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# pet age

PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR THE BUSY PET RETAILER OF TODAY ... AND TOMORROW

## the pet industry goes green

Ecological awareness is sweeping through the pet industry, ushering in a new wave of earth-friendly pet products as well as greener manufacturing practices. ► 34



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Baby boomers, empty nesters and young professional couples who own pets are increasingly willing to spend extra cash for fancy, nutritious treats.

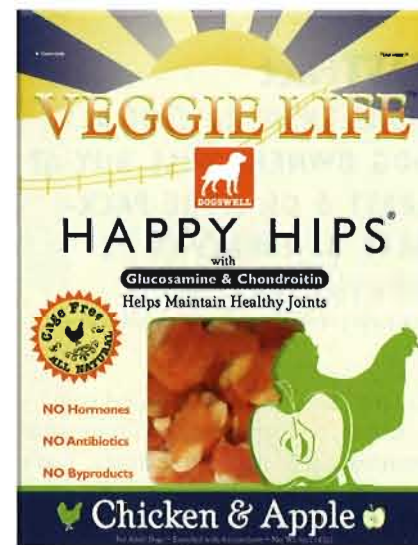
# treat them right

No longer content with ordinary treats, today's pet parents are splurging on fancy, functional and fun treats to spoil their dogs and cats—and improve their health.

By Renee Knight

**b**asic, ho-hum pet treats simply aren't enough anymore. In the last few years, pet owners have become more discerning when it comes to the treats they buy to reward their four-legged loved ones. Because they see their dogs and cats as members of the family, they want to offer rewards that are more meaningful than a simple biscuit. And the baby boomers, empty nesters

and young professional couples who continue to add furry members to their families increasingly are willing to spend a little extra cash on fancy, nutrient-filled treats to show their unconditional love. "Pets are almost becoming surrogate, furry kids," said Bob Vetere, president of the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (Greenwich, Conn.). "[Pet owners] no longer are satisfied with rewarding their pets in pet terms. They want



Veggie Life, a new line of supplemented treats from Dogswell, is available in formulas designed to support healthy hips and skin.

to reward in human terms. They want to thank them more, so they give something that's meaningful to them as a human."

The desire to keep their pets healthy, young and strong also fuels the pet treat market, a market enjoying an explosive growth in the last 12 to 18 months. In 2006 alone, treats accounted for \$2 billion of the \$15 billion spent on dog and cat food, according to the Pet Food Institute (Washington).

The surge in natural pet treats in particular can be attributed to the pet market catching up to the human market, said Bruce McKay, an experienced pet food industry professional who presented a Focus on Treats program at the Petfood Forum in April. The pet market typically lags the human market by about two years, he said.

Market experts and treat manufacturers alike say they expect growth to continue, not only in natural treats, but in treats that resemble human food and functional treats aimed to alleviate certain ailments such as hip pain.

"We're probably in as strong a growth segment as we're going to see," said Vetere, "but I'm sure it will continue for a few more years."

### Natural, Functional Treats

Expected to become increasingly functional, treats designed to add shine to the coat, promote dental hygiene, maintain healthy joints and more have already hit the market in



Modeled after Juvenon's dietary supplement for humans, new Vigorate Nourishing Dog Treats are said to give pets more energy and increase brain function.

force. These treats are getting more sophisticated, with more interesting shapes and colors.

People want their animals to live long, happy lives, so when they see something is helping *their* health, they figure, "Why not try it on my pet?"

That's what happened with Juvenon, a dietary supplement for humans to help slow the cell aging process. Clinical studies at a leading Canadian research center showed that the human pill led to positive effects in dogs as well, according to the manufacturer. Pet owners experimented a bit on their own, with some even cutting the pill up to feed it to their dogs, said Courtney Hamilton, a spokesperson for the Incline Village, Nev.-based company.

