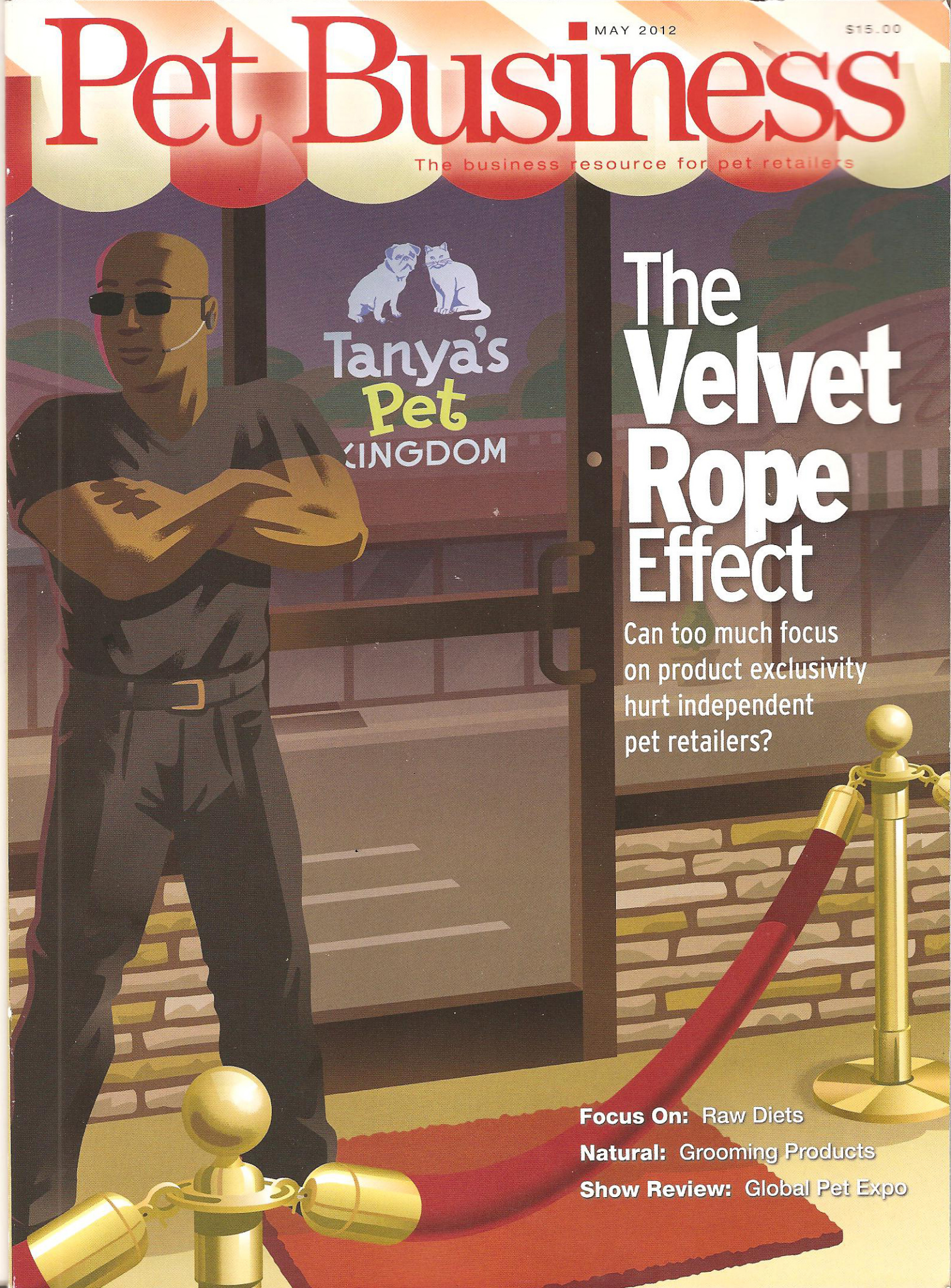


# Pet Business

MAY 2012

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## The Velvet Rope Effect

Can too much focus on product exclusivity hurt independent pet retailers?

**Focus On:** Raw Diets

**Natural:** Grooming Products

**Show Review:** Global Pet Expo





In fact, a number of these manufacturers have been green long before that description became the buzz-word it is today.

