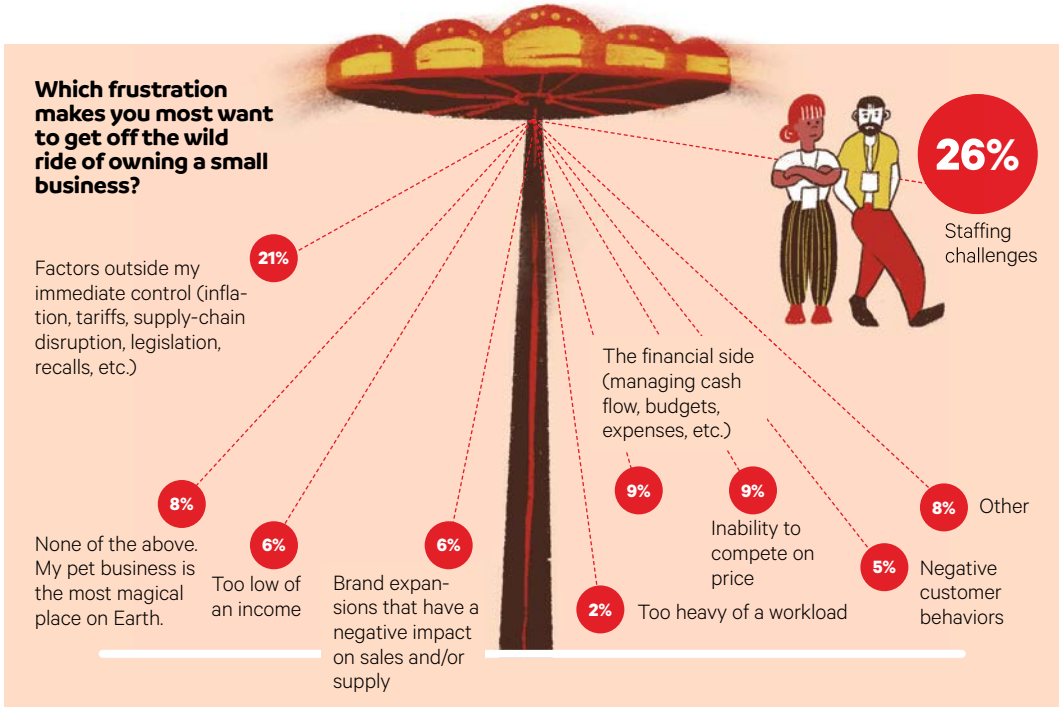
Candace D'Agnolo Tip: These results call out a common reality in the pet industry: Many owners rely on outside income to sustain their business. While that can work short-term and may seem harmless, it's not sustainable and it's holding you back. Relying on savings, retirement or credit cards is risky. Instead, focus on building reliable revenue streams, improving margins and paying yourself first. Treat your salary as a non-negotiable expense — because your business should work for you, not just through you.

If you are the full-time top manager, what did you earn (salary + bonus) in 2024?



If you had the opportunity to start over with your business, knowing everything you know now, what would you do differently?

- Open in a larger space** and in a different location were top answers, as was gain more business and/or retail-specific experience before opening. And buy the building — not rent! Other respondents said they would:
- + “Hire the best people, not the most available or within the budget. Revolving doors with employees are exhausting.”
 - + “Not bring in live animals and tropical fish. Huge investment of time and money, and store sales only improved after getting rid of them.”
 - + “Focus on controlling spending, separating wants from needs and making smarter financial decisions.”
 - + “Not have my now ex-husband as my business partner.”
 - + “Have a better online presence. Being almost four years in, it is difficult to play catch-up and get that started.”
 - + “Not hire family.”
 - + “Build the store around a walk-in freezer.”
 - + “Stick 100% to cat.”
 - + “Not care about the initial income. Take the first year to grow slowly and gain customer loyalty.”
 - + “Set up the grooming area differently.”
 - + “Not open in New York. It is one of the most small business-unfriendly states.”
 - + “Add more VIP rooms. They are in high demand and bring in more income.”
 - + “Wait until I had a larger savings to invest into both the business and myself.”
 - + “Structure my grooming salaries differently.”
 - + “Make connections with other store owners/managers earlier. They have been super helpful.”
 - + “Not be open seven days a week.”
 - + “Learn more about how to manage inventory.”
 - + “Network instead of spending thousands on advertising.”
 - + “Have a partner, to share the ride with and navigate.”
 - + “Be a lot more selective with what we carry, while trying to maintain margins.”
 - + “Look for a space with ample parking.”
 - + “Build my business in a progressive area.”
 - + “Not avoid brands just because they don't ‘fit’ the vision.”
 - + “Not offer boarding. My building is staffed 24/7. There is really never a break.”
 - + “Not be a franchise, to save in royalties.”
 - + “Use distributors instead of working directly with vendors.”
 - + “Have a POS system from day one.”



Candace D'Agnolo Tip: Staffing challenges top the list — and it's no surprise. A strong team can make or break your ability to grow, breathe and enjoy your business. If hiring feels overwhelming, start by improving retention: Clear roles, fair pay, recognition and a positive culture go a long way. But these results are also telling that many feel weighed down by factors outside their control. Worrying about those won't move the needle. Instead, channel that energy into what you can influence — your team, systems and customer experience. Control the controllables and let the rest go. That's where real progress happens.

If you ever do feel like getting off the ride, how do you reignite your passion?

Our favorite answer to this question was “I play the ‘I get knocked down’ song by Chumba Wumba really loud!” Other responses fell into these categories:

TAKE A BREAK

- + “Get out of the store and explore something unrelated to pets. I went to my mother's quilt group (I don't sew), but listened and enjoyed seeing their projects in various states of completion. Their passion rubbed off.”
- + “I take a day to unplug, get drunk, do a little ‘inspiration’ shopping, vent to anyone who will listen (and understand), and usually all of that combined will reset my head.”
- + “I take a long stretch away from the shop and work only *on* the business.”
- + “We set a week off every

year for the whole staff, so we can all take vacations. This helps a lot with burn-out. We plan it in the early fall so we are all back and ready to work through the holiday season.”

+ “Go on an ayahuasca retreat.”

CONNECT WITH OTHER PET PROS

- + “I reignite my passion by talking with other like-minded business owners. Sharing the ups and downs with those in the same boat is a game changer. They always inspire me to come back with a better mindset and give 100%.”
- + “Think about being at SUPERZOO!” (Going to tradeshows was a top answer to this question.)
- + “I belong to several retail Facebook groups — including the PETS+ Community — and find support and inspiration.
- + “Being a part of Pet Boss

Nation helps reignite my passion.”

