

# First Take

## Grooming Solutions

Obstacles grooming solutions manufacturers faced during the last two years allowed them to reflect on the best ways to streamline operations and present realistic and fulfilling shopping experiences. This reflection period has brought about the realization that as grooming solutions companies open additional facilities and launch products within their portfolios, companies are experiencing a Goldilocks syndrome. During expansion phases, these companies are becoming formidable in size to attract retailer and distributor partners and yet staying small enough to swiftly respond to issues while staying attainable to their partners. In 2022 grooming solutions suppliers are pushing necessary conversations about daily grooming to the forefront and making sure pet owners are informed and having conversations with retailers and manufacturers about how to best address their pets' grooming needs.

"We are a more mature company than ever before, but still benefit from acting like a startup," said Pete Stirling, Founder and CEO of Skout's Honor Pet Supply Co. "The brand launched several new lines over the past 18-months that have performed very well with limited distribution. This new year is a time for us to refocus our efforts on bringing these life-changing pet essentials to as many pets and their people as possible so they can start living their best life together."

"Best Shot is moving full speed ahead from the momentum created from consecutive years of record sales growth," said Dave Campanella, Sales and Marketing Director at Best Shot Pet Products.

"We will continue to educate the consumer about safe bathing practices at home and the importance of safe ingredients when caring for your pet," said Gina Dial VP of Sales and Marketing at John Paul Pet. "We use human-grade botanicals that are safe, and solution-based to address specific issues."

Innovation drives this effort. "We remain heavily focused on our patent-pending Topical Probiotic technology," Stirling said. "In 2022, you can expect to see that technology leveraged

across a growing wellness category (skin care) product line in support of our everyday grooming products."

"For 2022, we're developing new multi-functional SKUs for grooming and wellness that will be unveiled at Global Pet in March," said Julie Creed, VP of Sales and Marketing for Pure and Natural Pet.

"New product development is ongoing here," Campanella said. "Our recent introductions of The MAXX Miracle Detangler Concentrate and UltraMAX Hair Hold Spray seize upon two item categories we had identified as prime to enter. The concentrated detangler category historically has been led by only a couple iconic products. We knew we had a superior product as well as a much better selling proposition in terms of price, value and distribution channels. The aerosol sprays within the pet industry have been plagued by supply chain issues and import delays, opening the door for our non-aerosol alternative. Not only is it a great product made in the USA, but it can be steadily sourced stateside, filling the gap with an environmentally safe alternative to aerosols."

"We plan to continue honing our procurement and inventory management skills to keep things moving forward," he continued. "The pandemic identified many supply chain vulnerabilities we were able to overcome through changing the way we do business. Many of our competitors were not so fortunate which created a void we managed to fill instead. We were able to achieve 100 percent fulfillment during the pandemic and are committed to sustaining no less than that moving forward."

"We continue to evaluate new ingredients that might be beneficial to our product line," Dial said. "If we find something that is new, we do rigorous testing to determine if it has additional properties we can use in our line."

Trends previously identified continue to drive Skout's Honor's strategy this year. "The humanization of pets, and a growing awareness and interest in preventative care will play a huge role in our strategic approach to 2022," Stirling explained. "Our brand values have al-

ways guided us toward creating innovative products that are more socially and environmentally responsible, but most importantly improve the life of pets and their people. When you consider a pet as part of the family, it makes sense to take the same approach to long-term wellness and day-to-day health and comfort as we would for ourselves and our children. Skout's Honor's products are uniquely suited to provide that type of preventative maintenance routine and minimize the impact on the environment. The social aspect is also a big part of our brand. It gives the customer an added purpose to purchase because they know they've fed an animal for a day as a direct result of their decision."

"Grooming services and self wash stations are notably vital to most pet store business models, positively impacting bottom line profits," Campanella said. "Professional grooming services undoubtedly deepen customer relationships, build loyalty, and further build sales via add-on services and products. Best Shot continues to gain ground within retail chain grooming departments based on reliability, performance and legitimate value. Best Shot has become the preeminent brand of choice among most grooming professionals."

Trends John Paul Pet foresees playing a critical role for the company are, "Education and community outreach," Dial said. "Our PALS pages on Facebook (type in John Paul Pet PALS) continue to help lost, found, and adoptable pets and we are currently posting interviews with our hardworking VIP volunteers."

While Skout's Honor's larger story is an important one, the efficacy of its products should still be in the spotlight at retail. "The right products can make grooming our pets so much more than a necessary chore," Stirling said. "Our topical probiotic grooming products provide an active benefit that not only gets them clean and smelling good, but also makes the animal more comfortable and happier in their skin. It also offers pet parents the added benefit of knowing they are doing better for their loved one by preventing discomfort

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(itch, odor, irritation) before it happens. Grooming can really be a bonding moment and assist in improving the connection between pet and pet parent, which is why this category means so much to us as a brand.”