This is evident when it comes to certain manufacturers of natural and organic pet grooming products. Tropiclean, located in Wentzville, Mo., has been manufacturing natural grooming products for over 20 years, says Derrik Kassebaum, president of sales. The company made its debut with a line of soap-free shampoos naturally derived from botanicals and using a mild coconut cleanser. According to Kassebaum, Tropiclean was also the first to introduce biodegradable packaging into the grooming industry.

"The Tropiclean bottle is made from 50-percent recycled material and is 100-percent recyclable, while the sleeve is made from a corn product and is 100-percent biodegradable," he says.

Esprey Animal Products, Inc., located in Grapevine, Tex., was founded in 1989, says Justin Jones, president of the company, which manufactures natural and organic pet grooming products for dogs, cats



**Nootie:** The grooming line currently consists of six shampoos and five conditioning sprays made from natural ingredients. The Hypoallergenic Germ Fighting Coconut Lime Verbena Shampoo and the Daily Spritz are made with an all-natural grapefruit seed extract that helps fight germs and bacteria. The spritz also conditions and freshens and contains glycerin to moisturize the skin. Ingredients are sourced, manufactured and packaged in the U.S.

Visit: [www.nootie.com](http://www.nootie.com).

**Opie & Dixie:** The company's newest product is a stick-style nose balm, Snoutstik Nose Balm for Dogs. It's designed for "squashed-nose" breeds and for older dogs, both types of which frequently suffer from dry noses.



Snoutstik offers a combination of natural sun protectants like shea butter, sweet almond oil and jojoba seed extract, also known for their healing and hydrating properties. It comes in three varieties: Rosemary, Lavender, and Pumpkin, and it is made in the U.S.

Visit: [www.opieanddixie.com](http://www.opieanddixie.com).

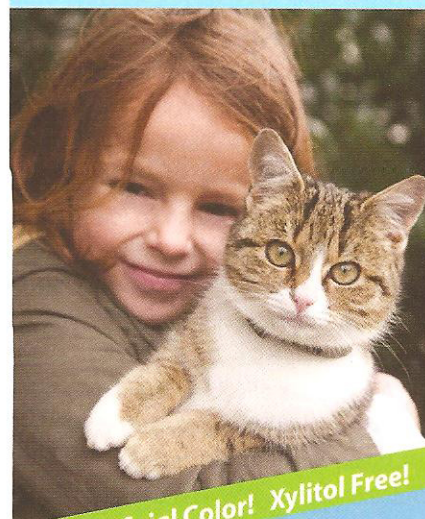
**Tropiclean:** Its Oxy Med line includes an Oatmeal shampoo and a Medicated Treatment Rinse/Conditioner. The products are naturally designed to stop itching, control flaking and reduce shedding. The shampoo is formulated with micronized oatmeal, vitamins E and B5, and wheat protein. The rinse has alpha hydroxys, along with vitamins and omega-3.



Visit: [www.tropiclean.net](http://www.tropiclean.net).



**NATURAL CHEMISTRY**

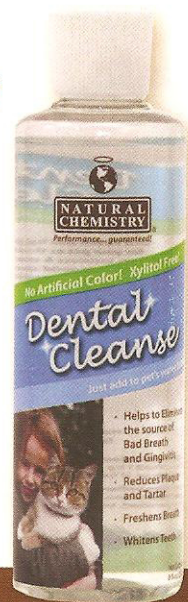


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and horses. Espree's offerings include shampoos, conditioners, colognes, health products and more; all use 100-percent certified-organic aloe vera.

## A Continuing Influx

There have been lots of new green arrivals, as well, as more manufacturers enter this segment. Consequently, pet retailers and their customers have tons of options. For example, Peter O'Kuhn co-founded Iani – dig your dog in 2006. The company offers high-end, canine spa products that are mostly organic and naturally processed, and hypoallergenic.

"As much as possible, we try to use finished packaging and marketing materials made with recycled materials," he says. "Additionally, we don't use any harsh dyes or sulfates, so our stuff is good for dogs, people and the environment."

Other relatively new companies in the natural grooming market include Isle of

Dogs, located in Germantown, Wis.; Opie & Dixie, LLC, in San Francisco; Aroma Paws, in Tarzana, Calif.; and Delray Beach, Fla.-based Nootie, LLC.