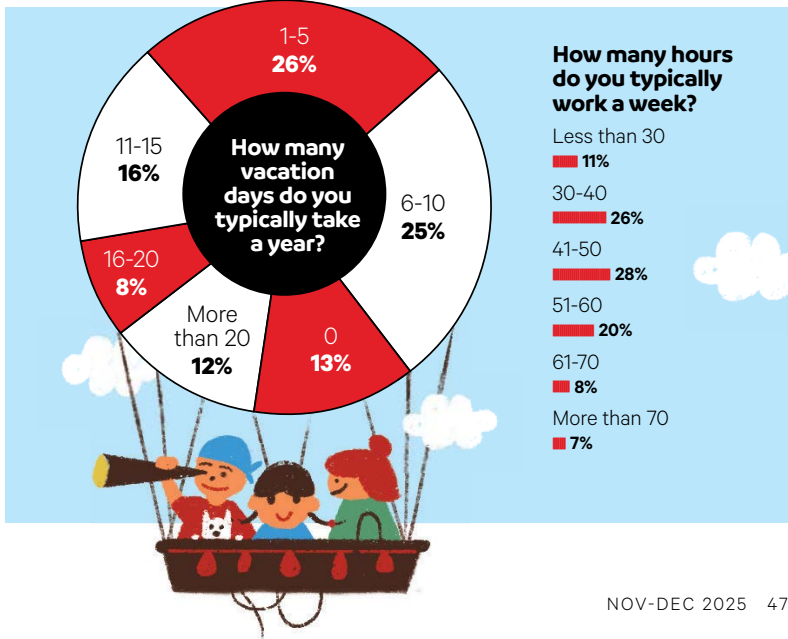
- + “Teach grooming or attend a pet-service seminar.”

CONSIDER THE ALTERNATIVE

- + “I've been in the industry since I was old enough to work and am not sure what I would be doing if

not running a dog-related business. I roll with the punches because failure is not an option. I'm sure this would make some people feel trapped, but it's fuel for the fire to keep going.”

- + “After 10 years, my worst day doing this is still better than my best day at any other job I have had.”



- + “I remember I have sunk my entire life savings and will lose it all plus some.”

- + “I remind myself what it was like working for other people!”

- + “I imagine telling my employees they no longer have a job. We serve a niche in town, and where would those customers get their feeders? Also, the lease. And I don't want to be a quitter.”

- + “I try to imagine anything else I could be as passionate about.”

FOCUS ON THE PETS

- + “I think of all of the dogs and cats we have helped through the years, and that tends to reignite my passion.”

- + “Remember that our community needs us as much as we need them.”

- + “My animals are the reason I keep going. I am always wanting to do better by them, so I am always looking for new things. In doing so, the new products reignite my passion for the industry.”

- + “I look at all the sweet puppies who are mine, if only while they're here in the shop, and I'm right back in! ”

- + “I go back and reread emails and reviews about how I've been instrumental in customers helping their pets get healthier.”



THE FUTURE

Indies look ahead through a lens of strategic growth and intentional modernization, strengthening what makes them irreplaceable: trust, expertise and connection.

What is your top priority for the next stage of growth in your business?

- Larger location or locations, within existing number of stores 10%
- Adding or expanding pet services, within existing number of stores 11%
- Opening additional locations 11%
- Adding or expanding private-label products 13%
- Adding or expanding e-commerce 16%
- Adding or expanding delivery 8%
- Franchising my business 1%
- Other 30%

Candace D'Agnolo Tip: It's exciting to see so many looking to grow in different ways, but what really stands

out is so many focusing on strengthening what they already have. Growth doesn't always mean bigger; sometimes it means better. Investing in your people, customer experience and in-store improvements can create the strongest foundation for future expansion.

If you could bring in one consultant to help you grow, who would it be?

- General business coach 16%
- Digital marketing/SEO consultant 27%
- Financial advisor 15%
- Inventory management consultant 13%
- HR support 7%
- Marketing strategist 22%

Candace D'Agnolo Tip: It's no surprise that digital marketing and SEO top the list. As the industry becomes more competitive, visibility

is everything. Visibility starts with a strong online presence because it drives foot traffic, builds trust and boosts sales. Pairing digital marketing with a clear overall strategy is required for serious momentum — especially for independent pet businesses looking to stand out.

If you are the business owner, what is your exit strategy?

- To sell at a profit 39%
- To sell whether at a profit or not 9%
- To leave the business to family 13%
- To close the business 2%
- Unknown at this time 27%
- Other (please specify) 10%

Most respondents who answered "Other" wanted to specify they would sell to a family member or employee.

What do you think will be the next breakout category or feature in products?

Quite a few respondents joked that if they knew, they'd "already be gazillionaires." Other top answers revolved around products that improve health and longevity. And, of course, there were mentions of technology for pets.

- "Puzzles and engagement toys are getting a lot of traction."
- "Freeze dried and dehydrated will continue to dominate growth."
- "AI-based toys that learn to interact with pets based on usage, personality, etc."
- "Items that benefit dental health. There's a whole generation of pet owners starting to realize they have to care for their pet's teeth and not doing so is very costly in the long run."
- "Anything to do with tracking pets, maybe even an embedded chip."
- "Air dried is really growing and so is gently cooked. We're excited to see more

minimally processed foods."

- "At home tests — allergy, intolerance, gut microbiome, etc."
- "Dog-walking robots."
- "Probiotics in everything."
- "The gently cooked arena is just getting going. Big brands are catching on to the profitability."
- "Growth of more restrictive diets as a pushback against prescription diets."
- "Virtual reality games for pets. Think about a dog with goggles and a headset!"
- "Continued growth of novel proteins."
- "If the economy continues to slow down, I see more smaller animals as pets as they are much cheaper to maintain, so more products for them."
- "More made in the USA products."
- "Robot fish tank cleaner."
- "It could be SeaMonkeys and pet rocks all over again for all I know!"

If you could ask a fortune teller one question about the future of the pet industry ... ?

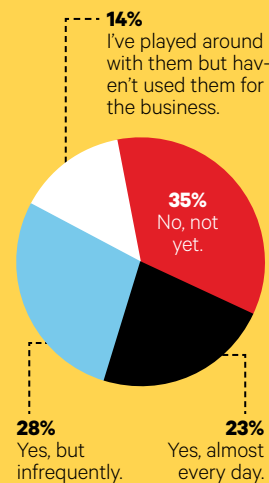
The overwhelming majority of respondents would ask if independent brick-and-mortar pet businesses will still exist. Other answers:

- "Will the next generation be able to afford the joy of pets? Or will rising costs make them a luxury item?"
- "Will vets ever embrace raw food?"
- "What products should I invent that everyone will buy?"
- "Will puppies be available in the future?"
- "Scientifically valid or not, what's the next big

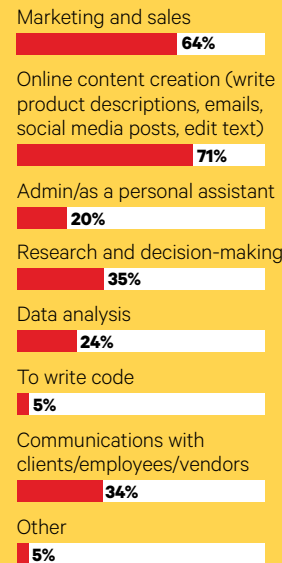
scare? Grain-free food was the most recent, and I'd like to get out in front of the next one."

