

THE FUTURE OF Pet Beds

Suppliers concede there is still demand for low-cost, thrifty pet beds. However, retailers with customers who are educated about materials, and valued added features—namely cooling pads for summer months, memory foam for stiff joints and waterproof pads to combat pet accidents—are leveraging these qualities to steer pet owners toward high-quality beds, priced to reflect their value.

After functionality, consumers are prioritizing style and personalization. Manufacturers are connecting with pet owners who will personalize pet blankets with their pets' names and initials and pet beds which are stuffed with the pet owners' clothing, towels and bedding to help soothe their pet. One key focus within the category is cat beds as an area select suppliers see as an opportunity to fill a need in multi-animal households.

"Pet beds and blankets are great SKUs to carry to round out your assortment," said Julie Creed with Pura Naturals Pet. "Consumers look for these products to pamper their pets and provide them with a bed or blanket that's specific to them alone; especially if you have a new pet, foster or rescue you've added to your family," Creed said.

"What was once a really challenging category has become one that literally every retailer seems to be looking to get into," said Arlee Pet's Ian Weiss. "We're seeing the mass market grow beyond expectations," Weiss said. "Every mass retailer is getting into the category and several are doing private label. Many are trying to offer more value for the price but are looking to bring in higher-quality beds, so the retail prices are going up. There is a real desire by the consumer to bring a better quality, nicer-looking product into their home for their pet. Pet retailers are starting to understand that and they're starting to follow suit. People are coming to us and saying my one reason for coming to a show and the one thing I keep looking for is new beds. People have a thirst for newness and that's probably the biggest change we're seeing in the bedding category," he said.

"Pet beds will be purchased multi-



"Part of the problem is that in most cases, pet retailers do not dedicate the space nor do they allocate the dollars throughout the year. Most pet retailers look at bedding as a fourth quarter business and while yes, a lot of bedding is sold during the fourth quarter, the retailers they're competing against carry product all year long."

**Ian Weiss,
Arlee Pet**

ple times during a pet's lifetime, which makes it a great category for retailers," said Tara Whitehead with Midwest Homes for Pets. "One challenge we see often in the merchandising of beds is that they can quickly become disorganized and disheveled, creating an unpleasant shopping experience," Whitehead said. "MidWest has developed a great line of QuietTime bed displays that fit in-line and end cap fixtures to help retailers with effective POGs and to help move customers from search and research to purchase," she said.

"Obviously for the consumer, it's an opportunity to care well for their pets, everything from protecting the furniture, creating the space for the pet that it needs to enhancing their décor with selecting a really beautiful product that can go in there," said Molly Mutt's Art Simon. "For the store, it's another opportunity to bring color and vibrancy in; that's an important category," Simon said. "Home décor, particularly with

millennials, especially with the growing trends on personalizing space and appealing to consumer trends and tastes, is a great opportunity for stores that otherwise may focus on the other areas that are important to the health and wellness of the pet," he said. "This is an opportunity to really focus on the home fashion category," he added.

"People are rediscovering the power of going into a store," Simon said. "You're starting to see a lot of what are called digital native brands or online only retailers opening stores and they're doing so because people really do want to touch and feel and see how a product is made and how it looks," he said. "They want to know it before they buy it," he added.

"People are much more cognizant of bringing things into their home that will accent their home," Weiss said. "The humanization of the pet industry continues where people are bringing things to their animals that they themselves would consider using," he said. "The fact that foam and orthopedic beds continue to grow, people are looking for indoor and outdoor beds so they can make sure their animal is comfortable when they're out camping or active in the warmer months," he said. "People are looking for beds that have more features and benefits. It has to be a more comprehensive product than what it used to be.

"The other thing that continues to grow is the cat category: the same thought processes that are going into buying dog beds are starting to go into buying cat beds and we've never seen that before," Weiss added. "It used to be throw a cardboard box on the floor, maybe throw some newspaper on it and maybe the cat will either go to the bathroom or sleep in it, but now people are buying hooded beds, domed beds, beds with toys in them, beds that their cats can really curl up in," he said. "People want their cats to be as comfortable as dog owners want their dogs to be. I'm going into stores and seeing full shelves dedicated to cat beds now. We launched our cat bed line at the beginning of this year, and we sold out within the first six

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weeks. Sold out," he said.

