

First Take

Ear Care

Manufacturers of ear care products are working in a category ripe for growth and innovation given that ear issues remain one of the top reasons pets need to see a vet. Savvy pet parents realize proper care and cleaning of the ears can help avert these sometimes costly and uncomfortable visits as they continue to seek natural but effective solutions to keep their companions healthy. Category leaders, meanwhile, are also investing in continued education to try and reach new pet owners and those who still may not be aware of these preventative care options.

"We've added a lot of new distribution channels this year," said Julie Creed, VP of Sales and Marketing for Pure and Natural Pet about maximizing the company's educational outreach. "We see education being a big part of ear care as we move forward. Ears are one of the top reasons pet parents visit the veterinarian. The ears can be a vulnerable spot for infections to develop, especially if your dog or cat has a lot of hair or if the ears fold over, creating a warm, moist area for bacteria to flourish. Our award-winning, USDA Certified Organic Ear Cleansing Kit can aid in preventing painful, and costly, infections. By regularly cleaning the ears, especially if your pet is prone to recurring infections, our products can make a big impact on the health of your pet."

Pet parents want effective solutions but don't want the risk of chemicals that could harm their pets. "The demand for non-drug remedy products to care for a pet's ears is a trend that began more than two decades ago and has shown no indication of weakening," Debra Decker, Director of Marketing for Pet King Brands said. "We live in a pet nation where pets have gone from the backyard to our beds and are viewed as cherished members of the family. The concern for the health, welfare and comfort of our beloved pets has intensified as a result. Add to that, increased access to information via the internet plus the influence of the veterinarian's recommendation and we have a very well-informed parent with a list of must-haves for pet care products."

Decker continued, "Topping the list

of requirements for ear care products are ones that can be easily used, do not bring additional stress to the pet, provide relief without having to compromise with side effects, work without antibiotics and are recommended by veterinarians, groomers and other pet parents. These are all the reasons why the ZYMOX line of Ear Solutions and Cleanser have experienced consistent, robust sales. ZYMOX has been recommended by veterinarians to manage problematic ears for more than 20 years and only needs to be applied once daily with no painful pre-cleaning of the ear prior to application."

TrueBlue Pet Products' Super Easy Ear Wipes checks those boxes as well. Formulated with natural ingredients including lemon and marigold, the pre-moistened wipes are easier to use than liquids or powders and have garnered nearly 60 customer reviews on the manufacturer's website with an average of five out of five stars. Founder Doug Gleason shared his own experience with the product on the company blog: "My own experience with my Labrador Sam was that he truly hated having ear cleaning liquids poured in his ears. If he saw me reach for that particular bottle, he would literally run away as fast as his legs would carry him! And even when I would corral him and administer the liquid, he would wildly shake his head and make a mess. I also tried ear cleaning powders but found them hard to use and messy as well. So, we decided to create a pre-moistened ear cleaning wipe. Our Super Easy Ear Wipes are simple to use and help clean away the dirt, wax, and debris which can lead to infections. We start with a hard-working textured pad that's just the right size and shape to work on the ears, and then marry that to an all-natural cleaning solution with lemon and marigold. Lemon cleans while promoting healthy blood vessels, while marigold softens and smooths the delicate skin in your pet's ear."

According to Creed, ear care has been a strong category for Pure and Natural Pet, which also produces an assortment of grooming and wellness products. "All of our ear care products are USDA

Certified Organic and medical grade," she said. "More pet parents are looking to organic products especially if it goes into or near the ear canal. If you can treat with a holistic approach versus synthetic chemicals, it's preferred for wellness."

These days, a holistic approach can also address the real issue of antibiotic resistance. "When ZYMOX was launched, the awareness of antibiotic resistance was just starting to be discussed in the industry as veterinarians, groomers and pet parents were experiencing frustration with medication failure and side effects," said Decker. "Antibiotic resistance has remained a threat and has fueled the demand for products like ZYMOX that are safe and continuously effective because the prevalence of pets experiencing ear infections and itchy allergy skin continues to be on the rise."

That demand has translated into increased sales and store loyalty for retailers who have used ZYMOX to anchor their remedy section, said Decker. "This is because ear infections can be very painful, occur frequently and they can be costly," she said. "Providing these veterinarian-recommended products is a service that pet parents will use regularly and enables retailers to expand their core sales from a dependency on just pet nutrition to include products that solve health problems."

Pet King Brands continues to work toward tailoring its ZYMOX technology for other pets including cats, horses, rabbits, guinea pigs, ferrets, birds, chickens and reptiles. "Pet King Brands recently launched a line of ZYMOX for Cats & Kittens, ZYMOX Equine Defense for horses and has plans to roll out lines for specialty pets in early 2023," Decker said.

Pure and Natural Pet similarly has charted its 2023 course toward growth and innovation. "We are looking forward to 2023 with great promise as we get ready for the Global Pet Expo where we will be introducing new and innovative products. We have already had planning and strategy meetings involving product mix and introductions to stay at the forefront of the pet wellness and grooming categories," Creed said.