- "Will AI be generating ideas for more Doodles?"
- "I would like to know what food will be recalled in 2026."
- "What brands are going big box?"
- "Will we still be able to sell any animals?"
- "How will tariffs affect us long-term?"
- "Will Doodle owners ever learn to brush their dogs?"
- "Will there be AI pets?"
- "Is it worth it? Are all the stressful moments, long days and headaches going to pay off?"

Are you using any of the AI-powered large language models such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Co-Pilot or Claude to help you with your business?



What areas are you using them for? Check all that apply:



Candace D'Agnolo Tip: It's exciting to see more than half of respondents already exploring AI — especially for marketing, sales and content creation. For the 35% not using it yet, this is a huge opportunity. Even small, simple tasks like for writing emails, product descriptions or social posts can save time, boost creativity and help you work smarter not harder. Give it a try!

AI

Tell us about a specific use of an AI agent that has markedly improved your business life?

- We could tell that** quite a few respondents used AI to answer open-ended questions in this survey. No shade! We applaud your use of tools to efficiently complete tasks.
- "We use AI to listen to and summarize dog-training lessons."
 - "Create newsletters and social media posts. When I have writer's

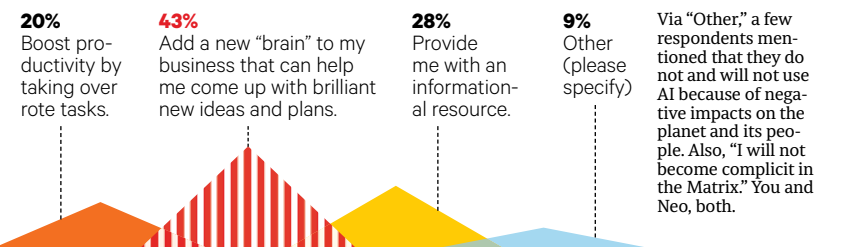
block, ChatGPT helps me get past it."

- "I take pictures of every groom and use AI to edit backgrounds and place the pets into them. Clients love it."
- "Help with taxes."
- "We used ChatGPT to help craft our messaging of a price increase for grooming."
- "Wrote a sales dialogue with a customer discussing higher cost of quality nutrition."
- "Creating responses to negative reviews/

- customer complaints."
- "I use auto-texting with our clients when they have questions. It can even find open appointments and suggest times to book."
- "Write hiring ads."
- "Helping me analyze reports and create buying plans."
- "It's like having a marketing department, a copywriter and a therapist — without payroll. AI wrote that."
- "Our employee handbook. I don't need to

- reinvent the wheel on this one. I just need an outline to edit and make it applicable to our business."
- "ChatGPT for generic, SEO-optimized product descriptions."
- "Video content for TikTok, Instagram and FB."
- "Giving us guidelines on handling an HR situation."
- "Event planning! I can name the craziest idea, and ChatGPT will plan it from start to finish."
- "Sales data analysis by category. Record retention. Forecasting. Research."

Do you think that the ultimate benefit of AI will be to ... ?

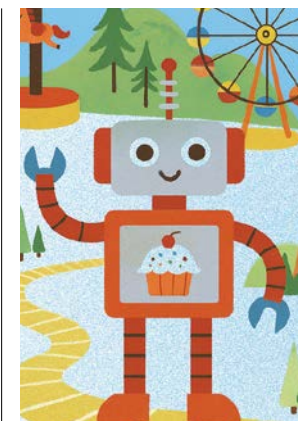


Via "Other," a few respondents mentioned that they do not and will not use AI because of negative impacts on the planet and its people. Also, "I will not become complicit in the Matrix." You and Neo, both.

Speaking of the future, what does your type of business look like in 25 years?

Respondents said they envision an evolved business model that leverages AI and automation to create even more space for expertise and customer experiences.

- "I picture pet stores as high-tech hubs — AI-powered nutrition stations recommending custom diets, robotic grooming assistants, and interactive virtual play zones where pets can be enriched safely indoors. Shopping will be less about shelves and more about experiences, with technology anticipating each pet's needs before the owner even asks."
- "Like a pet food 'bar' experience, where



people can build their perfect complete meal from start to finish, kind of like Chipotle."

- "Emphasis on live animals and services, the things you cannot duplicate online."
- "A hybrid approach to dog training: a mix of in-person coaching (one-on-one and/or group training classes) and online modules for

clients to refer back to as they train at home."

- "I envision the potential for in-store allergy and intolerance tests, and potentially on-demand bloodwork to decide what supplements pets could benefit from!"
- "Robots will be grooming dogs and really messing them up. So my type of luxury grooming salon will be in even more demand."
- "Better digital support, but still with the knowledge and customer service that only people can provide. Nothing should replace the human element."
- "I envision secure self-checkout to be

standard. I think interaction with people will make a swing back to being desired, unless more pandemics have caused us to shop only online for delivery. People's short attention spans will require 'activities' to be a constant draw. All pricing will be electronic — no more price stickers."

- "Dogs would have bar codes on their collars for check in/out and payment, and probably arrive at daycare in an autonomous vehicle."
- "More biologically appropriate foods. More freezers, more raw."
- "More professionals on the team with licensing and meaningful certification across all specialties. No more big companies, only small ones."
- "Delivery by drone. Mobile grooming by robot."



GIVING BACK

Indies who took our survey remain deeply committed to charitable giving — but most do it informally, without budgets or structured policies. They lean toward product donations, with or without brand support.

Tell us about your favorite brand partner in charitable efforts:

Many of you answered that you don't ask for help, with some saying you

didn't know you could. Be inspired by these examples and start asking!

✦ **NutriSource** has been a great partner. We affix a dollars-off voucher to bags of food, and customers can

either use it as a coupon or donate the value. About 75% of customers donate, and then NutriSource gives us the total value donated in free food to give out to those in need."

and beyond to support us, whether it's providing

samples for community events, helping us stock products for adoption drives, or simply checking in to make sure we have everything we need."

✦ **Grandma Mae's Country Naturals** will

✦ **"World's Best Cat Litter.** They will give to me no charge and no questions."

✦ **"Precision Sharp** has donated a lot of products for prizes."

✦ **"Farmina** is really helpful in providing a bag of food to each foster we get adopted out."

✦ **"Our favorite brand partner** in charitable efforts is Northwest Naturals. Our amazing rep, Kevin, consistently goes above

always contribute in the form of samples, free food, and free food for a year to a lucky customer, as well as feed dogs of military families serving abroad."

✦ **"Fromm** has been great. We partner with our local NPR station during their yearly fundraiser, and we donate dog and cat food for every donation made to the station."

✦ **"Weruva.** Whenever we ask for samples or products to donate to our local rescues, they are always the first to respond."

✦ **"Evanger's** has been great for this."

✦ **"Steve's Real Food** partnered on a low-cost microchipping event. They sponsored the first 15 pets and also had coupons for those who participated."

✦ **"Annamaet.** We participated at an Iron Dog police K9 event, and as a raffle they offered a year's worth of food for a lucky winner."

