Honing in on Health

To take a more proactive approach to supporting their pet’s well-being, dog owners are turning to supplements and remedies for help and to pet specialty retailers for expertise.

BY PAMELA MILLS-SENN

Just as many folks are taking a more health-conscious approach to their own well-being and are utilizing a variety of supplements and remedies to do so, they are starting to do the same for their dogs, and for similar reasons. Key among these is the desire to maintain the good health, comfort and longevity of their pets. Contributing to the interest in supplements and remedies is the desire for more natural and holistic alternatives—a trend that has accelerated in the pet product arena.
The fact that there is a plethora of canine supplements and remedies available on pet store shelves is also propelling growth for these categories, resulting in more options for pet owners and helping to fuel awareness. Still, there are some challenges to selling these products that pet specialty retailers must keep in mind. For example, product effectiveness varies, making it challenging for pet owners to find those that provide measurable results, says Samantha Lang, director of marketing for Wholistic Pet Organics, a Bedford, N.H.-based provider of holistic and nutritional animal health products for dogs, cats and horses.

The sheer number of options can also confuse

### WHAT’S ON THE MARKET: SUPPLEMENTS AND REMEDIES

**Ark Naturals Products for Pets** ([arknaturals.com](http://arknaturals.com)): Breath-Less Brushless Toothpaste is an extruded, easy-to-digest product that provides the benefits of toothpaste and brushing without any of the work. The outside consists of the fresh flavors of chlorophyll, cinnamon, vanilla and clove along with ridges for abrasive action. The inside contains a patented toothpaste center with ingredients that help fight plaque and tartar, and control bacteria.

**Glacier Peak Holistics** ([glacierpeakholistics.com](http://glacierpeakholistics.com)): Inflapotion is formulated with 100-percent organic herbs that target common inflammation and old-age mobility issues, and assist with cellular healing. Appropriate for senior and also younger dogs, it is sold in powder and capsule form, and the ingredients work to maintain a natural balance with virtually no side effects. Inflapotion contains no chemical additives or preservatives.

**Herbsmith, Inc.** ([herbsmithinc.com](http://herbsmithinc.com)): The company formulates holistic, natural products for dogs and cats. The company’s Condition-Specific Herbal Blends are formulated to address an array of complaints, from urinary tract infections, seasonal allergies, calming, natural immunity and joint support. These condition-specific herbal blends come in powders or tablets. Herbsmith also offers the Wellness Products for Every Animal line that includes a variety of wellness products, such as a digestive support supplement and dental treats, for dogs and cats. All products are made in the U.S.

**Okinawan Happy Dogs** ([okinawanhappydogs.com](http://okinawanhappydogs.com)): Okinawan Happy Dogs Long Life product is an herbal blend containing turmeric and milk thistle, which naturally boost the body’s antioxidant enzymes, and superoxide dismutase (SOD) and glutathione that neutralize free radicals and give the pet the ability to naturally prevent disease, fight existing health problems and slow down aging. Every product in the Happy Dogs line contains the turmeric and milk thistle complex, along with other high-quality herbs, and each targets specific areas of health, such as vision, brain, oral, joints, skin, kidney and the digestive system.
consumers. "Dog owners have trouble knowing where to start when it comes to choosing the right supplements," Lang explains. "Because there is such a vast number of products on the market, along with an immense amount of information, dog owners can feel overwhelmed."

Retailers can tackle this confusion in a number of ways. The first step is realizing that remedies and supplements are two different animals and selling them as such, says Susan Weiss, president of Ark Naturals Products for Pets, a company based in Naples, Fla., that manufactures a full line of pet remedy, health, wellness and lifestyle products.

Another bewilderment-busting strategy is resisting the urge to overload the inventory. "Carrying a lot of brands or a lot of the same type of SKUs isn’t a good idea," Weiss says. "It would be more meaningful for the retailers to really know the differences between the products they carry. This would grow consumer trust. Sometimes less is more."

It’s all about education, says Trish DeVall, vice president/co-founder of Glacier Peak Holistics. Located in Eureka, Mont., the company distributes 100-percent organic herbal remedies for pets. "Product knowledge has always played a key role in the sales market," says DeVall. "Alternatives can be a hard sell at times if the staff isn’t knowledgeable about the products. However, if the staff is trained properly, these items seem to fly off the shelves."

In order to effectively assist customers, pet specialty retailers should understand some of the more common issues driving customers to these categories. One of these is the cost of veterinarian visits, says Ruslana Golunova, general manager for Okinawan Happy Dogs (Everyday Wellness Corporation)—a pet supplements manufacturer based in Pleasanton, Calif.

"Financially, not everyone can afford it," says Golunova. "So pet parents are now moving toward preventative care, using natural or herbal remedies. Also, pet parents want to stay away from tons of medications and injections. The negative
Antibiotic resistance is getting a lot of attention these days in human healthcare, and pet owners are starting to turn the same wary eye when it comes to treating their pets, says Wayne Whitney, national sales manager for Westmont, Ill.-based Pet King Brands, which makes Zymox pet products, including an ear-treatment formula containing antimicrobial enzymes that offers an alternative to antibiotics.

"Infections of the ear are one of the most common conditions a veterinarian treats," says Whitney. "There is also the trend regarding allergies. Where there is a pet with ear infections, there tends to be a pet with skin infections as well."

Dental hygiene is another concern, says Weiss, explaining that awareness among pet owners about the fact that dental problems lead to more than just bad breath has strengthened interest in dental treatments.

"Bad breath is just the tip of the iceberg," she says. "Gums become red. Teeth become loose or fall out. Or plaque breaks off and bacteria enter the dog or cat’s blood stream, which can lead experience and side effects of conventional treatments make pet owners look for more holistic solutions for their pets."

