

Special Report: Supporting the Independent



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Stephanie Zeigler Steelman,
Textotic Pets



"Manufacturers that aren't 'independent only' usually have a way to lure us in. They'll assure us that we're getting the same pricing as everyone else or offer a line that only we can carry,"

Sherry Redwine,
Odyssey Pets

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industry retailers are being heard," said Mike Karsting, WPA's VP of exhibitions. "I'm thrilled to be a part of an organization that cares, listens and is responsive to the concerns and feedback from our community," Karsting said.

Another issue Trufant found troubling as a retailer from the southeast was that though SuperZoo bills itself as national show, he was hard-pressed to find a representative from his area. "Many of the national companies seemed to discriminate against us by not having sale sheets for our area," he said.

Mark Watkins of ZippyPaws said that the company definitely values and supports independent pet stores. "We offered a 10 percent discount to wholesale customers on all of our products at SuperZoo and worked with our distributors so that they could provide discounts as well," Watkins said.

West Paw always has its retail success or merchandising specialist at hand during all trade shows. "We do this to merchandise our products to inspire retailers with new innovative displays, offer tips and tricks as well as help answer any merchandising questions," said Spencer Williams of West Paw.

Derek Bodkin of Nordic Naturals said, "We only offered a special discount for show attendees. This is a good incentive to reward my clients who attend the show."

James Brandy with TropiClean also has a similar attitude. "We work closely with our distribution partners to offer TropiClean promotions to retailers who purchase through them. For our retailers that purchase directly from us, we had our wholesale representatives present at the show offering TropiClean discounts," Brandy said.

Ted Hayes of Life Line Pet Nutrition has personally been involved in in-

dependent pet trade since 1982 and doesn't plan to change that. "Our distribution is limited. We don't sell to mass market or large box stores," Hayes said. "Our message needs to be conveyed by face-to-face contact with customers. That is best facilitated by staff at independent retailers," he said.

Art Simon of molly mutt, that has been showing its commitment to the small independent retailer since its inception, said, "All our new product introductions are geared toward independent retailers." molly mutt featured its brand-new blankets and expanded sheepy wool-filled inserts. "Both of these product lines had a great reception by the independent retailers who ordered from us at the show," Simon said.

Stephanie Zeigler Steelman of Textotic Pets likes how many vendors show up at SuperZoo, however, she believes there just isn't enough time at the show. "I wanted to speak with at least 100 vendors and maybe got to 50," she said. "Some of the bigger manufacturers ignore the small mom-and-pop stores. They want these huge ISOs that none of us can afford," she added.

To big food manufacturers Ziegler Steelman said, "If big manufacturers want us to carry their food, they should come up with a way to help us promote their food at our stores. Huge ISOs that cost thousands without support for advertising will bankrupt some small mom-and-pop shops." That said, Ziegler Steelman loves that small start-ups are willing to work with small stores. "We will go again next year," she added.

Joe Toscano of Purina points to the fact that the company's entire Purina Pro Plan line is exclusive to pet specialty and independent retailers. "With Pro Plan, we're delivering life-changing innovations backed by scientific research to challenge what nutrition can do for

pets. This philosophy led us to breakthrough discoveries around cognition in senior dogs, longevity in aging cats and this summer, probiotics to support digestive and immune health," Toscano said. "Most of our nutritional innovations are first launched within the Pro Plan brand, which gives pet specialty and independents an edge," he said.

Toscano added that Purina's Muse line is also exclusive to pet specialty and independents. New to the Muse line in 2018, Purina introduced MasterPieces Dry Food in June and Grain Free Filets and Muse Creatables in July. "Muse is inspired by the discriminating, unapologetic nature of cats. The new brand is our cat-centric approach to natural food that rises to the occasion with tempting tastes even finicky cats can't resist—backed by our clean plate guarantee," Toscano said.

WellPet stresses that independent pet retailers have always been an important part of its business. Being able to show retailers in person how the products work in tandem to help pet parents customize their dog's meals is something SuperZoo was able to help WellPet accomplish at scale.

"We've seen that pet parents are becoming increasingly interested in switching up their dog's meals and love being able to offer options for every dog's needs to ensure that their bowl is anything but boring. This continues to be our primary focus post-SuperZoo," WellPet's Chanda Leary-Coutou said.

As a venue that provides a platform for independent retailers to meet, form relationships and accumulate knowledge to help them build successful businesses, manufacturers at SuperZoo are using the opportunity to come together, brainstorm and put into practice ways to collaborate with independents to build a stronger industry.