✦ **"We have had Cuddly** donate a lot of food to a

"Messy Mutts gives us products for puppy bags that we leave at local hotels."

In what ways do you support charitable organizations? Check all that apply:

Donate product **91%**

Donate proceeds from services **16%**

Donate proceeds from events **41%**

Donate percentage of profits **16%**

Round up at register **11%**

Collection jar at register **53%**

Serve as purchase or drop-off location for donations **54%**

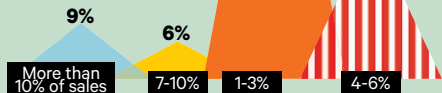
Pay to exhibit at their events **29%**

Donate personal and/or employee time **38%**

NA - I don't. **3%**

Candace D'Agnolo Tip: With over 90% of respondents donating product, it's clear this is a big way pet businesses support their communities. But these donations should work harder for your brand. I'm shifting toward more intentional visibility — like packaging everything in a bold, logoed bag so that anyone passing a silent auction table notices our business first. Donations are generous, but they can also be powerful marketing tools when done strategically. Make sure your giving builds awareness, not just for the recipient but also with anyone who sees your brand because of the donation, potentially driving future sales.

If you give back, what percentage of your sales did that work out to in 2024 with all methods combined?



Proportionately, the weakest-performing businesses were the most generous, with more than half that lost money in 2024 handing out 4% or more of their sales. The higher-revenue stores were mostly in line with the averages.

Do you think you will donate more or less in 2025?

More **23%**

Less **7%**

About the same **70%**

Do you set an annual budget for giving?

Yes, and I stick to it. **11%**

Yes, and I regularly go over. **13%**

No **76%**

Candace D'Agnolo Tip: There's an expression I love: "Givers get." These results make me think that many of us could

local rescue we work with."

✦ **"EarthRated** is so willing to support our store, even though we are probably the smallest fish in their pond."

✦ **"Health Extension** helped a jail/shelter program we helped start in our area. They fed the dogs for months."

✦ **"BayDog** always gives us product."

✦ **"Portland Pet Food** has donated to the Eagle Cap Extreme sled-dog races. They donated products that I carry, so then participants came in for more!"

Rank these business benefits of giving back to your community:

Exposure to new customers **4.50***

Having "doing good" as a core business value **4.44**

Increased customer loyalty **4.24**

Public recognition **3.49**

Tax deduction **2.35**

Increased employee loyalty **2.29**

Weighted average score based on ranking 1-5

be more strategic with our donations so they truly work for us. A set budget might actually create more opportunities and make it easier to manage requests. And for those without one, giving more intentionally could build stronger community visibility and leadership. All very interesting to think about!

How do you handle requests for donations?

Requests must be submitted via a form on our website. **6%**

Organizations must email us the request. **21%**

We don't have a standard policy for donation requests. **64%**

✦ **"Suzie's CBD** never hesitates to send samples and/or information for any events we have."

✦ **"Pets Global/Zignature.** This year they offered to match all the sales of their food for a 30-day period. We were able to donate 1,000 pounds of food."

✦ **"Our Rawz rep** makes gift baskets of products for almost every special event we have, as well as gives out coupons."

✦ **"Petcurean** has consistently supported our community initiatives by donating pet food for events, fundraisers and programs that help pets in need."

Tell us about a cause or organization not related to pets that you support in your community?

Many respondents

said they only support pet-related causes. You might want to reconsider because as this respondent pointed out, "We sponsor a few Little League/kids programs. Families with children generally have pets." Other answers:

✦ **"We raise funds** for and volunteer with ClearPath for Veterans. Their primary mission is pairing service dogs with veterans."

✦ **"Families Fighting Cancer Together** is a local charity that I donate to yearly with funds, along with donating my time and advertising their events at the store."

✦ **"Boulder Ridge Wild Animal Park.** We volunteer to help keep costs low for visitors so they can see animals up close."

✦ **"We sponsor a high school robotics team."**

✦ **"We donate our time every year** for the local pre-K classes to have a field trip at the store. We have also taken animals (ferrets, ball pythons, etc.) to private schools, church youth groups and charity events."

✦ **"We participate in local 'band cards,'** which go toward raising money for the school bands."

✦ **"We are BIG supporters** of our local LGBTQ organizations. We sponsor several Pride Events, including our beloved Gayest

Pet Competition that we've held for about 15 years!"

✦ **"I support Main Stay Therapeutic Farm.** They provide horse-back riding, petting zoos to those with physical and mental disabilities. We sponsor their large gala event and also let customers donate their \$5 loyalty reward."

✦ **"We provide food** for the working K9s in our county and city. There are three dogs we donate food to monthly, and we love doing it."

✦ **"We participate in a monthly bingo fundraiser** at a local brewery. We meet a lot of new customers at these events."

✦ **"In the past, events have wanted goldfish** for carnival games. We would donate 50-100, but we've found that a lot of people don't want the fish or will go elsewhere to get what they need for the fish. So we've started allowing

the organizations to create vouchers for a free goldfish instead. The winners are not obligated to come get it if they don't want it. This also makes them come into our store to shop instead of going elsewhere."

✦ **"Every year we pick one non-pet related organization** to support. This year, we donated products to the local Fly-In event, which supports students learning about aviation."

✦ **"We hire young adults** who have maxed out of foster care due to their age. There is a small community for them down the street."

✦ **"A local coffee shop** employs young adults with special needs. We sponsor a pup cup made with healthy ingredients."

✦ **"We give all the 'oops' biscuits** from our bakery to the local animal control officers for the dogs in the shelters."





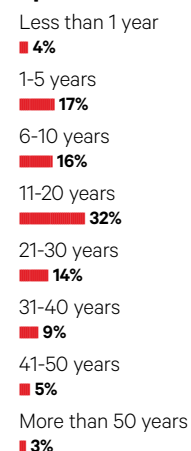
THE BASICS

Our typical 2025 Big Survey respondent operates one retail location, not a franchise, and has been open more than 11 years. Their business primarily serves dogs and cats, and likely offers grooming and/or self-wash services.

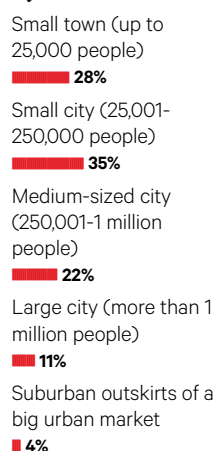
Are you a franchisee?



