

A Dog's Doggy Bag

Products for on-the-go feeding and watering center on convenience.

By Wendy Bedwell-Wilson

Whether on a long hike in the woods, a three-day weekend at the beach or a cross-country road trip, a dog has to eat and drink. A growing category of products designed for dishing out food and water on the go makes the job easy and convenient for pet owners—and presents retailers with a chance to help customers solve problems they didn't even know they had.

"Sometimes, the first thing retailers have to do is help consumers understand that they have a problem before they can start throwing solutions at them," said Tibor Siklosi, head of product development for Bergan LLC in Monkey Island, Okla. "A well-organized travel category will scream solutions to very real problems. If the problems are not self-evident and intuitively recognized in the category, consumers are going to walk right by it all day and never put the two together.

"Not all people will need trav-

el feeding and watering," he continued. "But retailers have an opportunity to point out the options to putting food in a zipper-close bag, for instance, because sometimes dog owners don't necessarily have eyes for travel-related solutions."

After customers realize they can pack 10 pounds of food in a reusable and transportable container rather than schlepp a 33-pound bag of food for a weekend trip, or after they discover they can offer their pet food or water wherever and whenever thanks to portable dishes, they'll stock up, said Gordon Spater, president of Kurgo in Salisbury, Mass.

"Whether it's a long trip or just an errand around town, more people are bringing their dogs with them more places," he said. "Now is the time for retailers to make sure they're addressing those needs."

Those needs vary depending on the demographic, said Ted Ellwood, owner of Petacular in Lon-

don, Ontario, Canada. Although demand for on-the-go travel products is low, he said he stocks items his customers may need.

"There's not a huge demand, but if our customers are going to be traveling across country, we point them to a travel bowl and water dish," Ellwood said.

Cross-country expeditions, however, aren't the only occasion for travel bowls. Mary Lee Withers, a clerk at PC's Pantry for Dogs and Cats Inc. in Boulder, Colo., said she routinely sells collapsible dishes to customers who simply enjoy outings with their four-legged friends.

"The collapsible bowls are a best bet for walks or hikes because dog owners can carry them in their pocket or coat," she said. "We also sell spill-proof bowls and the Gulpy Pet Water Dispenser, which looks like a water bottle with a plastic tray that folds down. It can be hooked to your belt. That's popular with people with medium to small dogs."

Regardless of where they're traveling, dog owners want to make sure their pets enjoy the

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Some Unexpected Competition

As experts in all things pet, retailers who specialize in products for four-legged friends might think they have the market covered, but some unexpected competition may lurk, especially when it comes to travel and outdoor products. Some automotive and sporting-goods stores have added a pet product aisle, said Jerry Warner, president of Max Pet Industries in Brunswick, Ohio.

"I get multiple reorders from backpack stores on the East Coast," he said. "For a product designer, it's interesting because you don't think about where the product is going to be successful. You think you create a dog bowl and it's going to sell really well in a dog store. And then you find out that different channels are interested and they're the ones that might sell the most."

Gayle Brooks, president of Peak-Waggers Inc. in Nederland, Colo., said she's actively trying to get her products into backpacking stores and display them alongside human trail food.

The crossover makes sense, said Tibor Siklosi, head of product development for Bergan LLC in Monkey Island, Okla., but pet specialty retailers ought to rethink their strategy.

"Maybe they were too focused on



Retailers can stay ahead of their non-pet-specialty competition by becoming the go-to source for pet travel.

consumables, but pet specialty has missed organizing their hard goods to react to consumer travel needs," he said. "It's interesting that you can now go to automotive stores that have pet solutions that some pet specialty stores haven't gotten yet.

"Pet specialty should be leading the charge ahead of the trend," Siklosi continued. "There's an opportunity for retailers to reposition themselves as the leader in pet and understanding pet problems when it comes to traveling on the go." —WBW

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same comforts as they do, said Jerry Warner, president of Max Pet Industries in Brunswick, Ohio.

"When I'm out hiking with Jasper out on a trail and it's time for a drink, I can put the water in a dish and let him have a cool drink, too," he said. "Or for agility groups, when dogs are running through their routines, the parent can put the water out and know that when the dog goes over and drinks, it's going to be a cool, fresh drink of water."

Products designed for on-the-go feeding and watering include easy-to-transport food, food storage solutions, collapsible bowls and water bottles and dishes that cool and refresh pets. They're all centered on features that make on-demand food and water convenient and fresh, said Denver-based Sarah Julian, director of corporate communications at Petmate.

