

modifying pet behavior— the gentler way



From harmless sprays to flower-based remedies to imitation pheromones, there are lots of safe, stress-free products to help your customers solve common pet behavioral problems.

BY LISA PLUMMER

Behavior problems in dogs and cats aren't just annoying. They can test—even damage—the bond between owners and their pets. Excessive barking, digging, chewing, house soiling, furniture-scratching and other destructive behaviors are among the top reasons owners relinquish their pets to animal shelters each year, research shows.

“Research done in the 1990s, that I believe is still valid, indicated that about 40 percent of relinquished dogs are noted as having some type of behavior problem and about 30 percent of cats,” said Dr. Stephen Zawistowski, a certified applied animal behaviorist and executive vice president of programs for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (New York). “This would probably put the number of dogs relinquished with behavior problems around 500,000 to 1 million per year and about 400,000 to 600,000 cats.”

Disturbing statistics aside, not all pet owners are willing to give up on their furry companions without a fight. For these committed people, help is available in the form of a wide range of behavior modification products. Traditional aversive training methods

The SentryHC Good Behavior Pheromone Collar from Sergeant's is one of the latest examples in the growing category of kinder, gentler products to curb unwanted behaviors such as chewing.

such as static shock collars or mats remain popular, but gentler products that address a host of behavior issues are gaining ground.

With the shift in perception of pets from “just a dog” living in the backyard to a beloved member of the family, it makes sense that consumers would become more interested in alternative products that address behaviors gently, said Michael Dillon, president of Dillon Media, a marketing research firm headquartered in Rockville, Md.

“This subsegment has great potential for long-term growth because it aligns with the evolution of the pet industry and prevailing consumer trends toward the humane treatment of pets,” Dillon said.

Furthermore, dogs learn better when they’re not stressed, according to Mary Kay Grahn, owner of Smarty Paws Canine Coaching in Las Vegas. “Dogs are going to learn better from something that’s not anxiety-provoking,” Grahn said. “With the more preventative products, dogs are not as stressed and a problem behavior is addressed only when it happens.”

Here’s a look at some “kinder and gentler” behavioral modification products that can help your customers solve common problems.

Discouraging Unwanted Behaviors

Collars that emit a harmless pet-detering spray when activated remotely by the owner can be an effective training tool. Spray collars often employ citronella because most animals hate the smell, yet the all-natural, nontoxic spray won’t stress or harm the pet. Lemon-scented and unscented sprays also are available. The sight, sound, sensation and, in the case of the scented sprays, the smell all help curb unwanted behaviors.

For example, the Spray Commander, a remote control training collar for dogs from Radio Systems Corp./PetSafe (Knoxville, Tenn.), allows owners to interrupt unwanted behaviors such as digging, jumping up and more by signaling the collar to release spray near the animal’s snout.

Owners also can reinforce positive behaviors by signaling the device to release a rewarding tone.

For kitties, PetSafe’s SSSCat is helpful for such things as keeping cats off tables and countertops and out of plants, and discouraging furniture scratching. Filled with compressed gas, the unit



The dual-sided furniture throw from PetzOff keeps pets off the couch when its dog-detering side is exposed but looks good when its decorative side is revealed, as in the inset photo.

has a built-in motion detector that senses a cat up to 3 feet away and emits an odorless spray that is startling but harmless to the animal. The battery-operated device can be adjusted to spray in different directions and angles.

These training and behavior control products are good choices for pet owners because they’re designed to discourage unwanted behaviors without causing pain, fear or anxiety, said Lisa Taylor, PetSafe marketing director.

“Our training tools and positive reinforcement systems are designed to educate pets or to address specific animal behavior problems in the most successful manner, whether in or around the home, and in the most comforting manner,” Taylor said. “When these products are used properly, the pet becomes a better behaved [one], which in turn strengthens the bond between pet and pet owner.”

Another simple, harmless solution to keep pets away from off-limit areas such as furniture and baby cribs is the PetzOff dual-sided throw blanket. The concept for the throw is based on a home remedy solution that uses aluminum foil to deter dogs and cats as most of them don’t like the look, sound or texture of it, said Mike Lwin, co-founder PetzOff Intl. Inc. (Orlando, Fla.). Released on the market less than two years ago, the throw has a shiny, polyester film on one side that looks and acts like aluminum foil and a decorative side that comes in a variety of colors to complement any room décor.

“Our big focus was [creating] a product that actually worked that didn’t harm, scare or shock the pet to work as a deterrent,” Lwin said. “It’s an easy solution without hurting or stressing the animal.”