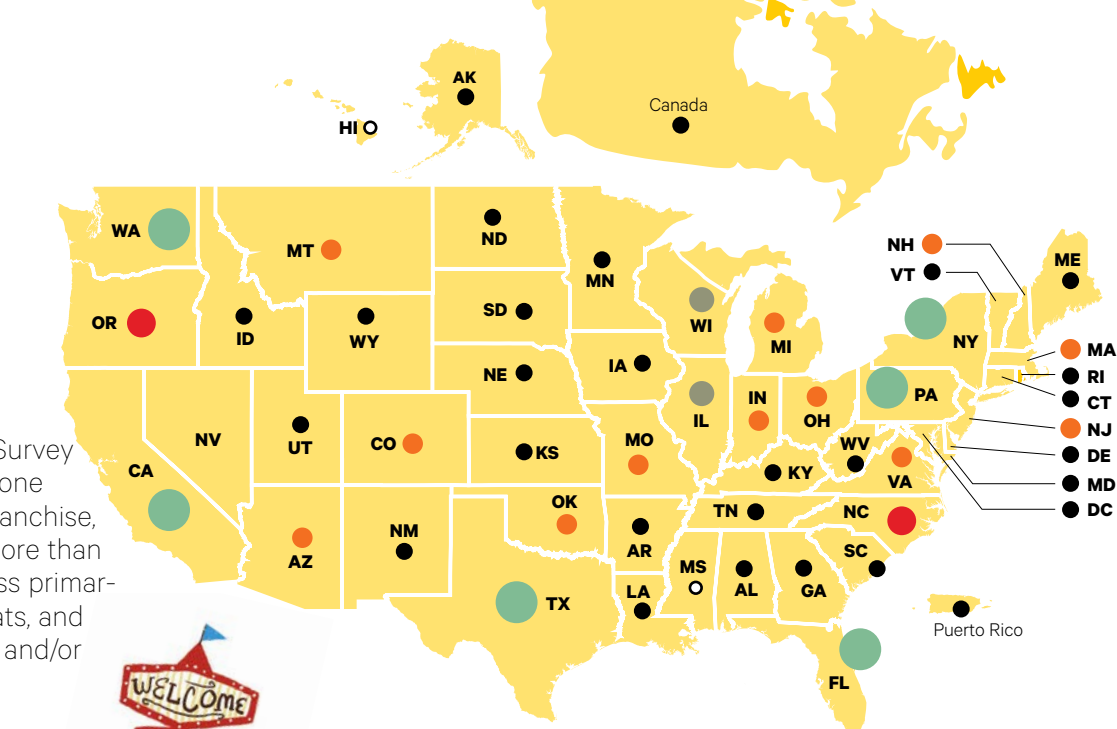
How long has your business been in operation?



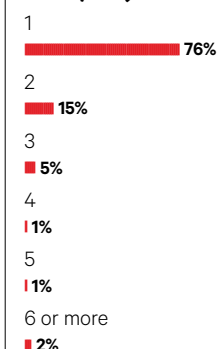
Where is your business located by market size?



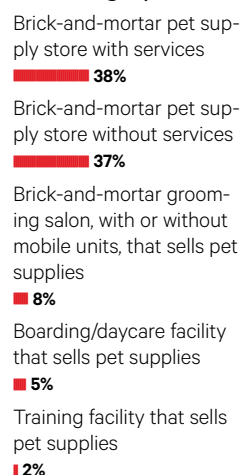
Where is your business located/headquartered?



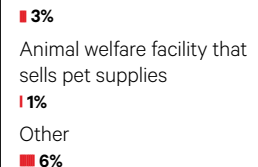
How many locations (including any mobile units) do you have?



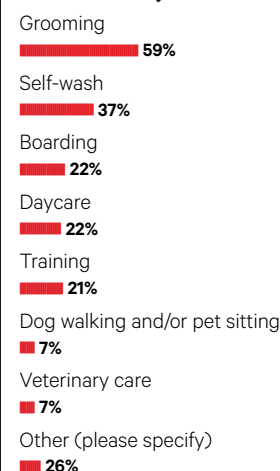
business by top revenue category?



Veterinary clinic or hospital that sells pet supplies



If you own a brick-and-mortar pet supply store with services, please check which you offer:



Nutrition counseling was a top "Other" answer, and we found it interesting that those who offer small animal, bird and reptile grooming and boarding did not want us to count those services under our provided answer options.

Check all animals that you sell products and/or offer services for:



SAVE THE DATE

Mark it down: August 2026 is going to be huge. That's when SUPERZOO, North America's most comprehensive pet product marketplace, returns to Las Vegas. And trust us when we say you'll want to be there.

Get the first look at product debuts, discover the industry's emerging brands, keep up with new retail strategies and connect with your pet pro peers. (Plus, there's the return of the popular Swingers Mini Golf networking event and the annual SUPERZOO Beach Party.) Come for the business, stay for the memories. We can't wait to see you in 2026!



August 12-14, 2026

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22,000+

Pet professionals participate, including:



10,000
buyers—the most in North America



1,200+
exhibitors



3,300+
buying companies

Largest Industry Show Floor

350,000
square feet

Source: 2025 SUPERZOO website



NEIGHBORHOOD TREASURE
A former laundromat now serves as a center for clean and happy pets.



SOUTH BARK / SAN DIEGO, CA INDIE INNOVATORS

Lisa Vella and **Donna Walker** recently celebrated 25 years in the pet industry, with a legacy that includes opening one of the first self-service dog washes in the country and inventing the popular Blueberry Facial. **BY MELISSA L. KAUFFMAN**

It's no surprise that South Bark — a self-service dog wash, grooming salon and retail store in San Diego, CA — recently celebrated its 25th anniversary. The community staple and anchor business has well proven its ability to innovate and adapt.

Co-owners Lisa Vella and Donna Walker met years ago, both members of a dog rescue

organization and founders of their local dog park. “One day in 1999, we talked about opening a self-service pet wash in our neighborhood, and the rest is history,” Walker says.

Today they're known as “The Blueberry Girls,” creators of a legacy neighborhood business and a signature line of blueberry-extract grooming products. They take

part in a variety of industry and community groups and committees, run South Bark Professional Pet Products wholesale, and partner with other local businesses to raise money for animal rescues.

“South Bark does not chase trends, we try to create them,” Walker says. “We think life is an adventure, and we try

to create a thought process that mixes innovation with pragmatism.”

INNOVATIVE RENOVATION

Vella bought a 1951 free-standing, mid-century building in the South Park community, close to both her and Walker's homes and the dog park.

“We were part of the

renaissance and re-branding of our neighborhood,” Walker says. “Now South Bark of South Park is a solid and prominent member of our business community.”

The retail store has 1,200 square feet of interior space with a same-size patio on one side, covered with sun sails and surrounded by fencing. The building had been a laundromat for the 50 years prior.

Walker says, “The South Park neighborhood was in transition, and the building itself had fallen into neglect. We needed not only routine fixes, but a cosmetic rebirth that still reflected the history of what it once was.”

It took eight months to

complete renovation, with the help of friends and relatives and an architectural firm. She says, “We won a special ‘Bulb in the Hood’ Orchid architectural award from the San Diego Architectural Foundation for the whimsical way that we captured the original look and feel of the time it was built.”

