

Taking It Home

Groomers and shop owners can offer home-use tools and supplies while still making money on services.

By Ann Springer

Despite the deflated economy, several grooming niches—all-natural, at-home and preventative care—are experiencing sales growth, according to many retailers and groomers.

One of the reasons is that people are willing to shell out more money today to save larger amounts of money down the road, reported Joe Zuccarello, sales manager for Tropiclean Naturally Green Pet Products, a Wentzville, Mo.-based manufacturer of grooming supplies.

As a result, people are performing self-service grooming on their pets in between professional appointments. According to Zucarello, customers aren't willing to skimp on the quality of products they buy just because they're going down the do-it-yourself route.

"They want to make sure the products they're using on their pets are environmentally friendly and create a healthy experience for their pets," he said.

For example, dental care products have seen an uptick in sales as pet owners have learned that preventative care is well worth their time and money, according to Julie Warblow, owner of Wags to Whiskers Pet Grooming in Thompson, Conn.

"People are becoming more aware that bad teeth can lead to all kinds of diseases," she said. "It can also make for a costly trip to the veterinarian for a cleaning."

Likewise, sales of all-natural flea and tick treatments, sunscreen products, paw balm and ear wash are increasingly becoming more available and accepted in the marketplace, reported Anne-Lise Stannard, owner of PlanetBlueDog.com, a distributor and online retailer of pet supplies based in Carmel Valley, Calif.

The luxury spa services that owners enjoy, such as facials, scrubs, massages and acupuncture

ter, green tea and soy, according to Stannard.

"People are eager to try something new," she said. "It's really like a form of entertainment for people, so it's important to keep changing things up that you carry."

Shampoos and conditioners that contain organic or all-natural ingredients have seen increasing sales in human spas and they're all the rage in pet lines, too, reported Alyssa Butler, buyer for The Dog's Meow, a retailer with locations in Salt Lake City and Draper, Utah.



Brands such as Earthbath, which is also biodegradable, and Happy-tails Spa top her customers' shopping lists, Butler said.

Daniel Mechley exclusively carried natural and holistic products in his Plymouth, Minn., shop, It's A Pet's Life, long before the "go green" phenomenon was hip, he said, and he doesn't see a plateau in sight for this growing trend.

"There's still a need for better formulations of all-natural shampoos and spritzers," he said.

Savvy customers look closely at labels, question them and ask what ingredients are in their pets' grooming products, according to Mechley. He suggested that retailers should be prepared with answers by thoroughly researching each ingredient on the list.

Due to a lack of regulation for

down their salon budget. One method is to purchase professional-grade equipment for home use, such as Yellow Dog, a brand within the Conair Pro Pet line. According to John Vascone, the national sales manager for the Stamford, Conn.-based manufacturer, nail trimmers, small clippers for use around the paws, ears, and eyes, and other handheld products are among the most popular tools in the line. Conair also manufactures low-wattage pet hair dryers for home use.

"The intense heat [of human hair dryers] is bad for pets, but these dryers only run on 200 watts instead of 1,200 or 1,500 watts like a human hair dryer would," he said.

As the at-home niche continues to grow in these temperamental economic times, groomers should stock at-home products without fear of losing business, Zuccarello reported.

"A groomer can jeopardize a loyal customer," he said. "If the customer wants something that you don't offer, they'll buy it from another supplier."

Retailers can build business in this segment by offering free samples of shampoos or spritzers to ensure future sales, Stannard said.

"They'll try it and then they have to buy it," she said. "If you give someone something, then they're more likely to buy something."

Another way to create a sale that may otherwise not be captured is to pair a grooming serv-

Items

De-shedding brushes

Slicker brushes

De-matting tools and sprays

All-natural shampoos

Spritzers and colognes

Wipes for use between baths

Ear cleaning

Dental care products

Nail trimmers

Clippers and shavers

Smart groomers market their services well to increase sales during the busy times—such as the holidays when appointments are booked solid—as well as during the slower periods, too, said Betty Hamnett, owner of Betty's Grooming, in Atlanta, Texas.

"If you can show them that it's a better deal to add a service for a few extra dollars, people will appreciate that you're saving them money—especially in this economy," she said.

Sales of at-home grooming products tend to increase around the holidays, said Blaine Andersen, owner of Fins 'n Things, a retailer in Oskaloosa, Iowa.

"People want to fix their dogs up at the holidays and they buy gifts for their dogs, too," he said.

Whether they're preparing for family to visit for the holidays or primping Bowser for a family photo, customers definitely spend more on grooming in the last few months of the year than any other time, according to Warblow.

Gift certificates and gift cards are a simple way to boost gift sales in the last quarter, Warblow added.

"Some people will even buy a year's worth of grooming visits as a gift for their friend or relative who's a dog owner or for their own pet," she said.

Pairing clippers with combs and shampoos or a hair dryer with nail clippers or barrettes also provide ideal holiday gift packages

"If you add a special price to the combo and a bow on it you will increase sales of grooming products," Vascone said.