Controlling Barking and Chewing

In dogs, excessive barking is a particularly bothersome issue—not just for owners, but for neighbors, too. Fortunately, several companies offer barking solutions to help keep Rover quiet whether the owner is home or away.

For example, PetSafe’s Deluxe Spray Bark Control collar includes an electronic bark-sensing unit that releases a citronella, lemon or unscented mist in front of the dog’s nose to deter barking. The patented Perfect Bark detection technology ensures that the unit is activated only by the dog wearing it. Because the collar is lightweight, it also can be worn as a regular collar.

Ultrasonic anti-bark devices that emit high-pitched sounds audible only to dogs represent another option for humans that want some peace and quiet. PetSafe’s Outdoor Bark Control, an ultrasonic unit designed in the form of a birdhouse, can be hung from a tree, wall or fence post. The unit’s internal microphone detects barking up to 50 feet away and emits an



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"These products are easy to use, easy to promote, priced attractively and offer the retailer good sales margins," Taylor said.

For dogs that like to use furniture or other household objects as chew toys, there's an all-natural solution in a spray bottle. Don't Chew Dare anti-chew spray, developed by Kathy Santo Everyday Pets (Mahwah, N.J.), deters destructive chewing with two lines of defense: scent and taste. The spray contains a mixture of bitter-tasting herbs (including white pepper and spearmint leaf) that tastes and smells horrible to dogs.

According to product creator Kathy Santo, a trainer and behaviorist, the 2-year-old product is all-natural so it isn't a stressor on the dog's system.

"All of my products help owners get a handle on some pretty serious issues that can, in some cases, overwhelm the owner to the point of reconsidering having a dog in their life," Santo said. "Our mission is to keep pets in their homes and out of shelters."

Easing Anxiety Issues

Separation anxiety is a common problem for pets, especially for those left alone for extended periods of time. Pheromone products represent one solution.

For example, the Comfort Zone line from Central Life Sciences (Phoenix) includes species-specific products in spray and diffuser forms. According to Dan Martinez, senior marketing manager, Comfort Zone with D.A.P. (Dog Appeasing Pheromones) mimics the natural pheromones a mother dog produces while nursing to calm and reassure her puppies. These natural chemicals continue to have the same effect on dogs throughout their lives, he said.

"Numerous clinical studies have been conducted on Comfort Zone [products] to determine product efficacy," Martinez said. "Some recent clinical studies show that Comfort Zone with D.A.P. helps reduce destructive behavior in 91 percent of dogs, excessive barking and whimpering in 65 percent of dogs and house soiling in 75 percent of dogs."

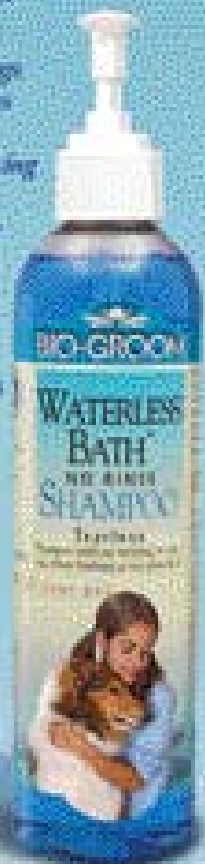
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facial pheromone a cat leaves behind after rubbing its face on an object, such as a table leg, in order to make an area feel safe and inviting. However, when feeling distressed or threatened, cats also may mark their territory by urinating or scratching. Using pheromones to help calm and appease the cat has been proven to reduce these unwanted behaviors, Martinez said.

“Clinical studies show that Comfort Zone with Feliway has been proven to reduce urine marking and scratching by 95 percent,” Martinez added.

The Comfort Zone diffuser, which is plugged into an electrical socket, offers continuous control in the home and new environments, while the Comfort Zone spray works well for spot applications, he explained.

New to the Comfort Zone product line, after debuting at Global Pet Expo in February, Comfort Zone Wipes are a portable solution to comfort pets

in stressful situations, such as travel, Martinez added. Available in a convenient five-pack, they can be used on furniture, walls, crates, beds or other areas.

Also debuting at Global Pet Expo in February, SentryHC Good Behavior Pheromone Collar for Dogs from Sergeant’s Pet Care Products Inc. (Omaha, Neb.) conveniently calms stressed or anxious dogs at home or on the go, said Caryn Stichler, vice president of marketing. The collar releases a synthetic pheromone via a sustained release technology that works up to 30 days, she explained.