The unique storefront has a total of 20 windows, with 12 blanketed by a charming custom graphic. “We created a window covering of dogs and cats, treats and fun to draw attention from cars and pedestrians passing by,” Walker says. The distinctive coverings



QUICK FACTS

OWNERS: Lisa Vella and Donna Walker | **FOUNDED:** 2000 | **LOCATIONS:** 1 | **AREA:** 1,200 sq. ft. inside and 1,200 sq. ft. outside patio | **EMPLOYEES:** 3 full-time and 4 part-time | **WEBSITES:** southbark.com and southbarkprofessionalpet.com | **FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM:** @southbarkdogwash | **TOP-SELLING BRANDS:** FirstMate Pet Foods, Fromm Family Pet Food, Fussys Cat, The Honest Kitchen, Natural Farm, NutriSource Pet Foods, OC Raw Dog, Open Farm, Plato Pet Treats, Primal Pet Foods, Smallbatch, South Bark Blueberry Products, Showseason Grooming Products, Tall Tails

TOP SELLING-BRAND SPONSOR: NUTRISOURCE PET FOODS

BLUEBERRY GIRLS

Lisa Vella, left, and Donna Walker recently celebrated 25 years of innovation in business.



MID-CENTURY SPIN

An architect helped Vella and Walker retain the original aesthetic emphasis on use and need.

JUDGES' COMMENTS

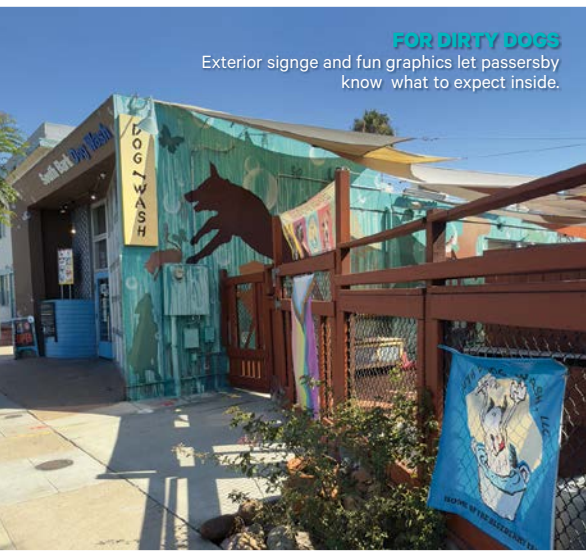
South Bark perfectly captures the vibe of the local community. Easy going and fun but all business!

Shelly Armstrong, World Pet Association

+ A legacy brand that helped shape the DIY dog wash industry, South Bark brings history and heart to everything they do. The branding around their Blueberry Facial is iconic, and their product line adds depth to the business. Their social content is strong in variety, with service promos, events and user-generated content. With hundreds of reviews and a loyal base, they're clearly beloved. **Matt Aldrich, Pet Engine Marketing**

+ Very unique tub layout in the middle of the store, which I am sure invites more bath customers to learn about your services. I am envious of your outdoor space, and it is so uniquely branded to fit every inch of your store brand. Your store oozes your passion for what you do and how you do it! **Alison Schwartz, All Pets Considered**

+ The retail portion of the store gives off an old-time general store vibe. The displays are full, and it looks easy to shop. Having customers exit by passing by the retail items is smart. The store's exterior is fun and colorful. It gives welcome and happy place vibes. The murals are cool — I love the whimsy. The use of yourselves in your marketing is brilliant. You have also created a number of logos, taglines and catch phrases — customers love that stuff, and you own it! A continuous building of word of mouth is also brilliant as it is the number one thing that brings new customers to your store. **Georganne Bender, Kizer & Bender Speaking!**



FOR DIRTY DOGS
Exterior signage and fun graphics let passersby know what to expect inside.



also serve another function: Stopping the intense sun from bleaching out the products in the retail area and blinding the crew and customers.

Walker and Vella took the dirt lot next door and made it into a brick patio. The extra space allows for dog-training classes, seminars, dog-coat brushing and drying, along with socialization and special events. Its wood deck, fencing, metal signage and mesh in the fence slots match the age and architectural elements of the neighborhood.

A large mural by local tattoo artists and muralists Beth Emmerich and Diana DeAugustine covers the building's patio wall, extending to the front of the building. "We commissioned it to add some eye-catching beauty," Walker says. "Our South Park neighborhood also has a mural by the renown artist Shepard Fairey on another building, so it was in theme with the look and feel of the area."

VISIONARY VIBE

The exterior and interior's colorful signage, vibrant colors, tile and art are guaranteed to earn attention. Walker says, "We chose cool

and quirky shades and happy and whimsical depths of colors. We wanted people to be happy and comfortable, but not overwhelmed with brightness."

The interior consists of an open-concept retail and spa area. "The smaller size of the interior limited how much the area could actually be broken up into usable space," she says. "We realized that keeping it open would also add to a safe flow for clients and our crew members."

Areas within the open concept include retail, register, self-wash and grooming. "Smaller sections are identified by theme," Walker says, "dog food, cat food, toys, frozen raw food, treats, shampoos and bathing items, supplements, and collars and leashes."

Vella adds, "Our retail area is approximately 600 square feet, but we sell the same

volume as a 2,000-square foot retail space by constantly moving inventory in and out."

The one-stop shop carries products for cats and dogs

with dog kibble (20%), dog treats (14%), dehydrated (8%) and frozen (6%) foods as the biggest product contributors to overall revenue. Cat products come in at 8%.

"Our name, South Bark Dog Wash, obviously doesn't call out 'We have cat items,'" Walker says. "We have

worked hard bringing awareness that we sell cat food, toys, treats, etc. It isn't easy, but it continues to grow." Pet gear and other accessories make up the remaining sales.

They strive to constantly improve the business. "This past year, we focused on increasing our bulk product and successfully raised our profit margins in this area by 10%," Walker says, referring to the bulk treats they sell. Vella did this by adding more inventory



A stained-glass window features South Bark's logo.

and through smart purchasing from vendors.

Selling a high volume of supplies and products in a small space can be a challenge. Walker says, "You must find a way to do it so that clients can find the products easily and freely shop, as well as be directed to the proper area. This requires a vibe, an educated and friendly crew, plus clean and labeled retail placement."

GOOD CLEAN FUN

Walker and Vella made the self-service dog wash a key focus of their business. "We fell in love with the innovation of the self-service industry," Walker recalls.

The spa layout consists of four porcelain and cast-iron Kohler Tea-for-Two extra-large deep tubs laid out in a tiled H pattern, raised on an island. The unique island tub system controls traffic flow while allowing clients to interact with other clients and their dogs or face away. Shoppers can see what the self-wash and grooming services are about and as a result bring in their own dogs. All bathing and related services are done in those four tubs.

"This layout also increases the ability for our spa attendants and crew to easily circle all four tubs easily and swiftly, providing South Bark Blueberry Facials, ear cleanings and teeth brushing," Walker explains.

The store added full-service grooming as a service when Covid hit. Starting with one groomer, they now have three along with a variety of bathing choices.

"There is self service, where the client washes their own dog and can still have added services like ear cleaning, teeth brushing and nail clipping. Blueberry Facials are always complimentary, by the way," Walker says. Full service includes spa attendants to wash the dog, do ears, teeth

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For more info: nutrisourcepetfoods.com

and nails, and grooming includes all that plus brushing and hair cutting.”