## Natural Desire

"Consumers are looking for natural grooming solutions more than ever," says Debbie Guardian, founder and owner of Opie & Dixie. "All-natural ingredients, organic and made in the USA are all attributes that are top of mind for today's grooming consumer."

It only makes sense that the desire for more natural and organic products would find its way into the pet industry, given the prominent position most pets occupy in the family. This ongoing trend towards the humanization of pets is compelling owners to seek out products with ingredients they know are safe and can recognize, explains Jones.

Crystallyn Guzman, owner of Aroma

Paws, says consumers are demanding healthier options for their pets, particularly as they become more aware of the potential effects of ingredients like sulfates and parabens, which are found in most conventional products. Savvy pet retailers and groomers should quickly adapt to this demand, says Guzman.

People are talking more about sulfates in particular, says Erin Clemens, director of ecommerce and business support for Isle of Dogs. The line of thought as it relates to shampoos for people is that sulfates, which are commonly used as the cleaning agent in shampoos, can have a harsh, even detrimental effect on the scalp and hair. Now, this perspective is starting to pop up in the pet industry, she explains. Consequently, Clemens says that in order to address the concerns of pet owners, the company has developed three sulfate-free collections.

The demand for natural solutions has really taken off when it comes to addressing the various skin issues that pester dogs in particular, mentions Kassebaum, who says that as more people become aware of the benefits of going green, they're turning away from drugs or steroids, embracing natural topical remedies instead.

## Sales Strategies

But there's more to selling earth-friendly products than simply lining them up on the shelves, especially since they can come with a heftier price tag than many conventional formulas. Additionally, some of these alternative solutions require a bit of staff and customer education.

"One of the challenges with 'natural' or 'germ fighting' is that it is copy driven," says Nootie president Lonnie Schwimmer, whose product line includes a shampoo and daily spritz that offer natural germ-fighting properties. "It takes a lot more educating or information about your products to reach your target audience."

One of the tactics he advises is getting groomers and/or staff to try the products so they can see how they work. Nootie makes special sample packs available to groomers and key employees in targeted areas.

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Retailers can turn to manufacturers for literature and other forms of product support and education, as well. Not only can retailers get up to date on the products, their ingredients and what they do, they can pass on this information, and even supply educational materials such as brochures or flyers.

"It's essential that retailers transmit product information and excitement for the products to their customers," says O'Kuhn.

Having the background information necessary to talk up the products and the manufacturers that make them can also go a long way in building a customer base for these products. Customers are often interested in knowing more about the story behind these companies and the ways in which they get involved beyond just manufacturing products. For example, Iani donates a portion of its net proceeds to local no-kill humane societies and other community-based organizations. Most earth-friendly companies have similarly compelling stories that will make customers feel good about buying their products.

As for actual product placement, creating a natural/earth-friendly

section in the store may be the best way to generate excitement in the category. This will draw attention to these products, says

Clemens, adding this has been a "great success" for retailers of all sizes.

It is also a good idea to dedicate areas within this section to different categories of natural solutions addressing specific problems, says Kassebaum, whose company, for example, offers an assortment of medicated products. "This increases the ease of discovery for consumers," he explains.

If possible, stores should locate these items at checkout, as well, says Guardian, adding that this is an effective way to merchandise smaller products that might otherwise get lost on the shelves.

Ultimately, however, understanding each product's purpose and what makes it an effective solution is key to successfully retailing natural, earth-friendly solutions, says Jones.

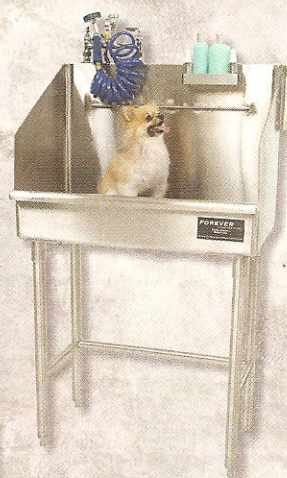
"Retailers that know their products and can recommend the right one for the pet parent customer will also benefit from return customer sales, because the customer is satisfied with buying the right product and [has] had a great shopping experience," he says. **PB**

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