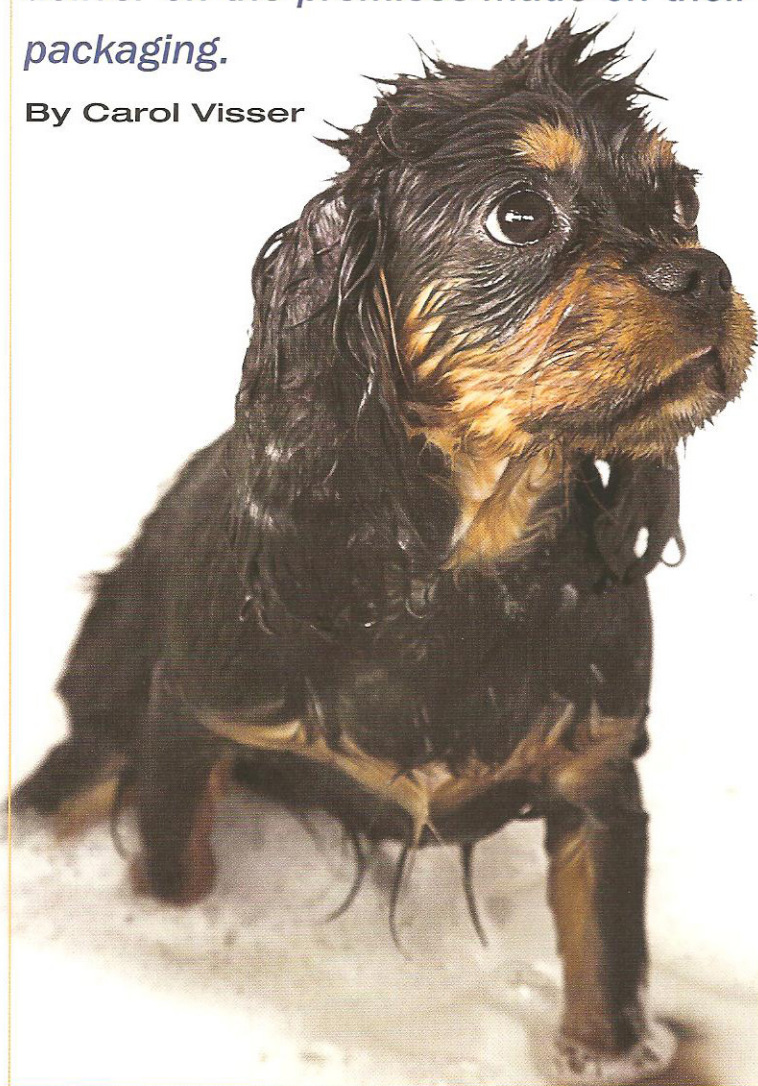


# Promise Realized

*The home-grooming category has proven to be a particularly good fit for a natural marketing proposition, but it is essential that these products deliver on the promises made on their packaging.*

**By Carol Visser**



The target market for natural products is a good one to cater to; it's made up of thoughtful consumers—pet owners who really care about the health of their animals and of the planet we all live on. These are consumers who have learned not to just accept whatever they are told by marketers about a product but to question it for themselves until they are comfortable that they understand the answers. If you carry natural products for consumers to use in grooming their pets at home, rest assured that they will be in demand among these knowledgeable customers.

For the most part, manufacturers of green/natural/eco-friendly products are the same thoughtful people they are creating products for. They care about having as little impact on the environment as possible while providing healthy, safe products to keep pets in optimum condition.

Debbie Guardian, founder of Opie & Dixie, of San Francisco, Calif., is one of those educated manufacturers. A bout with breast cancer prompted her to look not only at what we put into our bodies, but what we put on them as well. "Toxic ingredients applied topically can seep into our bodies as readily as what we eat and can seriously affect health," says Guardian.