In studies conducted in a United Kingdom-based animal behavior institute and home markets, the pheromone collar proved effective in modifying stress-related behaviors such as excessive barking, destructive behavior and inappropriate marking, said Stichler.

SOOTHING THE SAVAGE BEAST

Musical solutions represent another way to address stress, separation anxiety and loneliness in cats and dogs.

And Felix Pando, a music producer, composer and arranger, says he has discovered the kind of music pets like best. After roughly five years of study in partnership with German veterinarian Dr. Franz Wirth, Pando discovered that certain instruments, tones, acoustic frequencies and sounds have a calming effect on pets. Pando blended them all together into the classical compositions of Beethoven, Chopin and Mozart to create the PandoMusic Classic Collection, from Pando Partners L.L.C. (Coral Gables, Fla.).

The six CDs—three designed for dogs and three for cats—include sound effects such as dogs barking, cats purring, birds chirping and household sounds. These, according to co-founder Stephen de Kanter, help get the pet’s attention so the calming effects of the classical melodies can shift the animal into a calmer state.

Diana Makeig, president of L & J Green Products (Fairfield, Iowa), took a different approach. After her daughter documented—as part of a school science project—that soothing music lessened canine anxiety and arousal by 18 percent, Makeig was inspired to release a collection of peaceful instrumental melodies enhanced with nature sounds.

The three-week study in a local veterinary kennel proved that dogs respond much more positively to calming music than to talk radio or silence, even in high-anxiety situations, said Makeig.

Because L & J also manufactures natural and organic grooming products under the deBotanica name, Makeig said it made sense to create a natural, drug-free solution to help canine professionals as well as pet owners calm stressed and anxious pets. What evolved was Companion Music, Volume I, developed especially for the company’s high-end gift line, Botanica Boutique.

Composer and musician Bryan Kirk Zwaheln combined relaxing musical compositions with sounds pets might hear in a nature setting. “This music is similar to the kind of soothing music you’d hear played in a spa or during a massage,” Makeig said.

The response has been so positive that Volume II is in the works, she added.

—Lisa Plummer

A cat version of the collar, SentryHC Good Behavior Pheromone Collar for Cats, launched in March.

The market potential for such natural solutions to behavioral problems is strong, Stichler said. "Realize that there are a large percentage of pet owners who have dogs or cats with behavior issues. The nice thing about the collar is it's an economical, easy solution to administer for a complicated, frustrating issue for many pet owners."

Flower essences address separation anxiety along with a host of other behavior issues from aggression to training troubles, said Meg Harrison, owner of BlackWing Farms (Pauma Valley, Calif.).

Inspired by Dr. Edward Bach's Rescue Remedy, a flower essence tincture used to counter negative emotions in people, Harrison developed a line of 21 healing blends for animals.

"Essences are the most humane, gentle, eco-friendly, effective and noninvasive manner of training and behavior modification that is available today," said Harrison, who has been creating the tinctures for more than 20 years. "Emergencies, evacuations, post-trauma, stress and strain from competition are all addressed and assisted by our remedies. Behavior change is permanent before the end of the bottle. That is our money-back guarantee."

The essences can be sprayed in the air, lightly massaged on the tips of pets' ears or put in drinking water, food or treats.

Selecting the Right Product

Behavioral modification products are not fix-alls, said Dr. Jacqui Neilson, a board-certified veterinary behaviorist and owner of Animal Behavior Clinic (Portland, Ore.). However, they are useful if used for the right reasons, she said.

"If a product has been shown to be effective and you're using it for the correct [behavior] indication, then it can be a helpful part of an overall behavior modification program," Nelson said. "[However], the real solution for behavior problems is to not just to look at one sign, such as barking or digging, but instead to understand the underlying motivation for that behavior, then identify an intervention that is appropriate."

Your job is making sure customers select the right product for each

behavior issue as well as marketing them in a way that makes owners feel more comfortable about giving them a try.

Manufacturers suggest making these products more attractive to customers by offering price promotions and trial coupons, mail-in rebates and additional placement programs.

Also, educating staff and providing POP materials to help educate consumers is key to helping pet owners make informed decisions that can lead to product success.

By helping dog and cat owners

correct undesirable behaviors, gentle behavior modification products have a useful place in an overall training program—and on your shelves. When unwanted behaviors are extinguished and the emotional bond between owner and pet is strengthened, the likelihood of pets being surrendered to shelters decreases. In the end, that is the real success story.

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Lisa Plummer is a freelance writer based in Las Vegas.

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