“Next to diet, grooming hygiene is essential to a pet’s health throughout its entire life,” Campanella said. “Routine grooming along with a healthy diet not only promotes a healthy coat and a happy pet, together they build more meaningful customer relationships in terms of loyalty and credibility. There’s no better way to build a business than upon trust. The grooming solutions category offers an incredible array of profound possibilities.”

“Yes, it is an important category albeit a small one in the overall pet picture,” Dial said. “Choosing brands that stand the test of time and are proven effective, may be a solid way to go.”

The new year provides suppliers a chance to refocus their energies. “Education and constructive content are two key drivers of adaptation and growth,” Stirling said. “The more people know about, have access to and relate to this next-generation of grooming solutions, the more they will use and recommend them to others. The proof is part of the experience. Products that leverage our topical probiotic technology can really change the life of a pet for the better. It is those organic positive experiences that will continue to drive growth behind innovation and ultimately drive sales and success for the industry.”

“We provide options in all of our solution driven categories, from shampoos and natural flea & tick solutions, to dental care and wellness,” Creed with Pure and Natural Pet said. “We are always looking for process improvements that provide increased product efficacy and enhances our sustainability.”

“Best Shot maintains an active presence on social media, particularly within the pet grooming community, actively participating at AKC dog events, grooming and trade shows, often hosting educational seminars,” Campanella said. “These avenues offer reliable feedback and an accurate pulse of where the industry is headed. From there we can

clearly align any new goals with our mission, ‘To excite pet parents and animal professionals with continued advancements in grooming technology. We strive for legitimate value, quality, convenience and innovation with every product we make!’”

“We are a classic line, using beneficial botanicals to keep pets healthy on the outside and well-groomed,” Dial said. “To grow the category, we think about how to promote grooming without excessive bathing as it could be harmful to the skin and coat. Expanding the grooming category with items that support bathing such as wipes and sprays assures even and steady growth.”

Throughout 2021 grooming solutions suppliers devised individual approaches to best support their retail partners in constructing a path forward. For each category, this route towards a sense of normalcy was similar to the past and the comfort of familiarity and for others, embracing change and the accompanying untapped opportunities was the right path in order to move forward and succeed.

“Those who say, ‘We want to go back to the way we were,’ are missing out on opportunity,” Dial, with John Paul Pet, told *Pet Insight* in June 2021. “Everything negative or positive, opens up an opportunity for something to be created. The fact that brick and mortars, especially the large pet specialty chain accounts, survived and increased their business shows innovation at its best. Many kept the stores open, followed all of the Covid-19 rules, and intensified their online sales presentation—and added delivery. As a result, some retailers have seen up to 100 percent sales increases in online in one year.”

“Many small retailers added delivery and curbside pickup,” Dial continued. “Knowing the customers, who come in every week or once a month to purchase food and pet supplies, they appealed to them saying, ‘Hey, we understand you can’t come in, but you can still purchase from us and we will deliver it to you.’ The grooming salons had a different issue as many had to close their doors. That created a need for more mobile groomers who can go directly to the consumer. This is another great example of opportunity and innovation. It’s

all about recognizing opportunity. ‘Never let a good crisis go to waste.’ Every time something happens, an opportunity opens up. As long as you’re willing to look at a situation and ask, ‘What is my opportunity here?’ you’re going to win. You’re always going to win.”

She went on to say, “From a pet grooming product point of view, sales sky-rocketed. It happened because of availability, online shopping, and pet parents were at home with their pets paying more attention to them. They had the time now that they never had before. Bathing your own pets became more prevalent. Many believe that is bad news for the groomers, but in actuality it’s a 50-50 proposition. You’re going to have people who bathed their pets at home who hated it, and those who said, ‘Yeah, I can do this myself.’ It works both ways. We need groomers to do nail trimming, ear cleaning, teeth cleaning and coat trims. The average groomer knows about 300 different breed cuts.”

“Since founding Skout’s Honor we have seen a lot of changes in the industry and this past year has definitely sped up the process in some ways, but I don’t think any of the changes in shopping habits are necessarily shocking or completely unexpected,” Stirling said last June. “We have put a strong focus on strengthening our supply chain and staying on top of logistical hurdles in an effort to keep things as simple as possible for our customers. We have always been committed to putting pet retailers first and delivering the product solutions they need, when they need them.”

The future of the grooming category is forecasted to experience growth in 2022 and throughout the next five years, suppliers predict. “I believe the grooming category is poised for extreme growth,” Dial said. “We’ve seen that even during a pandemic, when the country was closed down for a year, sales grew. By looking at the problem and creating solutions the pet industry fared well in 2020. The pet industry ran its own agility course and won!”

“Grooming is going to see considerable growth over the next five years,” Stirling said. “A lot of people became first-time dog owners in 2020 and those dogs will need a lifetime of care.”