She began to think about her beloved pets' shampoos and conditioners, too, resulting in a line of all-natural and organic grooming aids—named after those pets, of course. The company's website, [www.opieanddixie.com](http://www.opieanddixie.com), lists and describes every ingredient and its function in the product. All ingredients are listed on every product, in descending order, leaving no doubt as to what they are putting on their pet.

Guardian's commitment to whole health extends all the way to its packaging. Labels are made using plant-based, non-toxic ink and printed on forest-friendly paper, and containers are made of either recyclable tins or BPA-free plastic.

## The Right Ingredients

Juno's Garden ([www.palldog.com](http://www.palldog.com)), manufacturer of Pal Dog and Pal Kitty products, is another all-natural products company that came about when a pet owner attempted to solve problems for her own dog. Juliann Eskite, owner and founder, wanted a shampoo that was safe to use outdoors, biodegradable and soothing for her dog's dry itchy skin, but everything she tried had harsh detergents in it.

"Most shampoos at that time, both human and pet, had SLS (sodium laurel sulfate or sodium laureth sulfate) in them. It cleans well and is inexpensive, but it's very drying," says Eskite. "It strips the natural oils from the coat—which sounds good if you have a stinky dog. But the dog has to replenish those oils, and if it can't [do that] immediately, it can lead to itching."

This led Eskite to develop pet-friendly products—if they lick them off, there's no harm. They contain no petroleum, SLS, DEA (an agent put in only to make more foam), dyes,



or parabens (commonly thought to be carcinogens).

"People are paying more attention to their pets' health and grooming than ever before," she says. "And people today are much more likely to ask what's in a product, and that's great. Any ingredient we put on our dogs that is plant based has to be better. If there's an option, and a better, safer way to do it,

why not go natural?"

That seems to be the conclusion of many pet owners and manufacturers.

Bobbi Panter, owner and creator of Bobbi Panter Pet Products, agrees that natural is best. She tried to find products to help her own dog's dry, flaky skin and dull, dry coat post-surgery. When she couldn't, Panter applied her interest in natural healing to developing

her own products. The website bobbipanter.com points out that all formulas are salt free, as sodium chloride is nothing more than a thickening agent and is not needed. Salt also leaves a residue that prevents essential oils from actually penetrating the skin. Ingredients are listed on the website, as well as each one's function in the formula.

"We use higher percentages of natural ingredients," says Panter. "Some products have .01 percent, and that doesn't do anything at all. The ingredients are there to perform a function and must be enough to do the job."

### Focus on Safety

At least one company has been heading down the green and natural road since long before any of the terms became popularized. Frank Pohl, owner and president of Bio-Derm Laboratories Inc., makers of Bio-Groom products, says his company has thought about the effect products have on animals and their skin since its inception 41 years ago. "Our main focus is on safety," says Pohl. "[We focus on] natural too, but products that are as safe as possible for the pet and the environment have been important to us since the beginning."

Pohl says it's important to put enough of an ingredient—for example, protein and lanolin—in a shampoo to make a difference, not just enough to put its name on the label. Whether it's chamomile and silk, oatmeal, or natural pyrethrins to kill fleas, there has to be enough to do the job it's supposed to. He says he sees a trend in both human and pet products of putting in so many ingredients that they will actually work against each other. Bio-Groom avoids adding ingredients based solely on marketing—every ingredient has a specific function, and in sufficient quantities to have an effect.

"Marketing techniques and claims may get a customer to buy a product once, but once it's in their hands, it has to be good for repeat business," says Pohl.

One advantage to the natural trend is that many manufacturers of natural products are small businesses, or a small segment of a larger business, and as such can be expected to be more attentive to a retailers' needs. Most suppliers of this type of product are able to offer POP displays and truly informational websites to help educate consumers, as well as a personalized approach to sales support. Take advantage of the trend. Offer natural and earth friendly products and make sure your customer base knows you care about their pet's health—and our planet's health, too. 🌱

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