"Beds are among the top-selling 'luxury' items for pets and we see a spectrum in consumer behavior, from pet parents seeking beds based solely on price point to those seeking boutique or fashion beds and some looking for beds with function like orthopedic or cooling beds," Whitehead said. "What tends to remain consistent across all pet bed shoppers is that they are seeking beds that are durable, comfortable and washable," she said. "There is a vast and very diverse market in the pet bed category. The best thing retailers can do is know their customers—their typical pet parent profile—and offer a selection of beds that meet those needs," she added.

"We're very interested and pleased to see the research showing that sustainability, and health and wellbeing are trends driving the category, driving every category, and these are right up molly mutt's alley," Simon said. "So, sustainability and ingredients that the consumer can understand what they are, simple, plain, straightforward good quality ingredients," he said. "Obviously this affects a huge trend in the food and treat category and it's certainly now impacting all categories across every industry. For the first time, research is showing that consumers are making purchase choices based on how sustainable a product is, how committed a company is to doing what's good and right for the economy and for the product. We saw an article that basically said they are buying their beliefs now. That's certainly becoming more on-trend and now the millennials are certainly leading sustainability, but it's now starting to peak across all generations. People do concern themselves with that. The other trend, of course, that is very popular gets back to the personalization and the ability to not only personalize their space from a décor point of view, but in the case of molly mutt, when they're able to stuff their own bed with things from around the home, they really are personalizing a bed specifically for their pet. Those are huge trends we really see continuing to drive consumer behavior," he said.

"We added Pura Soft Blankets late last year as an offering to spur Q4 holiday



"We're recognizing the pressures that are on stores and we're thinking carefully about how can we help the stores better display our products and how can we help stores better turn our product? We're trying to bring services, problem solving and partnership to retailers as we have the ability to connect with them and discuss how we can best serve them."

**Art Simon,
molly mutt**

sales for our retailers," Creed said. "Our American made fleece blankets come in a variety of colors and can be customized with paw prints, the pet's name, or both—making them a truly unique gift. Best of all, fur easily wipes off the blanket with the brush of a hand, so your new favorite blanket always looks great," she said.

"For merchandising support, we have swatch rings available for retailers, data sheets and a promotional piece that can be used as on-shelf signage, for bag stuffer fliers or an HTML to customers," Creed said. "There are also social posts and a digital poster in our marketing portal for customers to utilize," she said.

"Our Pura Soft Blanket is priced as a premium blanket. It comes in two sizes and a colorway of seven on-trend colors," Creed added. "Add in the customized embroidery options and we've pro-

vided plenty of customer preferences for our retailers' and their consumers' needs," she said.

"We support all channels of trade, that's the first thing we do," Weiss said. "We segment our products so that there's less competition between channels," he said. "So for instance, a Tuesday Morning is still going to compete against a TJ Maxx but ABC Pet down the street is not going to because we're going to offer them different products and different brands. We see that online is definitely growing, and we are going to be more involved with online retail. You have to be in this marketplace, you really do in this day and age," he said.

"We're going to continue to listen to what our customers say because that's been our most important way to develop our products further," Weiss said. "For instance, we kept hearing, 'We love your mattress beds, your Bella Orthopedic Mattress Beds, but it would be great if the foam was protected.' As a result, we came out with waterproof stuffers which we marketed as waterproof and people just jumped on it," he said. "They were more than happy to pay the premium on the price because it added that extra feature. That's something that a lot of other manufacturers don't do—they don't hear what their customers have to say. All they hear is whether or not the product is selling. We don't want to just be someone who sells product. We want our retailers, whether they are in mass or whether they are in pet specialty, to really feel that they have a company that listens to their needs. This is really the biggest way we've differentiated our self. We genuinely listen to what our retailers tell us and they appreciate that, they hear it, they know it, they see it. We are about as customer-centric as we can possibly be, we know that the retailer is one of the most important links in our chain to the consumer, if not the most important link. If they don't feel confident and comfortable selling our products, then our products won't get sold. That's what we keep trying to do and we keep bringing on more regional chains every week. We've got more of the bigger players looking at us. Our distributors continue to grow and expand our reach organically. If a retailer wants your opinion, they'll give it to you."