

<< Polladras Pet Supplies in Camborne says she too, stocks premium and supermarket brands due to customer demand. "The 'better' foods do not often offer the sort of price deals that a small independent retailer can take advantage of, therefore, we can rarely offer competitive deals. We trade in one of the poorest parts of the country and county; with that double whammy, we have to cater for our customers' purses!"

"All our staff members are trained in nutrition and the benefits of feeding a correct diet. This is something that the supermarkets (even the 'pet' markets) cannot offer. Our advice is free, but often the price of the recommended food is prohibitive and only some people can maintain the cost."

Aaron Hicks of The Ark Crook in County Durham says he thinks independents should stock specialist brands: "Stocking brands of better quality and that are harder to source in big stores should improve footfall and gain confidence in cat owners."

Mark Lunn of Pet Truck in Lancashire avoids supermarket brands on grounds of quality. He said: "Education/communication is a key element of the change that cat lovers need more than anything. How can specialist retailers promote quality cat foods both wet and dry if the customer has no visual link to bad diets; dogs are well known, but cats?"

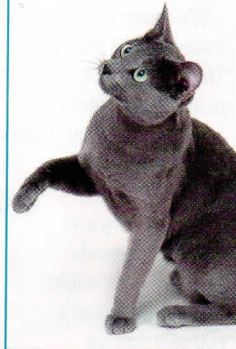
And John Moore, of Swords Pet Store in Co. Dublin, says his shop started stocking a few supermarket two years ago as a trial, but only a few customers wanted them. He said: "After six months or so the sales of these brands were too small to warrant the shelf space. We were able to talk to some of the customers who purchased these brands and persuade them to try a higher quality food."

"We no longer stock any of the big supermarket brands, but have noticed a significant rise in dry and wet cat food sales over the last two years."

For other retailers like Kerry Roe of I Want Pet Foods in Clay Cross,

A whopping 70% said their customers choose to mix and match brands and flavours.

pbwnews cat food survey 2014



Derbyshire, and David Sanders of Yaxley Pet Care in Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, offering their own private-label cat food has given them that point of difference to challenge the supermarket and online offering. Both say their own-label has been a success and they would recommend it. David said: "Good quality own brands are the way forward."

Yet cat specialist retailer Sam Atherton-Ryan of Elliotts Pet Warehouse points out that stocking specialist brands is all well and good, but what happens when 'these suppliers sell to large chains and then tell you that you cannot stock it because you are too close to one of these chains, what are you to do'?

"This is the case with Orijen who sell to Kennelgate, who have stores popping up all over the place. What would you do if you were a specialist supplier? Supply a chain who operates by employing kids on minimum wage, or sell to a specialist retailer with extensive knowledge built over 38 years and who has written a book on the subject?" ■

GONE ARE the days when pet cats had to make do with just a scratching post and a comfy bed. With the rise in popularity of the ideas of US cat behaviourist Jackson Galaxy, the word on everyone's lips is 'catification'. If you're not already familiar with the term, catification is about 'creating feline-friendly environments that cater to a cat's natural instincts to climb, perch, rest, play and own their space', explains Jackson on his website.

There are already several specialist catification businesses that offer ready or custom-made cat furniture solutions such as cat shelving and catios (that's an enclosed outdoor area to you and me!), but choosing such a specialist solution can get very expensive for cat owners.

Luckily, affordable catification can be achieved by using a variety of household objects or materials that can be found in garden sheds, cupboards and garages, as well as by using products that you, as a pet retailer, already have for sale.

If you're savvy about exactly what catification is and how it can be achieved, you can advise your customers accordingly and boost their loyalty to you along with your profits. The Pet Food Manufacturers' Association's 2014 *Pet Population* report states that 17% of the UK population currently own cats. Capitalise on this section of the population's desire to make their homes as cat friendly as possible, and you'll be promoting responsible pet ownership as well as maximising your revenue.

Up, up and away!

Cats like to have high vantage points from which to survey their kingdoms. It's part of their natural behaviour as it makes them feel secure and safe from any potential predator on the ground, so it's no wonder that cat trees are a popular choice with customers.

It's possible to stock specialist cat shelving, stairs and walkways to create routes for cats to travel on vertical surfaces, but the cost of buying enough to fill a home can soon add up. If you have customers looking to make the most of the space they've got, all it takes is some imagination and creativity. If they make good use of existing furniture and surfaces, they can

Not just a cat tree...

Ever heard of 'catification'? Emily Fowler explores this emerging trend in which cat owners seek to create that bit of cat heaven in their homes, and explains how retailers can help their customers achieve this

use cat trees of different heights along with shelving, furniture and ledges to create multiple levels, giving their cat a path from the floor, up to the highest point and back down again.

Adding basic shelving to a wall that's specifically earmarked for cats is a popular, and affordable, way to catify a room. Covering the shelves with material, such as the cat or dog blankets you sell, gives cats a better surface to leave their scent mark on and, of course, makes it more comfortable for them. The more cats there are in a household, the more separate runs are needed, because each cat needs their own space without the risk of running into another cat.

Perhaps your customers have a high shelf or window-ledge that's perfect for a cat vantage point, and they just need to work out a way for the cats to get up there. As an example, in my house there's a high window at the top of the stairs that overlooks a big oak tree (perfect for bird and squirrel viewing), but isn't particularly accessible to us humans. We built a series of shelves and platforms, starting with a raised cat bed, which our cat can use to reach the window ledge.

Putting extra cat beds in high places, like on top of wardrobes, is another valuable suggestion you can make to your customers.

Nothing like a good scratch

Scratching is a natural behaviour in cats, and not something they do because they want to ruin a nice leather sofa – despite what some of your customers might think. They scratch to scent mark an area using the scent glands in their paws, remove the dead layers of their claws, and stretch out their bodies.

As well as suggesting scratching posts and boards as standalone products, you can encourage customers

to use their creativity in incorporating scratch products into their catification plans. They can attach scratchable materials (like sisal, carpet or even cardboard) to surfaces and the sides of cat furniture to make scratchy surfaces that will encourage their cats away from their good furniture.

Environmental enrichment is essential, especially for the increasing number of cats whose owners keep them inside permanently because of health issues such as FIV or deafness, or simply concern over their cats' safety. This means plenty of toys to keep feline minds occupied.

Your cat-owning customers are likely to already be purchasing the products you stock specifically for cats, such as catnip toys, indoor grasses, interactive toys and tunnels, but think about what you could offer that isn't in the cat department. Such as the perfect 'cat TV' for indoor cats: what could be better than the view of the outside world, with everything it has to offer a curious cat? By putting a bird table outside a window and keeping it regularly stocked with bird food, your customers' cats will have a veritable feast of visual entertainment.

When you help your customers understand affordable catification, you're arming them with the knowledge of how to use everyday household items along with products from your shop to catify their homes without too much expense. Your customers will thank you for it, and so will your margins.

These make perfect products for clued-up owners who want to catify their home:

- Cat trees and furniture
- Scratching posts or boards
- Cat beds
- Cat toys (including interactive toys)