Pet King Brands [zymox.com]: The ZYMOX Enzymatic products line targets pets with chronic ears, skin or mouth conditions. At the center of all ZYMOX products is the patented LP3 Enzyme System. It works without antibiotics or harsh chemicals and is antibacterial, antifungal and anti-yeast. The ZYMOX line consists of Ear Solution for infected ears; Shampoo and Conditioning Leave-in Rinse for itchy, allergic skin; Topical Cream and Spray for management of infections due to bacteria, fungi and yeast; and brushless Oral Care for daily use.

Durvet [durvet.com]: Durvet’s Triple Wormer is for the treatment and control of roundworms (Toxocara canis, Toxascaris leonina), hookworms (Ancylostoma caninum, Ancylostoma braziliense, Uncinaria stenocephala), and tapeworms (Dipylidium caninum, Taenia pisiformis) in dogs and puppies. Triple Wormer is a broad-spectrum dewormer that is available without a prescription. It is a convenient, chewable tablet that dogs love.

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Weiss adds that as humans and their pets have grown closer, not just emotionally but in proximity—think sleeping in the same bed—bad breath can send dog owners scrambling to put some distance between themselves and their pets, potentially undermining the relationship. Still, retailers must promote the availability of alternative solutions that come with fewer or no side effects, compared to prescription medication. “We think this is still a pretty new direction in pet health care,” says Golunova. “It is hard to compete with conventional medicine, so mostly consumers who have had a bad experience after conventional treatments come to us. But we really have to change the consumer’s mentality and introduce supplements as an excellent preventative tool.”

Some pet specialty retailers may also need to acquire a different mindset, says Todd Dean, national sales and marketing manager, OTC products, Pet-Tabs, Virbac Animal Health. The company, which makes vitamins and supplements for dogs and cats, has its U.S. headquarters in Fort Worth, Texas.

“I think that with all the high-tech food we
have today, a lot of retailers believe a pet doesn’t need vitamins,” says Dean. “But not every dog absorbs [food-based] vitamins and minerals the same, so this is insurance in that case. Also, we think our typical customer is a health-conscious person and probably takes vitamins. It’s hard to fight consumer trends; meaning, if you don’t stock and recommend something [for this type of customer], they’re going to go elsewhere to buy it. Why miss a sale?”

**Energizing Sales**

Although pet owners are exhibiting greater awareness about vitamins and supplements, Dean says retailers need to take a proactive approach. They can start by asking their customers a few targeted questions.

“We believe retailers should ask how the customer’s dog looks,” he says. “Is the dog healthy looking, does it have a good coat, is it active or lethargic, does it eat well? Also, ask customers if they take vitamins themselves.”

Other questions to ask include what the pet is eating; its age; if the pet is experiencing any issues, symptoms or conditions, and how long these have been present; and what medications or supplements the animal is currently taking. Don’t forget to inquire about the breed; this can be very significant, says Lang.

“By simply asking ‘what kind of dog do you have’ you’re able to present a number of recommendations,” she says. “For example, you may talk to a customer with a 75-pound Lab-mix about joint support and the pet parent of a Golden Retriever about skin and coat health.”

In fact, says Golunova, retailers should take any opportunity to mention supplements and remedies, regardless of what the customer is buying. This strategy will promote awareness and interest, educate customers and may result in add-on sales.

“In general, we think supplements should be used as preventative care,” she says. “So actually, every consumer potentially is a supplements buyer. It’s simply a matter of introducing the solution and educating the customer.”

Lang also suggest placing supplements nearby the checkout, since this is often when pet owners will bring up issues or cou-
cerns—this approach works for remedies as well. Keeping these products easily accessible to customers, rather than requiring folks to wander deep into the store is important, says Lang, particularly if they’re unfamiliar with the concept. This tactic works well for smaller stores with fewer employees who may find it difficult

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**Virbac Animal Health** ([pet-tabs.us](http://pet-tabs.us)): The company offers a vitamin and mineral supplements line consisting of five products and 10 presentations: Pet-Tabs OF (original formula) and Pet-Tabs AF (advanced formula). The liver-flavored products are given daily and are designed to support health and functioning. Both are available in three count sizes. Pet-Tabs AF is for older, working dogs, or for when a little extra is desired. There are also three products appropriate for both canines and felines in the Pet-Tabs line, and one just for felines.

**Wholistic Pet Organics** ([wholisticpetorganics.com](http://wholisticpetorganics.com)): The company offers a full line of canine nutritional and healthcare supplements designed to support overall health and longevity. The line also includes products formulated for specific conditions such as Canine Complete+Joint Mobility. This easy-to-feed formula delivers a complete array of vitamins, minerals, enzymes, essential fatty acids, antioxidants and digestive micro flora. It also features concentrated joint and cartilage protection. Ingredients include organic kelp, organic flaxseed, Digest-All Plus enzyme complex and more.

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APRIL 2014 ● 83
to leave the front of the store, she adds.

Also consider bringing in outside help, suggests DeVall. “Time seems to be a huge issue for most retailers in learning and selling alternative products. But there are always opportunities to bring in nutritional specialists and professional speakers for seminars and learning outreach in the retail environment. The general public seems very welcoming of these types of opportunities.”

And, of course, retailers should turn to product manufacturers, availing themselves of the education, sales training, product education and merchandising support they offer, achieving a thorough understanding of the importance of remedies and supplements and the benefits they offer.

“[By doing this] retailers will become a trusted advisor who can guide their customers to the best option,” says Lang. “These customers will begin to come to you first for product recommendation and advice in other areas of pet ownership.”

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