So, a few years ago, the company decided to develop Vigorate Nourishing Dog Treats, a dog-friendly version of the pill that contains two Juvenon-patented micronutrients that promise to give middle-aged and older dogs more energy, improved mobility and sharper brain function in about five to seven days. Just released in May, the chicken-flavored canine version is a semi-moist, bone-shaped treat.

"We felt strongly about presenting the micronutrients in a treat format basically to make it easy for the dog to consume and easy for the dog owner to control the dog's consumption," Hamilton said. "It's easier to control how many treats



The natural treats that are so popular with pet parents today tend to contain few ingredients. For example, Cheese Please from Complete Natural Nutrition is made only with real Wisconsin cheese.

they get versus food.”

Also brand-new on the functional treat scene is Veggie Life, a line of supplemented treats made with vegetables, fruits and chicken from Dogswell L.L.C. (Beverly Hills, Calif.). In addition to Sweet Potato Chews and Sweet Potato Fries, the line includes fruits and vegetables wrapped with all-natural chicken breast, such as Chicken & Carrot and Chicken & Banana. The treats are available in two of Dogswell's most popular formulas: Happy Hips, fortified with glucosamine hydrochloride and chondroitin sulfate; and Vitality, fortified with flaxseed and Vitamins A and E for healthy eyes, skin and coat.

“Most dog owners are unaware as to how much their dogs love vegetables and fruits,” said Marco Giannini, founder of Dogswell. “Not only are they delicious, fruits and vegetables also play an important

role in the health of dogs, as they do in humans. With the launch of Veggie Life, Dogswell's intent is to make sure that all members of the family get their recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables.”

The company also recently added Biscuits with Benefits to its portfolio of supplemented dog treats, available in three varieties. The primary ingredient in the biscuits is meat, rather than the wheat or corn typically found in most biscuits, said Giannini.

Likewise, the Nature's Recipe brand of supplemented treats—Joint & Hip Treats, Teeth & Breath Treats and Skin & Coat Treats—from Del Monte Pet Products (Pittsburgh) are specially formulated to avoid common ingredients that may cause food intolerances, according to the company. Introduced last fall, the crunchy dog treats promote strong joints and hips, fresh teeth and

## FASTFact

**MORE THAN HALF OF ALL DOG OWNERS WILL BUY AT LEAST 6 OR MORE PACKAGES OF TREATS IN 12 MONTHS.**

Source: 2007-2008 APPMA National Pet Owners Survey

breath, and healthy skin and coat.

Limited ingredients represent another trend in natural treats. Truly natural products should only have one or two ingredients, said Peter Kaufman, founder and president of Complete Natural Nutrition (Toronto). For example, the All-American variety of his Real Food Toppers freeze-dried treats contains just two main ingredients—steak and potatoes. And the company's Cheese Please treats are made of only one thing—real Wisconsin cheese, crumbled and baked.

## Fun, Human-like Treats

Not only are treats becoming healthier and more functional, they're becoming more playful in the way they mimic human foods. For example, Pegetables dog chew treats from Splintek PP Inc. (Kansas City, Mo.) are shaped to resemble their actual garden counterparts. Pegetables are available in three varieties: carrot, to help fight free radicals to lower the risk of macular degeneration; corn, to help provide a shiny coat and strengthen the immune system; and celery, to maintain healthy joints and detoxify the liver.

“These are not your ‘garden-variety’ dog treats,” said Steve Stecklein, chief marketing officer for the company. “Pegetables are made

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## CREATIVE TREAT PACKAGING

As treats become more sophisticated, so too does the packaging. For example, more treats today sport easy-to-find information about the ingredients and nutrients inside the treats, said Bruce McKay, an experienced pet food industry professional who presented a program on treats at the Petfood Forum in April.

Peter Kaufman, founder and president of Complete Natural Nutrition (Toronto), includes a nutrition fact panel on his company's treats. That's important to many retailers and consumers, he said.

Treat packaging also is getting more creative to help the treats jump off the shelves and into pet owners' shopping carts. Bob Vetere, president of the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (Greenwich, Conn.), said he's noticed some impressive packaging in the last year or so.