"We know that people are taking family road trips more often with their dogs, and a lot of companies are creating products that go along with that," she said. "But food and water on the go is just as convenient for a walk as it is for a trip, and so designers are making items that are easy to carry, that clip on the belts and that can be put in backpacks. You'll see thermoses, coolers and disposable canine Tupperware. There's a vast array of products right now, and I think it's going to continue to



A wealth of new travel products can help on-the-go owners keep their dogs hydrated.

evolve as we continue to integrate pets into our families."

Evolved to solve the problem of transporting heavy food on hikes, dehydrated food sealed in water-tight single-serve pouches ensures trail-couraging canines will enjoy a full belly of food, said Gayle Brooks, president of Peak Waggers Inc. in Nederland, Colo.

"If there is trail food for humans that's dehydrated or freeze-dried, there's got to be a way to do the same kind of gourmet meal for dogs," she said. "So I created trail food that rehydrates in about five minutes using only 8 ounces of water. But anyone who's taking a trip can use it. Nobody who's going on a road trip wants to lug a 30-pound bag of dog food."

Food storage solutions have enjoyed an evolution, too, said Nancy Cribb, president of Furry Travelers Inc. in Delray Beach, Fla. Many of the newest designs combine storage, service and portability in one convenient contraption.

"Omega Paw, for example, has a lunch box where the base of the container stores the food and the lid is actually two bowls," she said. "Dog owners can put water in one of the bowls and food in the other, and it's an elevated feeder because the bowls are sitting on top of the container. They're really popular. It comes with a handle on it so it can just be carried from the car to wherever someone is going."

Borgan offers a similar product

with its own unique features, Cribb continued, explaining that a bowl swings out from the bottom of the food container and fills via gravity flow.

"It has a handle on top, too, so it's very easy to carry, and it's airtight so the food will stay fresh," she said.

Transportable bowls—one of the most popular on-the-go food and water accessories—have also evolved. Along with lined canvas or nylon vessels that fold into a pocket or purse, collapsible colorful silicone bowls have hit pet store shelves. Their low price point allows pet owners to stock up and stash them wherever their dog might need a drink or a snack, Julian said.

"The collapsible bowls are an all-time favorite and always will be," she said. "There's nothing more convenient. They're waterproof; they can be folded and put in your glove box or purse; and you can put food or water in them, rinse them out and let them dry."

And to keep out-and-about pets hydrated, dog watering solutions range from bowls that fit into a car's cup holder and bottles with attached bowls to nylon cups that keep water cool, thanks to a freezable gel pack integrated into the dish's design.

"Pet owners freeze the gel pack and put it in a zippered compartment in the bottom of the bowl," Warner said. "Even with the gel pack, they can still fold the bowl, put it in the travel pouch,

INDUSTRY VOICES

What's your best-selling travel bowl?

"Our best-selling travel bowl is probably the Ruff Wear bowl. It's a collapsible bowl that's small enough to go into a person's pocket or hook onto the leash."

—Mary Lee Withers, clerk at PC's Pantry for Dogs and Cats Inc. in Boulder, Colo.

"The collapsible Port-A-Bowl by Outward Hound sells well. And the Water Rover, which is a bottle with a bowl at the end of it, does well, too. There's a lid on it, and when you open it up water pours into the bowl. When you're done, you tilt it back and it goes back into the bottle."

—Ted Ellwood, owner of Petacular in London, Ontario, Canada

"What's been selling well are the foldable dog bowls, the pliable ones made out of material and canvas. We also sell quite a few of the travel Le Bistros from Petmate."

—Joellen McCartney, manager at Anderson Township Family Pet Center in Cincinnati

clip it to their leash or belt and go. The pack will stay frozen for up to four hours."

In order to sell these easy to

In order to sell these easy to pack and transport dishes, watering stations and food storage containers, retailers ought to consider creating a travel solution section in their store, Julian said.

"Because most of these products are small—which they have to be to be convenient, lightweight and easy to carry—retailers should merchandise them together to draw attention," she said. "They should also display the products near kennels, seat belts and other items used for travel so they can cross promote and cross sell."

When pet owners are looking for travel products, retailers should make them easy to find, Cribb added.

"Because more people are traveling with their pets, retailers should make travel sections in their stores for all their travel supplies, like car seat covers, booster seats, safety harnesses and travel bowls," she said. "I get so many customers that tell me they've been looking for travel accessories but they don't really know where to buy them. It's a market that a lot of pet stores, especially the boutiques, are missing." ■