

It's Raining Cat and Dog Lovers

No matter who you're marketing to, you're more than likely to reach a pet owner. After all, 63 percent of U.S. households—more than 71 million homes—have one or more pets, according to the 2007-2008 National Pet Owners Survey, conducted by the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association. But while the pet owner market might encompass more than half the country, not all pet owners are created equal.

Bountiful Litter

Dogs and cats are the most frequently owned pets, according to the APPMA, with dogs in 44.8 million households and cats in 38.4 million; freshwater fish are the next most commonly owned pet (14.2 million homes), followed by birds (6.4 million), small animals like hamsters or ferrets (6 million), reptiles (4.8 million), and equines (4.3 million). In terms of overall numbers, freshwater fish outnumber everything else with 142 million in homes. Cats come next with 88.3 million, then dogs with 74.3 million.

Pet industry expenditures totaled \$38.5 billion in 2006. Pet food accounted for the bulk of the spending at \$15.4 billion, followed by roughly equal numbers for supplies and over-the-counter medicine (\$9.3 billion), and vet care (\$9.2 billion). Rounding out the category are pet services such as grooming and boarding (\$2.7 billion) and live animal purchases (\$1.9 billion).

The Truth About Cats and Dogs

Pet owners are of all ages and genders, though women may dominate the market. Jo Sullivan, senior vice president of development and communications with the ASPCA, says

that while the nonprofit's donor base is 90 percent female with an average age of more than 55, its initial experiences in retail have revealed a different market. "We launched a licensed pet line this year to reach the pet parent audience, and we've found there's not a clear demographic—no age range or male-to-female ratio—that tends to dominate," she says.

Geoff Mott, president of PetGadgets.com, on the other hand, says 80 percent of the site's buyers are

er due to the adults being childless or to the children having moved away from home—tend to spend more on their pets than households where children are present.

Manufacturers that have traditionally served only humans have launched pet products lines. Paul Mitchell, for example, has a line of shampoos and conditioners for pets, while the upscale body product company Origins boasts a high-end silky coat dog shampoo. The online meat delivery company

Omaha Steaks sells steak treats. Harley-Davidson sells collars, bowls, caps and faux leather dog jackets, all bearing the Harley-Davidson logo. "Babies have monitoring systems, and people are doing that with their furry friends," says Mott, thanks to devices that let you monitor your pet remotely. "Eye

The screenshot shows the ASPCA website with a central banner for an ASPCA challenge. The banner text reads: "Are you up for the ASPCA challenge? Every one of you will be thanked until we meet our goal." Below the banner are several smaller sections with images of pets and text, including "Help us reach our \$500,000 goal by 10/1/07", "Help us save our way to a better future", "Help us support the ASPCA in its commitment to animal care", and "Help us fund our rescue efforts".

ASPCA's donor base is predominantly older females, but buyers of its new product line defy such neat categorization.

women. "Our predominant readership is female," agrees Lisa Evans, circulation director for Belvoir Media, which publishes *Whole Dog Journal*, *Dog Watch* and *Cat Watch*. "More women make purchasing decisions for the pets than men, and when we've done testing, women respond better to the lists."

Product Crossbreeding

While people often joke about treating their pets as children, sales figures show this statement to be true. Ellen Blumenkrantz, an independent list broker who works with one of the largest pet mailers in the industry, says households without children—wheth-

er drops, the snore stop, massage beds, stair assistance—there are tons of human products being adapted for pets," he describes.

Such developments result from increased discretionary income along with changes in pet owner perception as to what's appropriate for their animal companions. Dog owners used to leave their animals outside with no protection, for example, whereas today's standards require a dog house—perhaps even one that's insulated—and that's hardly the limit to what's possible as is demonstrated by the climate-controlled pet carriers

(continued on page 55)

(continued from page 53)

coming onto the market. "Would you buy a home or car that doesn't have heat?" asks Robert Inello, president and CEO of Komfort Pets.

Admittedly many people would have laughed at this type of problem a few years ago, says Mott. "Some Web sites used to mock pet tech gadgets, but now they report on them."

