



Fall Product Showcase



Isle of Dogs
iodogs.com

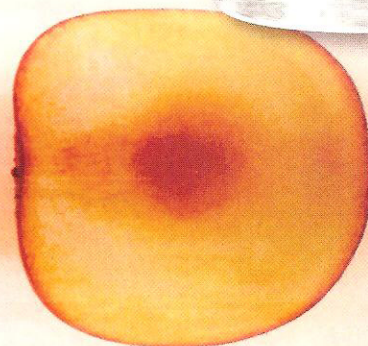
Aroma Paws
aromapaws.com



Tropiclean
tropiclean.net

SPA
BY TROPICLEAN

LAVISH
RENEW



PET SHAMPOO
REVITALIZES COAT
OATMEAL & WHITE PLUM

Grooming

Scout & Zoe's
scoutandzoes.com



Opie & Dixie
snoutstik.com



Bobbi Panter
Pet Products
bobbipanter.com





COVER STORY

Furry *Fabulous*

Despite tightening household budgets, consumers continue to help their pets put their best paw forward with grooming products straight from the spa.

By P.S. Jones

With today's uncertain economic climate driving consumers to cut as many unnecessary expenses as possible, one might assume that pet owners who pamper their four-legged loved ones with spa-like grooming products would be something of an endangered species. But such assumptions are proving to be all wet.

"Industry sales figures show that pet products, including grooming products, are growing annually," says Lisa Jordan, sales and marketing director for Espree Animal Products, noting that the company has been a beneficiary of consumers' commitment to keeping their pets primed and polished. In fact, Jordan says the company has enjoyed such steady growth that it recently had to relocate to a larger facility.

Savvy pet retailers are also profiting from the ongoing practice of pet pampering by offering a well-rounded lineup of grooming products that not only accomplish the goal of keeping pets fresh and clean, but also capture the imagination of shoppers by emulating

Photos by Javier Brosch

the latest trends coming out of high-end human spas. Of course, at the top of every retailer's list should be shampoos and conditioners, the staples of the pet grooming department—but that just scratches the surface. The grooming aisle selection should extend much further to include items such as between-bath sprays and wipes, paw and nose balm, hot-oil treatments, and even blueberry facials.

Natural Beauty

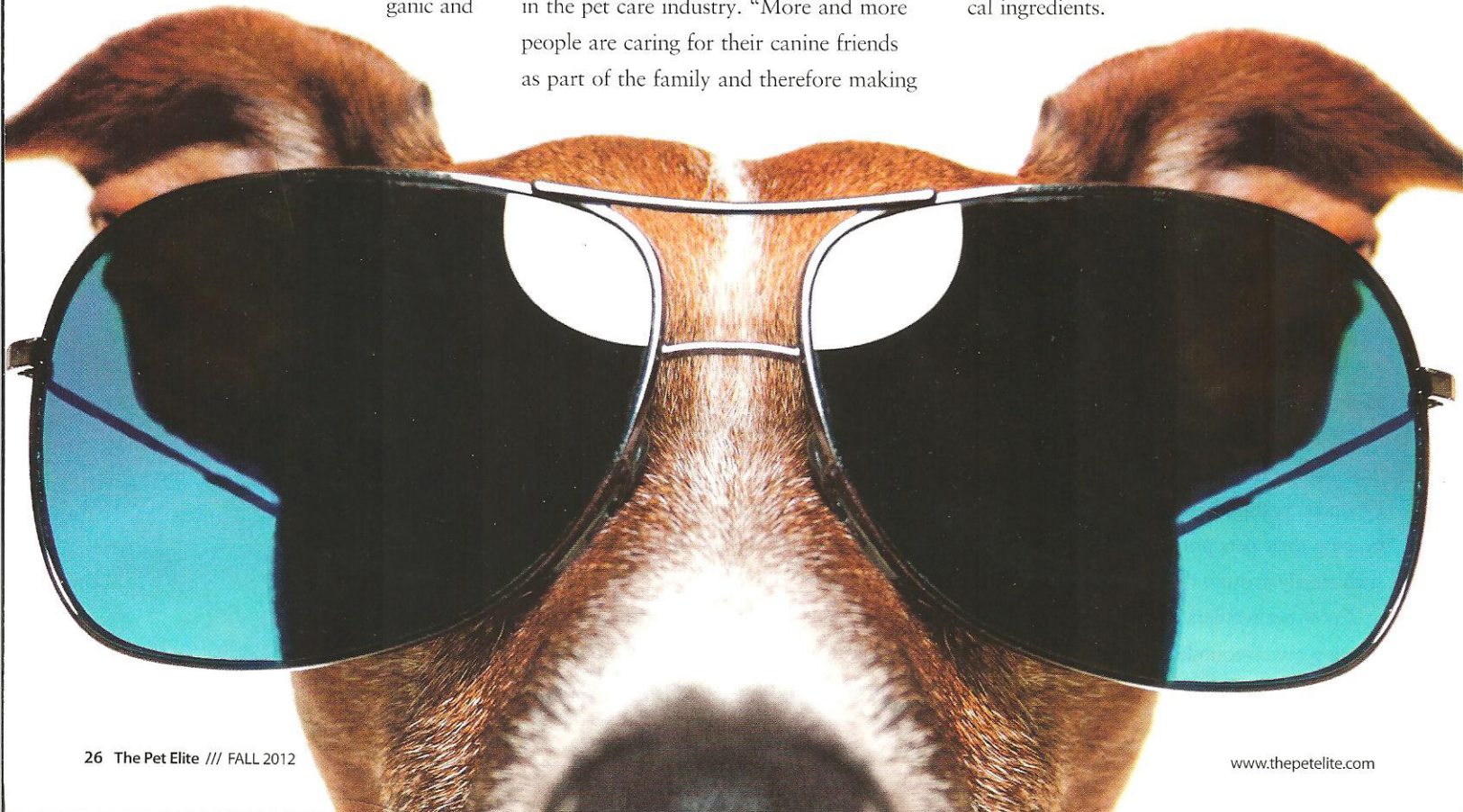
Time and again, the pet industry has witnessed human trends trickle down to companion animals, so it should come as no surprise that natural, organic and