Different drying options are offered on the patio: by hand towel, cool forced-air blow drying and relaxing cage drying. Walker says, “The ability to move the process from bathing inside to outside drying reduces noise and hair issues, frees up the tubs to keep the washing train moving and allows more interaction between the clients.”

The store’s dog- and cat-centered team members — spa attendants, groomers and the front sales team — make the high-end self-service dog wash and spa successful, creating an atmosphere of inclusion and synergy between products and services.

Online scheduling lets clients choose dates and times and a wide variety of full-service spa packages, allowing clients to order exactly what



A lucky pup gets a soothing Blueberry Facial from a South Bark spa attendant.

their pet needs. Spa services represent 35% of total revenue for the business.

PERFECT PIVOTS

Throughout the years, the partners have taken on different roles. “For the first 10 years, Donna predominantly ran the business and I ran the wholesale. For the past

15 years, I have run South Bark and Donna manages the wholesale,” Vella says. “Pivoting is the key for us, and it keeps it fresh.”

Another pivot: Last year, they hired social media specialist Angela Keselburg to take on the brand’s social and web presence instead

of continuing to do it themselves. “It has improved our reach and followings dramatically,” Walker says.

Honored numerous times through its 25 years, South Bark recently won the San Diego Magazine Readers’ Choice Award for Best Dog Groomer. Over 11K people have viewed Keselburg’s

humorous “If winning San Diego’s Best Dog Groomer was illegal” video.

Another popular video — the recent 25 year celebration reel. The celebration itself took place on Oct. 5 and featured swag such as branded T-shirts, canvas bags and limited-edition coins (see Five More Cool Things), plus a local DJ, blueberry-themed, of course, treats for pets, and a signature drink for the humans. The store’s distributors and brand partners sponsored specials.

“We have worked hard to visualize and create a place that has become beloved by our clients, and since we have been around so long, their children who grew up with us and their families too,” Walker says. “Creating and growing our business has made us feel significant and fulfilled, contributory and part of many communities. We feel beloved, appreciated and grateful.”

FIVE MORE COOL THINGS ABOUT

SOUTH BARK

1 SIGNATURE SWAG:

The team created catchphrases to get noticed and explain what the brand stands for. Used in advertising, T-shirts, bumper stickers, shopping bags and more, taglines include Spread the Blueberry Love, Bitches Love Our Facials, Home of the Blueberry Facial and A Bark From the Park. Walker says, “You may not always get your investment back from direct sales, but will absolutely get it back in long-term sales and

loyalty.” As well as brand awareness.

2 25TH ANNIVERSARY SILVER COINS:

Made for South Bark’s silver anniversary with the logo on the front and Vella and Walker on the back, customers use them to get flash discounts each month throughout the anniversary year. The



3 11 SPA PACKAGES:

Full-service grooming packages retail from \$60 to \$95. Themes vary from The Flea to The Itchy Dog to I Got Skunked. The After Beach targets the

local crowd, removing sand and residue while treating a dog’s skin issues from the sun and sea. Bestseller Blueberry Love includes the brand’s signature Blueberry products.

4 SIGNATURE BRAND:

Years ago, Walker and Vella noticed that self-service clients did not wash or clean their dogs’ and cats’ faces. Walker says, “We created a product, a process and a concept that could be safely applied, and left faces bright and clean but was relaxing for them and smelled good, too.” At first, they were laughed at, but the popularity of South

Bark’s Blueberry Facial grew quickly. The first dog and cat facial in the pet industry, the duo sold it to groomers, pet salons, retail stores and customers. Wanting someone to take it to the next level, they sold the brand to Showseason Animal Products in 2018 (bought by Groomers Choice Co. in 2025), but have continued to distribute it.

5 WROTE THE BOOK:

The entrepreneurs published *The South Bark Blueberry Girls Guide to Success in the Self-Service Dog Wash Industry* in 2019. At 181 pages, it covers starting, operating and growing your own business, with specifics on dog wash concerns. It retails for \$24.99 and wholesales for \$20.

Real Deal

INSPIRED BY REAL LIFE SCENARIOS®



GARY HUGHES is the owner of Gangsta Dog stores in Virginia. He has more than 30 years of retail management experience, and has specialized in dog health and nutrition for the past 12 years. Hughes is now franchising Gangsta Dog and looking to expand across the country.



ILLUSTRATION BY KARINA MARGA CUIZON

THE CASE OF THE

OFF-THE-CLOCK MANAGER

When his otherwise perfect employee continues to work without pay, Teddy must find a solution or risk a wage violation.

Teddy loved owning his small chain of pet stores.

And he really loved getting local recognition and awards. Early one morning, Teddy unlocked the front door of his flagship location, the store’s latest Readers’ Choice Award tucked under one arm. He wanted to put it on display to surprise his team. Teddy slipped inside, locked the door, and headed into the stockroom, where he almost ran head on into his store

manager, Stephanie.

“What are you doing here so early?” Teddy said.

Stephanie wiped a lock of hair from her eyes in shocked delight. “I like to come in early to make sure the store is clean the way I like it,” she replied eagerly. Her genuine, broad smile lit up her entire face, creasing the corners of her eyes and exuding a contagious warmth. Stephanie saw the award nestled under Teddy’s arm and enthusiastically

asked about it.

He showed her the award, much to Stephanie’s delight. But being a stickler for rules, Teddy had to ask — yet again — if she had clocked in before she started to work. Stephanie confessed she had not.

Teddy made sure that all of his full-time employees had 40-hour work weeks and paid them as much as he could. He also had a strict “No Overtime” policy. The stores had enough part-time staff to ensure the full-time team members never had to work more than 40 hours. It was obvious that Stephanie loved her job — and loved the store nearly as much as Teddy did. Her work ethic and passion for people and their pets were clear to all who met her.

The problem was that Stephanie would regularly

work early or leave late, helping the team members and waiting on customers, all while off the clock. One of her excuses was that her husband went to work very early, and she would come into the store for something to do. To make things even harder for Teddy, the other team members and customers loved having Stephanie around.

He had previously made her a salaried employee, and that worked until state wage laws changed, requiring salaried workers to earn a minimum much higher than Teddy could afford. He couldn’t bring himself to punish Stephanie for doing what she loved so much, and he wished he could find a way to reward her for the drive and excellence without paying her overtime. In every other respect, Stephanie was a perfect employee. But Teddy feared a disgruntled employee, or even worse a disgruntled Stephanie, would complain to the state. Wage violations are serious business!

THE BIG QUESTIONS

➕ How can Teddy keep Stephanie from working off the clock?

➕ Or are there other ways he can reward her?

➕ What other advice do you have for Teddy in relation to this scenario?

PAT SCHIEK

LUCKY DOGS
SKANEATELES, NY

We had a full-time groomer who had to have hip-replacement surgery. During her recovery, before she got her doctor’s clearance to return to work, she decided to clean inside the grooming van. We politely explained that if she

Continued on page 60

* This fictional scenario should not be confused with actual pet businesses and/or people.



