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# Pet Age

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## INVESTING IN GREEN

Small changes can help you  
win big with customers  
and the planet



# Going

Suppliers and  
retailers are  
finding that small  
changes can  
make a big  
difference in  
improving the  
environment.  
By Erik Martin

**M**ore than ever before pet supply manufacturers and retailers are taking steps to be as environmentally conscious in their operations as possible and spread the message to customers and vendors alike that the planet is as precious as their pets.

These efforts are demonstrated in a myriad of ways, from a wider adoption of recycling programs to retrofitting facilities with energy-saving lighting systems.

One company trying to make a difference is West Paw Design, a manufacturer of dog and cat toys, bedding and apparel. This Montana-based firm sets a high standard in the industry for sustainability in its manufacturing processes, products and facility design.

Among their numerous sustainable ef-

forts, West Paw Design has developed an injection molding process that minimizes waste to as low as 2.4 percent; uses special fabrics and fills, milled from recycled soda bottles in its products; repurposes scrap material to produce new toys, many of which are 100 percent recyclable; utilizes recycled material in its shipping materials, packaging and office supplies; sources its materials locally and regionally whenever possible; recycles all paper, plastic, metal and cardboard and stocks each workstation with recycling bins and reclaims and reuses banana boxes to store finished goods.

"We use recyclable or recycled products whenever possible," Spencer Williams, owner/president of West Paw Design, said. "For example, our Reknitz dog sweaters are made from reclaimed cotton. This means that, although cotton is a crop





# Green

resource, ours are made from crops that were already grown, harvested and would otherwise go to waste.”

The company also implemented the latest developments in energy efficient design when it built its facility in 2001. During construction, crews set the building on piers to avoid pumping ground water, which would have impacted the water table.

Additionally, exterior walls were built with movable and reusable 10-foot panels. During a recent building expansion, the business reused the walls, reclaiming 175 tons of concrete.

“As a business owner, it makes sense to save money and reuse materials we had already paid for and to repurpose things like boxes for storage,” Williams said. “We strive to keep costs down so that we can pass

these savings on to our customers. It just so happens that our money-saving efforts that are good for business can also be good to the planet. It takes each of us to make a difference for all of us.”

## A Growing Trend

Teresa Miller, owner of Treats Unleashed, a retailer of natural pet foods with seven locations in Missouri, says she aimed to turn her stores green as a continuation of her eco-friendly efforts at home.

“I had been doing these practices in my own home, but wanted to extend them to my business,” Miller said. “So I began encouraging staff members to reuse and recycle, as I believe these are good human practices.”

In addition to recycling their of-

fice supplies with local animal shelters — which receive money from a third-party for the used goods — Treats Unleashed has instituted a “bag buyback” program that has eliminated the need for plastic grocery sacks during the checkout process.

Customers are given sturdy paper bags, each equipped with a handle, that they are encouraged to return to the store at a later visit for a credit toward a future purchase.

“These paper bags are more expensive — we could have easily bought cheap plastic bags,” Miller said. “Yes, the upfront costs are higher, but in the long run, this benefits our environment and our community. There’s been very good reception to this program so far.”

Petsense, a pet supplies/services



## COVER STORY

retailer based in Scottsdale, Ariz., with 69 stores in 21 states, is also preparing to introduce reusable shopping bags in all of its stores.

"It makes economic sense to print and utilize these bags for all stores and drive down the cost of production," Joshua Patterson, sales and profit manager for Petsense, said. "It's important for retailers to understand the advantages that green practices can deliver, from cost savings to a positive image in the community."

### One Step at a Time

To help lower overhead and reduce her carbon footprint, Laurie Morse-Dell structured Pup's Place LLC, a Michigan-headquartered online retailer of non-toxic dog products, as a business where she and her employees work remotely from their homes.

The company uses eco-friendly shipping materials from Globe Guard made from 100 percent post-consumer waste and recycled paper. Large products are shipped directly to customers from the manufacturer to avoid duplicate packaging and shipping, and the staff uses electronic files to avoid paper printing, except for the shipping invoice.

In addition, the owner donate to the group, 1% for the Planet, an alliance of businesses that donate at least 1 percent of their annual revenues to environmen-

tal organizations worldwide.

"There was never a question in my mind, if I was going to operate a business, it was going to be green," said Morse-Dell. "In my previous careers, I was always the one setting up recycling bins for paper and aluminum cans in the office. Knowing my business is now eco-friendly and making a difference is very gratifying to me."

