

Healthy Inside and Out

Retailers need to stay up-to-date on the latest oral, skin and coat care innovations.

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Pet owners want to help their dogs and cats avoid suffering from pain, skin irritation and even bad breath. Over the years, manufacturers have developed innovative products to either mitigate or prevent problems related to skin, coat and oral care. Retailers are faced with the task of not only selecting the right assortment to carry in their stores, but also educating consumers on why it's important to buy these products for their pets.

"Pet parents have a myriad of needs when it comes to products for their pet's health," says Dan Archetti, national sales director for Westmont, Ill.-based **Pet King Brands**, makers of Zymox dermatology and Oratene oral care products. "It's not enough though to just have options at their favorite retailer. They have to be the right options."

The right options include products that are veterinarian recommended, easy to use, and offer alternatives to antibiotics. Also, the products must not contain harsh ingredients and must be non-toxic. “The ingredients consumers are gravitating toward are closer to natural or products that are naturally derived,” Archetti says. “They are steering away from ingredients that are harsh or can have side effects.”

That means pet parents are avoiding products with alcohol, xylitol (a sweetener that is harmful to dogs), chlorhexidine (an antibacterial ingredient) and detergents—such as sodium laureth sulfate—which can cause irritation.

In addition to looking for certain ingredients and avoiding others, another trend that Archetti points to is that consumers are looking for products that remedy more than one health issue. For example, like humans, pets that take medications can have side effects—like dry mouth or xerostomia. As a result, the pets can have bad breath. Pet King Brands offers Oratene Water Additive, Breath Freshening Spray and Brushless Toothpaste Gel, which all provide therapeutic benefits for pets on medications. “Because the products work without brushing, any pet owner of a dog or cat, regardless of age or health, will benefit from the ease of use and effectiveness of these products,” he says.

The company’s newest product is Oratene Antiseptic Gel for serious mouth conditions, with an enzymatic formula to soothe and relieve. It is recommended for pets with periodontal disease, stomatitis, gingivitis, red inflamed gums and ulcerations.

One tactic that can help stores drive sales in these products, Archetti says, is to set up a pharmacy-like remedy section. To help merchandise the products, Pet King Brands offers floor displays, counter displays and mini displays for Zymox. For Oratene, a counter display groups the different dispensing options together and serves as a “silent salesman,” highlighting the key benefits and information about the products, as well as featuring consumer literature. The company also provides training in-store, through webinars and with videos.

No-Brushing Catches On

One new product in the no-brush segment of oral care comes from Coeur d’Alene, Idaho-based **Oxyfresh**. “We were looking for an easier way to clean the pet’s mouth,” says Tom Lunneborg, vice president of product development and logistics. “It’s not very fun to brush an animal’s teeth.”

The company worked with veterinarians to develop Pet Fresh Breath, a liquid that the pet owner adds to the pet's water bowl every time they refill it. The product is odorless and flavorless, so it is not covering up the pet's breath with a flavor like mint. "They don't want the pet's mouth to be minty," Lunneborg says. Instead, the goal is to neutralize bacteria that causes pets to have bad breath and lose teeth.

Lunneborg acknowledges that the product is one that needs explaining. "If we just get the product in stores, it is not understood," he says. "If we put up a point-of-purchase display, the customer walking by can see that one capful equals clean, fresh breath. If we can get our message to pet owners we know our product will sell." Oxyfresh will present new point-of-purchase displays later this year, so retailers can have signage for Pet Fresh Breath.

While brushless oral care is a trend that is gaining popularity, the bigger trend, Lunneborg says, is that consumers are beginning to realize that oral health is tied to the pet's overall health. "I think it's going to continue to be one of the most important markets," he says. "It's just as important as human oral health, and when we ignore it we develop some issues with pets, not to mention spend hundreds of dollars to correct it."

The pet benefits from the products in another way. "The pet doesn't know anything is different other than the pet owner wants them closer to their face," he says.

Healthy Skin and Coat

Skin and coat care is also moving fast ahead on the natural trend. Consumers are looking for ingredients such as tea tree oil and aloe, says Julie Creed, vice president of sales and marketing for Seattle-based **Pura Naturals Pet**. She explains that tea tree oil is a natural cleanser and conditioner, while aloe is well-known for its healing properties and ability to soothe inflammation, repair skin cells and prevent itching.

Creed says that while these ingredients are on-trend now, pet owners are also seeking products that are free of GMOs and preservatives, natural, and USDA certified organic. "This is one of the reasons why there is a trend for natural flea and tick remedies," she says. "You don't need chemicals when you can effectively treat this problem naturally."

Pura Naturals Pet recently launched USDA Organic 2-In-1 Avocado & Olive Oil Shampoo & Conditioner, made with organic Hemp Seed Oil. The organic 2-In-1 has no preservatives or additives, and no chemical foaming agents, dyes or preservatives. It's also paraben-, sulfate- and formaldehyde-free and made in the USA.

The company also developed a Flea & Tick Natural Shampoo that safely and effectively repels fleas and ticks with the new fresh scent. The skin-soothing formula is made with organic rosemary oil, which has natural antiseptic properties to make it a disinfectant for skin, while also moisturizing. The shampoo also has aromatic cedar and peppermint oil, which Pura Naturals Pet says are natural repellents with a calming effect, and cinnamon oil, which serves as an anti-inflammatory.

In oral care, Pura Naturals Pet launched xylitol-free Organic Dental Solutions with kits specifically for puppy, adult and senior dogs. They freshens breath naturally, removes tartar and fights plaque without any preservatives, dyes or chemicals. The Cinnamon and Sweet Potato tooth gel is designed to taste like a treat, but is tough on decay and has health-boosting ingredients that can soothe gums, help digestion and fight bacteria. The gel is also safe for dogs with arthritis and diabetes.

“Consumers are understanding the importance of products with preventative benefits for greater longevity that may also offset costly health issues with a veterinarian,” Creed says. “We really look to create ethical products that improve canine wellness and are proud to manufacture Pura Naturals Pet in the USA,” she says.

Good for Humans and Dogs

One ingredient that has been getting attention lately is coconut, and San Francisco-based **Opie & Dixie** recently added coconut to the Snoutstik lineup of balms for dog noses. “Coconut is so widely used for humans,” says Debbie Guardian, founder and president. “It’s very hydrating and healing.”

Like the other Snoutstik balms, the Coconut formula features a clear ingredients panel and carries the cruelty-free Leaping Bunny seal of approval. According to the launch press release, coconut oil is a wholesome, edible oil and offers one of the most remarkable treatments for dry, cracked skin. It contains naturally antibacterial and antifungal properties, has a long shelf life, and only a small amount is needed to create a protective, long-lasting barrier for skin—even in the most intense sun. Opie & Dixie also makes a Pumpkin Snoutstik and Lavender Snoutstik.

One unique way to promote oral care products is with an online promotion. **PetzLife**, which offers oral care sprays, gels and other products, conducted its Best Smile contest in February for the **AVMA**-sponsored National Pet Dental Health Month. People sent in photos of their pets, and the winner—which received the highest number of votes on social media—will receive a one year supply of PetzLife oral care products. **PB**

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