ONLINE EXTRA! Responses have been edited for clarity and length. See more responses at petsplusmag.com/realdeal.

got injured while doing this, it could create a significant liability for us. I’d do the same thing here with potential wage violations. Reiterate how much of a valued team member she is, but that we can’t put the business at risk.

JULIE STERLING

JULZ ANIMAL HOUZ
MARYSVILLE, WA

It sounds like this manager truly wants the best for the owner and the business, and likely simply doesn’t understand the ramifications of her working off the clock. Giving the benefit of the doubt and an explanation as to “why” would be beneficial. “You’re amazing, but I’m officially banning off-the-clock heroics! You’ve earned your downtime, and I don’t want you working unless you’re on the clock. It’s actually against labor laws and could get both of us in trouble. I know you’d never want to do anything that could hurt the business or me personally, so stick to working only when you’re clocked in. If it keeps happening, I’ll have to take formal action to protect the business, and I really don’t want to do that because you’re such an important part of the team.”

CLAUDIA LOOMIS

CB PET MARKET
WASHINGTON, NJ

Teddy is correct: Wage violations are a real concern, and fines can be steep. Also no employee should be working off the clock, ever, as it is also a concern for workers’ comp should she be injured while working off the clock or while doing a task not part of her job classification. Teddy can: 1) Offer to change her hours so that she clocks in earlier each day and leaves earlier. 2) Offer her a longer period of time each day where she clocks out for a break/lunch so that

when she does clock in earlier, she will not go over 40 hours a week. Or 3) Explore putting her on salary again.

ALLEN LARSEN

FIREHOUSE PET SHOP
WENATACHEE, WA

At first glance, I want to go recruit Stephanie and ask if she has any siblings just like her. All kidding aside, it is so important to look at this from a few angles. First is always about following the law. Teddy was not the one who established the law or rule, but he is the only one on the hook if it is not followed and he condones that. This is a matter of ethics that he should explain carefully to Stephanie. Second, he is creating a recipe for burnout whether Stephanie knows it or not. While I love her enthusiasm, she will eventually hit a wall. Recommendations: 1) Look at whether four 10-hour shifts would work better. That creates a longer work day for Stephanie, but also reduces her temptation of working longer by one shift per week. 2) Since she is a manager, ask her for solutions. Turn it around on her, and let her know it is a non-negotiable rule. What ideas does she have to help eliminate working off the clock. I would tell her, “Stephanie, I love how dedicated you are. It means the world to me. But I need to protect both of us. State law says I can’t let you work off the clock even if you want to. Let’s figure out how we can use your energy in a way that works within the rules.” 3) Help her discover a hobby within the industry. She could volunteer at a shelter you partner with, get involved with the local rotary club or a youth organization. Encourage her to spread her amazing energy to others who could really use it. Lastly, if she likes

to work 40 to 80 hours a week, encourage her to look into opening her own business. Sounds like she has the DNA to be a biz owner.

JODI ETIENNE

RAZZLE DAZZLE
DOGGIE BOW-TIQUE
BRADLEY, IL

Who in their right mind wouldn’t want Stephanie on their team? She sounds spectacular! And like she’s not at all worried about being rewarded for the work she does. She’s totally invested in what she does and is passionate about every aspect. This is NOT a person who views her position as her JOB but as an integral part of her life. I highly doubt it has ever crossed her mind to report Teddy. Could Teddy possibly sell her this particular store as a franchise? If there’s no way to give her an opportunity to become an owner? Maybe Teddy can talk to his accountant about other non-taxable benefits that are cool with the IRS, such as contributions to her retirement account?

CYNTHIA MCKINNEY

LOYL’S NATURAL PET GROCERY &
GROOMERY
HOUSTON, TX

Teddy can dig deeper on the reason why Stephanie comes in early, as perhaps there’s more going on in her personal life than what’s on the surface. If there is nothing deeper to address, Teddy can remind Stephanie that as a manager, she needs to lead by example, which includes following company policies. Teddy can go through the policy with her and let her know it’s time to hit the reset button. He can suggest the following and see what combination ultimately makes sense, with her input, plus these may stimulate some ideas from Stephanie: 1) Adjust her start time so

she can be in before others to independently and efficiently prepare the store for opening the way she likes, with the understanding that she leaves early to avoid overtime. 2) Develop store checklists and assign team members to opening and closing tasks to ensure the store meets her standards. Essentially, delegating and holding others responsible for some of the tasks she’s doing to reduce her hours. 3) Discuss promoting another team member to assistant manager, one Stephanie trusts so she can step away. 4) Give Stephanie a pool of overtime hours, but together come up with ways to reduce expenses in other areas or increase sales through add-ons, promos, events, etc. Teddy may need to hold her more accountable for KPIs that they evaluate regularly for her to keep the pool of hours. Stephanie is clearly an ideal employee and likes to be at work. Personally, I would let her work some reasonable overtime, as other rewards still cost money. She seems to be running the store like she’s the owner, and that work ethic and attitude can be difficult to find.

DEBORAH VITT

MUTTS & CO.
COLUMBUS, OH

Explain how the effort is appreciated, but that following the law ensures compliance and is non-negotiable. Explain how this is critical to protect staff as well as the company. Reiterate that clocking in/out is also non-negotiable. I’m not sure about “rewarding” her for putting in “more” time than scheduled. That sounds risky. But rewarding her for dedication and compliance by increasing PTO accrual, product credits or bonuses might be a good option. I would also point out that as a leader, it’s critical that she sets an example by following the rules.

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PAGE 33

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PAGE 27, 29

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PAGE 16

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PAGE 33

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PAGE 6

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PAGE 23, 30

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PAGE 15, 28

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PAGE 33

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PAGE 32

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PAGE 7, 13, 37, 53

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PAGE 33

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PAGE 17, 31

**UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE
STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION**

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Christine Baloga

VP. MARKETING OPERATIONS & CUSTOMER ACQUISITION
10/1/2024

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Sanity Files

How pet business owners stay sane in a crazy world

Cooking & baking, preserving foods & harvesting honey from my beehives

My team - I'm only as strong as the team I build.

ADINA SILBERSTEIN

QUEENIE'S PETS, PHILADELPHIA, PA

Adina Silberstein approaches all that she does with pure joy — from the pops of purple inside and out of Queenie's Pets in Philadelphia, PA, to the names and descriptions she gives family members: dogs Reverend Cowboy and The Groove ("AKA Cowboy & The Groove, an unforgettable duo"); cats Brucie Marbles ("blind tabby cat I love more than anything else on the planet"), Zizzy ("sassy with a gritty old lady yowl"), Snacks AKA The Snick ("hates everyone except us and his cat sitter, favorite food is marshmallows"), Gorton The Fisherman ("hilarious chonk, also our shop cat"); hamster Alan From Accounting ("lives for mini Indian corn"); and last but certainly not least Christian ("my entire team uses 'Husband' as his name"). Up next for Silberstein: bringing her store's thoughtfully curated products and services that support every companion animal's physical, emotional and mental well-being to a second, much larger location in 2026.

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