

2018 VANGUARD AWARDS

Natural Litter

Pet health and desires for natural products are encouraging growth in natural cat litter as brands are tracking customer needs to increase the efficacy and convenience of offerings.

Pioneer Pets talks to customers and staff using its litter to find ways to evolve. "We've been happy with the performance of our litters and are working on an addition to our SmartCat Litter line, said Shannon Supanich.

World's Best Cat Litter employs several tactics through its innovation process to guide new products. "We listen to our consumers and understand unmet needs. This may include but is not limited to online and ethnography work to help us uncover insights we might not gain otherwise," said Jean Broders of World's Best Cat Litter. "Insights industry and competitive knowledge help guide our innovation to meet changing needs of consumers," Broders said.

Healthy Pet has just completed an extensive morphological research where it talked with all cat litter users, including



ökocat, to determine what performance features are most important to them. "We will use the results for future packaging refinements to appeal to potential new purchasers," said Leslie Ellis of Healthy Pet.

Broders believes the category is becoming more confusing to consumers with many litters claiming "Natural" on their labels. "Natural should be defined as litters that are truly environmentally

friendly and sustainable," Broders said. "Retailers should make the distinction when promoting and selling "natural" litters. They should capitalize on natural litter consumers willing to invest in their pet's health, which will also translate to other categories in-store," she said. Broders added, "Retailers should encourage these consumers to be advocates."

For Ellis, driving awareness of features and benefits of natural litter versus traditional clay is key. "Many cat parents may not know about natural litter alternatives or are hesitant to try it. It's important to reassure new cat parents or those new to natural litter it will work just as well, if not better," she said. "Ökocat natural litter performs best in class for odor control, clumping, easy cleanup with little to no dust," she said.

Supanich feels the natural market will continue to grow as consumers become aware of health and its importance in their products. "Performance and ease of clean up continue to be driving factors for litter purchases," she said.

Shampoos & Conditioners

An increasing number of pet owners are booking grooming appointments for their pets but continue to groom pets at home between appointments. Pet owners are looking for gentle, yet effective shampoos, conditioners and products which are natural and organic. They expect transparency and want to understand what goes into products they use on their pets.

"We look at trends, listen to our customers and see what is in demand in the marketplace," said Beth Sommers with Pura Naturals Pet. "That's one of the reasons we created our time-saving 2-In-1 Avocado & Olive Oil Organic Shampoo & Conditioner and Natural Flea & Tick Shampoo," Sommers said. "We're always looking for new ways to improve and are examining and fine tuning our formulas. We have taken our series of popular natural products and have now made them USDA Certified Organic. The lack of regulations in the pet products world has made us extremely conscious about the need for



transparency on our labels and in all of our marketing material."

"The earthbath brand embodies a commitment to pet parents, retailers and groomers that it will under promise and over deliver needs-based solutions to companion animals' grooming challenges," said Paul Armstrong with earthbath. "As such, we continually survey our customers, our retailers and the

pet and veterinary market for needs for which we can create solutions," Armstrong said. "We periodically meet with our wipe consultant to review new substrates, solutions and packaging for applicability to new products. These processes have helped us launch several new products in the last 12 months including Shed Control Shampoo and Shed Control Conditioner, as well as improvements to our Itch Relieving Oatmeal and Aloe Vera shampoos and conditioners."

"We listen to the concerns and needs of our customers and do our best to accommodate them," said Steve Nicolosi with Glo Marr Products. "We can't make 'everything' that anyone asks for but we do have the capability to 'evolve' or stay current with our ever-changing industry," Nicolosi said. "We also spend countless hours sourcing the best ingredients for our products that actually work for the purpose they are intended to such as remoisturizing dry skin, flea control and odor control."