Holly Sher, owner of Evanger's Dog

**"We feel that implementing sustainable practices resonates with more customers today."**

—Kathi Molloy

and Cat Food Company in Wheeling, Ill., said one of the ways she likes to measure a company's green efforts is to determine how much garbage it creates.

"We produce very little -- the equivalent of a standard family 60-gallon can each day," Sher said.

The company uses recycled packaging materials, has an on-site recycling program, supplies its water from its own on-

site well, uses green trays for food cases, employs LED lighting with motion-activated lights to conserve electricity, equips its motors with variable frequency drives to use less power and uses steam to heat its plant, and cook its food products.

Also, 90 percent of the ingredients used are sourced locally within 50 miles of its plant, and product labels use 80 percent recycled material and soy-based inks.

"Evanger's was originally a farm," she explained. "As a tribute to our roots, we wanted to continue the sustainable practices started 78 years ago, as this gives us the most control over the quality of our products. Ultimately, most of our green efforts save the company money. For example, we get rebates on the cardboard we recycle, so we have an additional incentive to maintain being green."

### Spreading the Message

They say no man is an island, and no company operating greener is an island, either. Ask Kathi Molloy and she'll tell you that businesses that demonstrate environmental responsibility encourage consumers and other businesses to do the same.

"We feel that implementing sustainable practices resonates with more customers today," said Molloy, co-owner and founder of Bark Place, a pet spa and boutique in Boston, Mass., which installed reclaimed furniture and eco-friendly flooring made from recycled rubber in its store. "People appreciate that you're making green choices in your operations and 'walking the walk.'"

Bark Place also uses energy-efficient lighting, paper bags, recycled materials and a local company that enables customers to shop via codes on their phone and receive emailed receipts.

"By alerting your customers to your green practices, you spread awareness of the need for environmental consciousness," Sonia Charry, marketing director for PawPosse.com in Scottsdale, Ariz., where recycled paper and packaging materials are routinely used, said. "That alone magnifies the impact of each green decision."

Morse-Dell believes going green is a wise decision because, ultimately, it's better for the buying public, "and in the end it's the consumer who will make the decision



Spencer Williams, owner/president of West Paw Design, creates dog sweaters made from reclaimed cotton that would otherwise go to waste.



who to buy from. As the entire spectrum of green products grows, consumers will increase their awareness and demand for green products in other industries, especially the pet industry, since pets are such an important part of many families' day-to-day lives. If your company isn't making a conscious effort to be green, consumers will sway to those that are."

### Set an Example

By setting a good example in your market, you can also influence other area companies to do the same, says Nathan Kaufman, web content manager for One Stop Green in Houston, Tex., which sells eco-friendly products.

"One business makes a difference because it forces its competitors to act or potentially miss their opportunity," Kaufman said. "Also, compared to homes, many businesses consume more resources and generate more waste, so a business going green makes a bigger difference."

Ecologically-minded companies should not only practice what they preach by operating greener, but should also expect the same of their business partners, said Jennifer Woofter, president of Strategic Sustainability Consulting in Herndon, Va., which provides green consultation services for pet supply firms.

"Consider creating a vendor code of conduct with terms and conditions that state, if I buy from you, you have to meet certain criteria for quality, reliability and sustainability," Woofter said. "This creates expectations for suppliers that they should have an environmental management system in place and that they seek to use recyclable and biodegradable materials whenever possible. This may also provide some measure of legal protection if you choose to stop doing business with a vendor that, for example, you've learned is dumping toxic waste into the river behind its facility."

### A Worthwhile Investment

Webster cautions that opting for sustainability in efforts such as producing locally and manufacturing eco-friendly products is an investment that can be expensive, especially initially, for a business. Consequently, the goods and services often have to be priced higher to the consumer than

many alternative choices.

"However, there is an audience that is willing to pay for this," she said. "Those people who are committed to purchasing green products understand what we have and embrace our products."

Going green "almost always comes with a higher up-front cost. The benefits are seen down the road," Kaufman said.

For instance, when calculating the re-

turn on investment of installing an LED lighting system in your business, it can take two to three years to recoup that initial investment, but in the long run, it will save money.

Don't let fears about going green possibly being a passing fad or a trend with a short shelf life stop you from adopting sustainable measures in your operations, Morse-Dell said.

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