environmentally friendly fare has become pervasive in all pet care segments, including grooming products. "Consumers start by seeking out natural products for themselves and their families, and once they understand and experience the benefits of natural ingredients, they inevitably gravitate toward the same high-quality ingredients for their pets," says Debbie Guardian, owner of Opie & Dixie, which manufactures a wide range of all-natural, organic grooming products.

Liz Mosesman, founder of Rosie & Friends, which manufactures a line of healthy grooming products using therapeutic plants and essential oils, also sees the far-reaching influence of the natural movement in the pet care industry. "More and more people are caring for their canine friends as part of the family and therefore making

better choices for them," she says. "It is not just [about] grooming products, but better foods and making more conscious choices in general."

In the grooming category, this trend is manifesting through the use of natural, organic and environmentally responsible ingredients. While the definition of "natural" varies somewhat among manufacturers, the term generally means the company uses plant- or mineral-based ingredients whenever possible. Labeling a product "certified-organic," on the other hand, requires adherence to specific standards governing the use of chemicals in the formulation of the product, as well as the farming of its botanical ingredients.



Environmentally responsible ingredients are widely defined as those that biodegrade quickly and without releasing harmful chemicals. A grooming product may fit into all of these categories, or just one or two; the only way to know is to read the ingredients on the bottle.

Increasing In-Store Sales

Still, no matter how impressive the products' ingredients panels, successfully selling these products requires getting shoppers' attention. Pet owners do not always come into the store planning to buy grooming products, but an attractive, well-placed display will catch their attention and inspire further investigation, and hopefully, trial of these items. "Getting the products front and center—if possible, at or right near the checkout—helps drive consumer awareness and impulse purchases," says Guardian.

"Another great strategy for encouraging repeat purchases is by setting up a grooming loyalty program," she says. "Loyalty programs such as these lure the consumer back into the store to take advantage of the points they've earned. It could be as simple as a punch card, with a punch for each natural grooming item purchased at the store. The fifth or tenth punch could represent \$5, \$10 or \$20 worth of free product."

Nothing, however, sells grooming products like a well-informed sales person. The ability to educate customers about all of the store's grooming fare will be key to a pet specialty retailer's success in this product

segment—and some items will require more consumer education than others. Grooming needs can run the gamut, depending on the pet's breed, coat type, health conditions, environment and so forth. With this in mind, consumers will need to understand the intended use of a product and what they can expect in terms of results.

"Know your products," says Jordan. "Customers may be overwhelmed by the many products on the shelf. Choose this one or that one? What makes one product better or different from the other? If retailers are knowledgeable of their products, they will be prepared to offer recommendations and information to address their customer's needs."

It is also important that consumers understand that natural, organic and eco-friendly shampoos, conditioners and other grooming products are not just good for a pet's appearance; they can also help prevent health issues for both the pet and the person who applies the products. For example, Aroma Paws has a vegan coat conditioner that is safe for both human and pet consumption. If the dog starts licking during the application, there's no worries about the effects.

Product recommendations can make or break a sale in the grooming aisle, and retailers that can solve consumers' problems will win their loyalty in the process. To this end, Crystalyn Guzman, CEO of Aroma Paws, advises retailers to educate themselves on the common skin-care

problems suffered by pets and which grooming products can help. "Pet retailers that can educate their customers on the benefits of healthy grooming solutions for common dog problems are invaluable," she says. "Trying a natural grooming or health product first, such as a hot spot treatment, can save many costly trips to the vet."

Retailers that are likely to be most successful in this arena are those who have done more than just memorize the marketing copy and ingredients listed on product packaging. In fact, a retailer's greatest sales tool, says Mosesman, will always be believing in the products stocked on the shelves. "I think when you have a great product you truly believe in, it is easy to sell anything," she says. "It comes from a desire and passion to educate people about great products. When you believe in something and know it is a great and beneficial product, it comes naturally." **TPE**