In the past six months, says Mott, "people have been gravitating towards home tests where they can test an animal's breed or check for inherent diseases. If you know that your dog is part Husky, for example, then you can watch for ailments associated with that breed."

Pet funerals, pet hospice and designated cemetery space next to the human owner are other developments in the trend toward humanizing pets. "Sometimes these announcements seem weird, but it usually doesn't take more than a year or two before they become standard," says Mott. "I think we're quite early with the pet market and what people are demanding."

Cleaning products are synergistic with pet-related items since fur and noseprints make their way into every part of a pet owner's home. "One of the ASPCA's corporate partners is Procter & Gamble, and we did a cross-promotion with Swiffer, Bounce and lams that targeted the pet audience," Sullivan mentions.

Animal Attraction: Making the Sale

Blumenkrantz says she compiles lists in bits and pieces from cooperative catalog databases. "A lot of files don't have a large array of pet products, but because they track things on a SKU level, you can know which people have bought, say, the collectible dog and cat plates," she says. "We find that people who purchase a pet product are much more responsive than people who just own a pet, and if the product is something for the pet to use, such as a coat or collar, that's better than just a product with a pet theme."

Mott says e-mail is often the best way to reach pet owners. "We have short messages with a promotion or product news, and no images," he says.

As for messaging, Evans suggests sticking to a positive approach. "Most [pet owners] are looking for information to solve problems," she says. "My cat is acting weird; my dog has this itchiness." Even with the pet food recalls, which we're talking about in our marketing material, we're predominantly positive, talking about what to feed your dog or cat."

Belvoir Media has conducted outer envelope testing with pictures ranging from cute puppies to older dogs with arthritis and has found mixed results. "We do something like a puppy, and sometimes it works and sometimes

it doesn't," says Evans. "It has to do with where the pet owner is in the life cycle of the pet."

To find points of commonality among pet owners that you can capitalize on in your messaging, you need to focus on the types of animals they own. "Dog owners tend to be house owners," says Blumenkrantz. "They're more likely to do things outdoors and have a fenced-in backyard so they can put up a dog runner." Bird owners tend to have an interest in gardening; cat owners tend to be concentrated in urban areas since cats make better pets in apartments. Cat owners often are stereotyped as little old ladies, and Blumenkrantz says there's some truth behind it. "People with cats tend to be into needlepoint and knitting. Not every cat owner does crafts, especially people in their 20s and 30s, but as they get older, you'll find that to be the case."

Pet owners are a large, diverse group willing to spend money on their "fur babies." If you have a product or service that can help humans spoil their pets, and you use positive messaging to market it, you'll find it raining cats, dogs—and sales. ■

Linda Formichelli and W. Eric Martin are freelance writers based in New Hampshire. Formichelli wrote about marketing to golfers in last month's issue, and Martin tackled pURLs for the October 2007 issue.

Lists to Test

The following is a sample of lists available to reach this market.

ASPCA: 358,774 donors whose gifts support education and animal welfare programs as well as care for abandoned and injured animals. Price: \$65/M. Call: Atlantic List Company, (703) 528-7482.

Belvoir Media Group Pet Masterfile: 154,639 active subscribers to one of Belvoir's dog and cat newsletters. Price: \$100/M. Call: RMI Direct Marketing, (203) 798-0448.

Doctors Foster & Smith Package Insert Program: 1.5 million inserts annually in shipments of pet care products for dogs, cats and other domesticated animals. Price: \$65/M. Call: Walter Karl Midwest, (847) 273-5300.

Humane Society of the United States - Conventional File: 1.36 million donors to the nation's largest humane organization dedicated to both domestic and wild animals. Price: \$75/M. Call: List America, (202) 298-9206.

New Pet Owner Insert Program from Dialogue Company: More than 2 million inserts annually placed in care kits handed out by shelters to new pet owners. Price: \$50/M. Call: Statistics, (203) 778-8700.

North Shore Animal League: 592,903 donors to a national, nonprofit animal shelter. Price: \$65/M. Call: Direct Media Inc., (203) 532-1000.