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The message from Organic Oscar?

"We are in a society where not only the quality matters, but also what you believe in and what you stand for," Svet said. "We think of the dogs first. They are our inspiration."

That is a message that retailers said customers appreciate hearing, and it is a message with which most manufacturers agreed.

"Customers want the safest and most beneficial products for their pets in all categories," BitchNewYork.com's Braverman said. "We treat our pets like they are our children."

Jared Katz, co-owner of Coupaw.com, also noted customers' preference for products in the natural category.

"Natural ingredients are key," he said. "The ability to provide something extremely safe and nontoxic to pets is always the No. 1 priority."

Coupaw.com offers the Gerrard Larriett Aromatherapy spa line, Bath Eaze from PetzLife, and shampoos, conditioners and wipes from John Paul Pet.

Pet and Earth Friendly

"I like to have a variety in products," said Patton Avenue Pet Co.'s Yarosh. "Some are simple shampoos that are great for puppies or those with sensitive skin, or we have more complex products that are great for treating specific issues like hot spots or dry, itchy skin."

Natural grooming products that meet specific needs are available at Land of Paws, a retailer with three locations in Kansas and Missouri.

"It's important to have a tearless puppy shampoo in stock," manager Kristen Lewis said.

Land of Paws stocks Pet Naturals of Vermont's Soothe Oatmeal Shampoo to help condition dry skin, she said.

"It's a gentle formula, providing great moisture to the pet's skin and coat," Lewis said. "It's also environmentally friendly, which is always a plus."

Ultimately, customers seem to appreciate that a gentle, earthfriendly product can meet their pets' skin and coat needs with natural, holistic ingredients, retailers and manufacturers stated.

"We believe that consumers are looking for products that are made without chemical pesticides, without preservatives and additives, that are made with ingredients from local manufacturers, and they want organic ingredients, wherever possible," DERMagic's Ritchie said.

Please Try This at Home!

To help encourage sales of natural grooming products, some manufacturers provide samples that retailers can distribute to customers.

"Retailers who have samples on hand for [customers] to try will get increased sales when the products work," said Adelia Ritchie, founder of Kingston, Wash.-based DERMagic Skin Care for Animals.

"Manufacturers who provide samples to their resellers also will see their revenues increase—but only if the products live up to the claims."

Land of Paws, which has three locations in Kansas and Missouri, offers grooming at one of its locations, and that particular store sells the products the groomers use on customers' pets.

"We are always trying out new lines," said Kristen Lewis, manager. "The customers always comment on how good their dog smells when they pick them up, and will go ahead and purchase the shampoo and conditioner to have at home."

A similar approach helps with sales at Lil Bit O' Grooming Pet Salon in Spokane, Wash. Owner Marina Ellis provides free samples to help customers determine the best solutions for their pets' skin or coat needs, and she also sells the products used in her grooming salon, she said.

"We ask our pet parents if they would mind trying new products and if there are any negative results, we take care of it immediately," she said. "We have followed customer feedback and the visual and health responses of our clients' pets."—SNH

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