



Pet Store Pro[®] Takes Training to New Heights in Colorado

Lots of people talk about training their employees, but it's difficult to find the time. Pet retailers have to balance the desire to train with the need to have people on the sales floor helping customers.

That's why Marvin Schaffer, owner, and Linda Morrison, manager, of J&M Aquatics & Pet Center, a full-line pet store in Grand Junction, Colo., were so pleased when they saw Pet Store Pro at a trade show.

"Our people have to know a lot about pets and pet products, but we didn't have time to develop in-house training," said Linda. "Pet Store Pro was the ideal solution because it is complete, detailed and ready to go."

The five employees at J&M Aquatics handle a wide range of pets and pet products. Customers may come in with a question about dog food or to choose new saltwater fish, and the employees have to move seamlessly between departments at the 8,000-square-foot store. J&M prides itself on being called, "the pet professionals." Pet Store Pro helps employees learn in-depth information quickly.

Created by the Pet Industry Distributors Association (PIDA) and offered free to qualified retailers, Pet Store Pro is an online training tool for people in the pet industry. Separate modules cover customer service and selling skills, merchandising techniques, as well as pet care for birds, cats, dogs, freshwater fish, saltwater fish, turtles and tortoises, snakes, lizards and small animals. A new module on nutrition provides critical information for selling pet food. Pet Store Pro can be accessed from any computer with an Internet connection for maximum convenience. And the study guides and tests can be printed for offline use.

"We require each of our employees to take the online training," said Linda. "The results are immediately evident — customer service improves."

At a time when many pet retailers are struggling with competition from big box stores, J&M Aquatics is differentiating itself with a knowledgeable in-store team. Customers know they're going to get their questions answered quickly, and they'll leave with the solutions they need for healthier pets.

"Pet Store Pro is filled with in-depth information — from selling skills to animal care — that benefits every employee — from new hires to seasoned pros," said Linda. "I've been working here for eight years, and I was pleased by the number of things I learned from the training."

J&M Aquatics recognizes the way to grow is to know more than the competition.

"We reward our employees with small raises when they complete the training," said Linda. "And we take great pride in everyone's accomplishments."

One employee who started at the store cleaning animal enclosures has used the training to earn a promotion onto the selling floor.

Customers have definitely responded well to the increasingly knowledgeable sales team. In fact, a blogger recently posted a review of J&M Aquatics online and mentioned the especially helpful staff. That's advertising you can't buy.

About PIDA

The Pet Industry Distributors Association (www.pida.org) was organized in 1968 to promote progress within the pet industry and to conduct programs and activities on behalf of the wholesaler-distributor. PIDA's mission is to enhance the well-being of the wholesaler-distributor, to promote partnerships with their suppliers and customers, and to work cooperatively with other organizations in fostering the human/companion animal bond. Members include pet product wholesaler-distributors, companion animal wholesalers, and pet product manufacturers.

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Linda Morrison, J&M Aquatics & Pet Center
Grand Junction, Colorado