



FOLLOW
YOUR
NOSE

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Ramie Gulyas,
Follow your Nose

"What we try do is go through two or three independents that we want to work with for a new product and see if it will work. We felt it's the best way for us,"

Doug Staszak,
Sunshine Mills



Sunshine
MILLS, INC.

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that fits," he added.

Ziwi only sells to independents and select online retailers. "Everything we make is with IPS in mind," said Mary Helen Horn of Ziwi. "Our focus is to launch the best product for pet parents and spend time and energy educating independents. We work with them to have customized promotions, incentives and training plans to help them understand Ziwi's benefits and communicate them to pet parents," she said.

"We haven't had the need to differentiate, we are primarily pet specialty," Ward Myers of Lafayette Bay Products said. The company sells to some Farm & Feed stores but are not in big national accounts and doesn't see itself pursuing it today. "If we do decide to do something, we will differentiate packaging color, color of products or even offer only private label," Myers said.

Brad Gruber of Health Extension said, "We consider ourselves the independent's best friend, based on the support we give them." Gruber does not think there is another manufacturing company willing to partner with IPS, from a cultural standpoint, better than Health Extension. "It's hard to have a relationship with us that's not good, fair or equitable. From a people, promotional or sampling standpoint, I don't think anyone does more than we do," he said.

Earth Animal began as an independent store in 1979, and still operates in Westport, CT. "There are a lot of marketing companies that view all growth as good, but that's not always the case," Chris Moore of Earth Animal said. He believes good growth must position you for future growth. "Sounds simple, but it's often not understood from a brand perspective especially when you're racing to grow revenues quarter over quar-

ter to appease private equity investors," he added.

"Reptile owners come to stores every three to seven days," said Andy Pettit of Timberline Live Pet Foods. "More than 56 percent own dogs and more than 40 percent own cats," Pettit said. "Stocking live food is an opportunity to capture this consumer and encourage them to shop at pet specialty." "We market to retailers, but part of our strategy is to tell the hobbyist to go to their local retailer to find our brand," he added.

Introducing New Products at IPS Independents Say:

Ramie Gulyas of Follow Your Nose said, "Smaller stores will try a new product or manufacturer more often than a larger store as they can pivot and respond quicker and do more to promote a new product with staff education and suggestions to customers who will buy based on their knowledge and experience." She added, "Larger stores demand more discounts and while they might sell more volume, they aren't driving customer base to your product."

Gulyas, who worked in the cosmetics and fragrances retail category, said, "Even as small independent stores, we had protected territories that kept a competitor from opening next door. Manufacturers realized spreading their brand too thin was not good."

"You don't see Gucci on every corner and you don't see 20 different reps for each brand in the same area," Gulyas said. "Too many layers and people carrying the same stuff does not leave room for true innovation and risk taking, and the industry will lose their last connection to their customer," she added.

"I believe manufacturers could offer IPS an awesome ISO to try new products, so customers can't pass up trying

it," said Debbie Holland of Fins Furs & Feathers. She thinks the practice works well with Nature's Variety and their prices to get people to try a new item. "A bag of cat food that normally sells for \$16 - \$18 is pre-priced at \$9.99, and we still can make a decent profit," she said. Holland added, "Many companies pay sales reps a spiff for each ISO they sell, instead companies should take down the price of the ISO and salesmen can reap benefits later."

Larry Oltmann of Clark Feed and Seed thinks brick-and-mortar, owner-operated stores thrive only if they can offer products and services customers value. "Manufacturers must understand that for brick and mortar to survive, they must move faster on product selection by four to six months than small chains," Oltmann said, adding small chains must move faster than large-box stores on product selection by 12-18 months.

"Manufacturers need distribution that keys-in on needs of smaller brick-and-mortar stores which introduces products, determines customer acceptance, fine-tunes retail price-point, in turn paving the way to smaller chains and finally large-box stores," he added. This, Oltmann believes, creates an environment where "everybody has a place, consumers benefit and stores profit."

Manufacturers Respond:

Pura Naturals Pet is unique to the IPS retailer. "This channel of distribution is our core business focus," said Brian Taus of Pura Naturals Pet. "Our distributors are invaluable and their local and consumer-specific knowledge makes them an asset," Taus said, stating the company will always launch introductions with its distributor partners.

Bare It All Pet Foods gives distributors parameters for new products. "We want

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