



Pet Store Pro[®] Training Helps Independent Retailer Stand Out

Chip Beitel left a 20-year career in corporate retail as a management trainer to pursue a dream of owning his own pet store. Together with his wife, Dianna, and business partner Delores Ezell, in 2007, he purchased a 6,300-square-foot, full-line pet store in Plano, Texas.

What separates Plano Pets from the big box stores? Certainly not distance. "There are nine major pet chain retailers within five miles of us, as the crow flies," said Chip. "That means we have to be different and better than anyone else. Customers expect us to be the experts." That means every employee must be able to knowledgeably interact with customers anywhere in the store.

Making Pet Store Pro the cornerstone of their employee-training program helps them deliver. After hearing about the program at the Lone Star Pet Supply Open House in November 2008, Chip and his partners used it to initiate a commission-based compensation program for their ten employees.

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.

Chip has seen a lot of different types of training in his former career and even taught customer service. As a busy business owner, he finds Pet Store Pro invaluable for making sure employees learn what they need to know to provide the best advice to customers about pets and pet care.

"As an owner, the essentials tend to get bogged down by all my other responsibilities," he explained. "You forget that the 19-year-old you hired doesn't have the experience that you have. Pet Store Pro ensures my people learn the fundamentals about pet care, which they use to generate discussions with customers on the sales floor."

Although every Plano Pet employee is assigned to a particular home department, cross training with Pet Store Pro has further enhanced customer service throughout the store. "Having my employees complete every Pet Store Pro module gives them the confidence to answer questions outside their home departments," Chip said. "Customers don't get bounced around as much."

That kind of expertise is what keeps Plano Pets holding its own despite tough competition in a tougher economy.

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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Chip Beitel, Plano Pets
Plano, Texas