



# Supporting Canine Skin & Coat Care

Pet parents and industry professionals alike should be in-the-know about the importance of skin and coat maintenance for dogs, as well as the range of products offered in the space.

BY JENNA FANELLI

Most people follow a personalized skin and hair care routine that revolves around using quality products that work for our unique bodies and keep us feeling healthy, clean and comfortable—and now many pet owners are also applying that approach to their canine companions. That’s because taking proper care of a dog’s skin and coat is an essential part of maintaining the health and safety of both the pet and the loving humans they come in contact with, whether it be directly or just by occupying the same space.

With that in mind, pet parents and retailers alike should invest the same amount of effort, dedication and attention to detail into skin and coat care as they do in other areas, such as dental hygiene, healthcare, and even nutrition.

“One of the emerging drivers in the category is the concept of a maintenance routine,” says Pete Stirling, co-founder and CEO of Skout’s Honor Pet Supply Co. “People rarely make a trip to a doctor to treat or prevent common skin conditions. Instead, they head to the personal care aisle and now they are doing the same for their pet.”

Noting that grooming is increasingly becoming a “problem-solution set,” Stirling says that dogs tend to struggle with skin and fur issues like itchiness, dryness, irritation, odor and shedding. Efficient, well-formulated grooming products—such as those in the Skout’s Honor Topical Probiotic line—can help ease those issues and even prevent them.

Also emphasizing the importance of solution-oriented products is Geoff Hamby, director of marketing at Vetericyn Animal Wellness. He cites common skin issues such as hot spots, rashes, itchy/dry skin, and other topical issues that repeatedly occur, and explains that oftentimes a

pet will scratch, chew or lick the affected spots, which obstructs healing.

Julie Creed, vice president of sales and marketing at Pure and Natural Pet, echoes the sentiment that dog parents looking for skin and coat care products are most often seeking solutions for specific issues. Creed says this is why the brand carries a variety of shampoos that address ailments and irritations and are formulated with high-standard ingredients.

“Finding the right shampoo for your pet’s specific needs is important as it can impact their health, especially if they suffer from allergies or skin sensitivity,” Creed explains. “Many of our shampoos are USDA Certified Organic or contain natural ingredients.”

Stirling has also observed the growing popularity of natural products, arguing that products that feature ingredients or technology to actively improve the health of an

animal’s skin are the future of this market, as pet parents continue to seek ways to improve and develop routines that will support their pet’s best life.

**Pet parents want a wealth of options when it comes to their pets’ skin and coat health.**

## PRODUCT PRIORITIES

As pet parents become more knowledgeable about certain brands and manufacturers, the makeup of products, and what will work best for their pets’ individual needs, they are better-equipped to discern which stores carry assortments that meet their standards and align with their values. Today, many of these shoppers are prioritizing features such as USDA-Certified Organic, USA-made and cruelty-free, according to Creed. Additionally, she says, they want a wealth of options when it comes to their pets’ skin and coat health.

“Options are critical, and you can never go wrong with a good hypoallergenic and fragrance-free

shampoo,” suggests Creed. “Seasonally, there is always a need for flea and tick products with a more natural solution as well as itch relief shampoo and skin soothing shampoos and conditioners.”

Hamby adds that another concern seems to be convenience. He says that in the shampoo category specifically, he and his colleagues have found that pet owners want bath time to move as quickly as possible, and were becoming increasingly frustrated by the “old-school shampoo application process.” This is why Vetericyn developed their

# DOGS

FoamCare trigger system. Hamby explains that the system allows pet owners to quickly spray the product onto their dog, as opposed to manually applying it to the entire body. FoamCare shampoo comes in all-coat, thick coat and medicated formulas, and can be easily rinsed out.

“These give customers a more personalized choice at the shelf without overwhelming

them with too many options,” Hamby explains.

Stirling points out that while many pet parents want to have various options, they don’t necessarily want to engage with products that are overly complex or make for a challenging grooming process.



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## SKIN SUPPORT

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**Natural Care+** ([naturalcarepets.com](http://naturalcarepets.com)) Activated Charcoal Odor Neutralizing Dog Shampoo pairs the power of activated charcoal and patented odor eliminating technology to absorb and remove impurities in the skin and coat while neutralizing hard-to-remove odor, leaving dogs feeling clean and smelling fresh. The shampoo detoxifies and cleans the skin and coat while Aloe Vera rehydrates and soothes irritated skin.



“Two-in-One shampoo plus conditioner and daily-use deodorizers and detanglers are going to be the best selling products of their type,” offers Stirling. “Millennials love to pamper their pets, but not necessarily mess with a variety of solutions. Keep it simple, easy to use and tangible.”

Hamby encourages pet retailers to look into product reviews and the online presence a product has before adding it to their skin and coat aisle. He credits much of Vetericyn’s success in this category to the company’s focus on products that are antibiotic free, non-sensitizing and results-driven.

### MERCHANDISING MADNESS

Retailers that can confidently vouch for the quality and effectiveness of their skin and coat care assortment should utilize all possible methods to express that to potential customers.

“Most of [Skout’s Honor’s] successful marketing spend is done at the retail level, where the customer interacts with the product,” says Stirling. “Digital before and after photos are very popular and effective, but lifestyle matters as well. Regardless, the most important aspect of any marketing is finding a way to connect with your customer and develop a product-driven relationship.”

When it comes to promoting these products, Stirling thinks anything that removes a barrier and gives the customer a chance to interact with the product will likely lead to success.

“Samples have worked extremely well for us,” he says. “It is tough to argue the value of a quality product.”

Creed also sees product samples or demos as a great way to increase customer interaction and interest, and she encourages retailers to host launch parties or pop-up shops for the release of new products. In terms of the digital space, she suggests inviting pet industry professionals to answer customer questions on a livestream.

Additionally, Creed says that Pure and Natural Pet provides retailers with an abundance of free, in-depth digital marketing support.

“Digital posters that can also be used for emails, social posts, web banners, and much more are all in our retail portal,” she says. “Work with tools that can educate your customers on your grooming categories and how the products will work for them and their customers.”

The more educated a retailer’s staff is, the better they can guide consumers to the products that will yield the best possible results.

“Educating yourself and your staff is huge in this

category because many pet owners rely on their local store for advice—especially when it comes to health aids,” says Hamby. “Knowledge and training of the products you carry will allow your team to make the best recommendations for your customers, and it goes a long way in building that trust with customers that makes them a customer for life.” **PB**

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