



The Next Generation of Humanization in Pet

A recent Nielsen survey reported that 95 percent of pet owners in the US consider their pets to be members of the family—71 percent let their pets sleep with them in bed, 65 percent buy their pets holiday or birthday presents and 31 percent even said they occasionally cooked for their pets. This pet owner behavior, that looks as pet as members of the family with strong bonds, has steadily increased over the past decade. This is reflected in a report by the American Pet Products Association (APPA) that shows how US pet owners have incrementally increased spending on their pets by almost \$2 billion each year since the late nineties.

Pet owners' choice to put the well-being of their animals first is most evident in the pet food and treat space that is seeing an 8 percent increase in products with natural ingredients. Pet parents are gravitating toward pet foods that have more than one source of protein, list meat as their first ingredient and contain superfoods. Vegan and vegetarian foods have also seen increased sales in recent years.

Whether it means paying a premium, pet parents want pet foods and treats that reflect more human food qualities such as 'organic ingredients', 'sustainably-sourced', 'low-calorie' or even 'vegan'. The practice of caring for their pets as children is also driving trends in non-food categories such as pet travel, safe-

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ty gear, toys, supplements for hip and joint, skin and coat, leashes and collars, probiotics and calming aids.

Werner von Pein, president of Halo, Purely for Pets, deems one of the areas of greatest growth for Halo is its Garden of Vegan line of wet and dry dog food and dog treats. "A statistically large part of the population, particularly millennials, are becoming vegetarian and many seek the same clean and non-GMO plant-protein based diets for their dogs," von Pein said. "Millennials are now the largest pet-owning segment in the US and take their nutrition, and that of their pets, very seriously. That so many are moving to our Garden of Vegan dog foods and treats is not surprising," he said.

Addiction Pet Foods sees the opportunity to sell grain-free, all-natural food with high levels of fresh meat beyond the US, too. Brian Willard with

Addiction Pet Foods said, "This bodes well with the humanization and premiumization trends in China. There is also a huge opportunity to capture the increased demand for indulgent treats. Addiction recently added a new co-extrusion line capable of producing a high capacity of treats made with innovative shapes and co-extruded natural flavors and colors."

Ryan Brown with Sunshine Mills believes waves of trends continue to flow through. "It starts with the no-by-product-meal, corn, wheat, soy trend and goes all the way to the feed-your-pet-by-mail subscription which mirrors human services like Blue Apron and Hello Fresh," Brown said. Following the success of their Evolve Pumpkin Spice Latte Dog Biscuits, the company will now launch its Triumph all-natural biscuits with no dyes, preservatives or wheat under the Wild Spirit brand. They will also introduce up to three new protein foods under their Evolve brand.

"Pets are our babies, children, security, guides, comfort and so much more. Why shouldn't we 'treat' them with products that are healthy and similar to the ones that we enjoy?" said Paula Savarese with Dogs Love Us. The company has responded to this trend by creating a completely new and innovative line of treats that cater to not only a dog's palate, but also their nutritional needs.

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Michael Bateman of Green Coast Pet, that recently earned the Quality Seal from NASC, believes humanized pet treats and butters provide a fun bond. "Our Pwnut Butter is totally fine for people to eat as well because all that's in it is peanuts and flaxseed. I use it on my PB&J sandwiches all the time," Bateman said. "When you can share products with your pet it creates a really fun dynamic," he said.

Products that tout 'natural' claims are driving market share when it comes to the health and wellness, grooming and toys categories, keeping pace with and sometimes even preceding human trends in baby and personal care.

Mark Watkins of ZippyPaws, that keeps an eye on changing market trends to find opportunities for growth, said "The pet industry is moving in the direction of humanizing our pets. People treat their dogs like their children and spend lots of time and money to keep them happy." ZippyPaws understands dog toys have come a long way from just a ball and a stick and will go in the direction of high customization options; toys that are engaging and of higher quality. "At Global Pet Expo 2019, we'll roll out two new toy lines of our dynamic 'Storybook' series, travel accessories like backpacks and car accessories such as car seat barriers, harnesses and lifts for dogs," Watkins said.

Jax & Bones, that manufactures pet beds and toys, chooses new fabric styles and creates beds that cater to different dog sizes and sleeping styles dogs display. "We made our beds in sizes that would be appropriate for each dog, to suit their different temperaments," Clare Christensen of Jax & Bones said. "Some dogs like the right side of the bed, some like the left and some like to sleep a little off the bed. There are so many types of beds just like there are for us, not just one standard," Christensen said.

Arlee Pet Products launched a new, updated doggie décor line using heavy-grade upholstered fabrics with high-quality, human-grade orthopedic foam. "These are beds we currently offer but in showing them to some select customers, have received high praise. They are beautiful, very well made, very heavy and incredibly affordable



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for the quality they are," Ian Weiss of Arlee Pet Products said. The company also unveiled a new cat line. "We know millennials are one of the more rapidly growing demographics in the business. Overall millennials tend to own cats and different from past generations, they tend to spend more money on their cats, whereas older generations tend to buy more value-priced items," Weiss said.

Pura Naturals is aware of pet owners wanting to invest in products that mirror their own lifestyles and improve the lives of their pets. "We are constantly fine tuning our formulas. Our company has always specialized in certified USDA organic products. Customers know when they buy from us that our product is eco-friendly, cruelty-free and made in the US," Beth Sommers of Pura Naturals Pet said. The company is conscious about the need for transparency on its labels and in all of its marketing.

"Like us humans, each animal is unique. We don't believe there's such a thing as one-size-fits-all nutrition," said Jessica Young of W. F. Young. The company thinks of pet food as a great base, but believes supplements added daily to a pet's diet can meet unique nutritional goals. "Like us humans, as pets get older their nutritional and health needs change. They will need more hip and joint support as well as vitamins, minerals and protein. Our senior dog supplement adds New Zealand Green Mussel to provide great antioxidant and anti-inflammatory powers for help with arthritis support and overall comfort.

We're currently looking into new ingredients that can help our 'youth-challenged' pets as well," Young said.

W. F. Young wants to learn more about new allergies and concerns that pop up, including recent potential issues with common proteins and diets, like the grain-free diet. "We know that it is very important that animals receive a nutritionally dense diet, preferably using whole foods and cold-processed supplements like ours. Pets, like us, need variety in their diets. If an animal consumes the same ingredients every single day their odds of developing an allergy to something in their diet is higher. A one-size-fits-all diet does not benefit the animal," Young said.

Young added the company is looking to broaden its product line beyond hip and joint, skin and coat formulas and age-specific needs. "There are several very popular ingredients in the human health industry that provide restorative proven benefits to aches and pains as well as ingredients to help with animals suffering from anxiety," she said.

Mike Alexander of Nite Beams explains how campgrounds carry the company's products. "The hall of fame RV museum in Indiana has a gift shop with our pet collars and leashes. It seems like 80 percent of campers are taking dogs with them, so our products are a perfect fit for them," Alexander said. He observes that for today's customers dogs are just like their children. "They don't board their children, they take them with them," he said.

Pet product manufacturers and retailers are attuned to consumer demand driven by the humanization trend and have hinged product development, merchandising and selection based on helping consumers give pets a healthier life. Stewart Shanley of Earth Animal observes a lot of cool, innovative thinking in the pet industry. "Everybody is talking about the 'humanization of pets'. We use this phrase at Earth Animal which is 'the animalization of humans,'" Shanley said. "What we mean is there's a bigger conversation to be had around: 'Do we as human beings really have the right to represent ourselves as the highest order beings in the planet's overall jigsaw puzzle?' It's going to be interesting to see how that develops," he said.