"It's really taken off," Vetere said. "You've got some really high-end

packaging." Up Country Inc. (East Providence, R.I.) caught on to that trend about five years ago, said director of marketing Donna Bodell. The company makes just two kinds of treats—chicken-flavored for dogs and fish-flavored for cats. Rather than focus on making different flavors for the treats, Up Country devotes its time to 22 packaging variations—11 for cats, and 11 for dogs. For example, they market the treats in seasonal packaging and packaging that matches the company's bowl and futon collections.

Offering different packaging options appeals to retailers, Bodell said, because it adds a new element to the store. If customers see something presented in a new way, it catches their eye.

"You see such wonderful packaging out there, and it's all different shapes and sizes," Bodell said. "It's really gotten into this realm of fashion, the treats."

—Renee Knight



Inventive packaging helps bagel-shaped treats from Bagel House L.L.C. stand out on store shelves.



Treats that mimic human sweets, such as these tiny cakes from Petit Four Legs, offer a nutritious way to spoil pets.

more of the fawning over the dog, and more human-dog bonding at the point of giving that treat. There's more thought in giving it as opposed to a normal treat that looks like a dog bone."

Other human-like treats are based on homemade American classic desserts from Nutro Products Inc. come in Apple Torte, Berry Cobbler, Carrot Cake and Pumpkin Crumble. Made with real fruits and whole grains with no added sugars, the desserts are packaged in 3-ounce cans.

And just like bakery goods for humans, boxes of fresh-baked, all-natural treats from Sojourner Farms (Minneapolis) are stamped with a freshness date. SoJo's Good Dog Treat for Dogs' newest flavor, Blueberry Cobbler, is made with real blueberries and rolled oats. The treats also come in Apple Dumpling, Chicken Pot Pie and Peanut Butter and Jelly.

It's just the beginning for health-enriched treats that spoil and reward pets.

"There's the pet humanization trend where pets are being treated like children," said Lewis of Petit Four Legs. "For every baker and manufacturer, it's an incredible time to be in [the industry], and I think we're only going to see more and more growth over the next few years."

Renee Knight is a freelance writer based in Merrillville, Ind.

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Looking like they came straight from a New York deli are the new Dog House Bagel treats from Bagel House L.L.C. (Lake Zurich, Ill.). The natural, made-from-scratch bagels are based on a human-grade recipe that dates back to the 1920s, said Doug McLennan, director of sales and marketing. Small and crunchy, the treats clean the dog's gums and teeth.

"Everybody is looking for the next best treat and something different," McLennan said. "Some are looking for breath freshening. Others, when they look at treats, they want simple quick treats, something good to give [their pets]. With a bagel, it takes a little bit more for the dog to chew. He's not going to wolf it in two bites. He's going to work it, so there's fun involved."

Treats also mimic human sweets, from ice cream to cookies to candy.

For example, Cool Claws from Pet Specialties Ltd. (Columbus, Ohio) is a frozen treat that resembles ice

cream. Made specifically for cats' digestive system, the tasty treat contains vitamins and minerals that can lead to skin and coat improvement, said chief executive officer Peter DeMarco. "We've designed it so that the animal will really like the product, but so that it's also good for them. It's not just buying junk food for your cat. It's buying something nutritious."

Cool Claws is mostly available in Midwest markets, he added.

Tiny dog-friendly cakes also are taking their place in the market. Gourmet treats made from natural, human-grade ingredients are the specialty at Petit Four Legs (Seattle). The handcrafted treats are made in a commercial kitchen and are good enough for people to eat, said founder and head chef Jennifer Lewis. (And yes, sometimes the human staff does some taste-testing to ensure the treats are indeed human quality.)

Lewis collaborated with a chocolate guru on her latest luxurious treat, artisan truffles. The dog-safe carob-coated truffles are topped with an intricate doggie design and come complete with fancy packaging.

"It's a special treat. It's not the treat that's necessarily being given every day," Lewis said. "There's

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