

Marketer bets big on U.S.'s growing canine obsession

FreshPet goes guerrilla to spread the word about refrigerated food

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AS MORE AMERICAN dogs are being treated like members of the family, one entrepreneurial company is trying to persuade owners to feed them that way—with meals straight from the refrigerator.

FreshPet, a privately owned Secaucus, N.J., company, in 2006 began marketing two brands of refrigerated dog food—FreshPet Select and **Deli Fresh**—which are made from 75% fresh ingredients including rice, beef and carrots, and are shaped like meatballs or sausage-like tubes. The company has distribution in about 2,000 stores nationwide, including pet stores such as PetCo and PetSmart, as well as grocery stores such as Kroger and Giant Eagle, and hopes to double the number of those outlets by the end of this year.

"Here pets are part of the family more than in any other part of the world," said Scott Morris, FreshPet co-founder, who got the idea from Australia. "But we're feeding them really like we're feeding farm animals."

Four years ago, Mr. Morris, a former executive with Meow Mix

and Purina, and his partners were inspired by the popularity of fresh pet food Down Under and started looking for ways to bring it to the U.S., where, with vets, dog walkers, fancy collars and a trend toward organic food, consumers arguably spend more money on their pets than themselves.

The American Pet Products Manufacturers Association estimates that U.S. pet-food purchases will reach \$16.9 billion in 2008, up from \$13.7 billion in 2003. FreshPet also got a boost from the 2007 recalls that inspired consumers to look for smaller, independent manufacturers that are less likely to source ingredients from China.

Mr. Morris and his partners are betting heavily that the growing importance of pets, the trend toward less-processed foods and fears about food safety will make consumers spend more money on dog food, even as they are spending less on themselves. FreshPet prices range from \$2.99 for a one-pound tube to \$9.99 for a six-pound tube, which is less than a week's worth of food for

a medium-size dog. A 13-ounce can of Alpo sells for less than \$1.

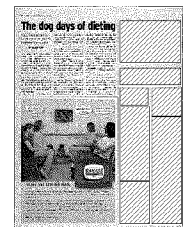
"The absolute No. 1 thing that we can do with consumers is put product in their hands," said Mr. Morris. "People are skeptical until they get it home and see the initial reaction, because the dogs go completely bananas. ... And with the long term, over a couple of weeks they talk about [their pets'] coat and energy level and excitement around mealtime."

PET BLOGGERS

While Mr. Morris and his partners are holding off on using broadcast TV to peddle their products until they become available in 20% to 30% of retail locations in a given market, he said his company has been focusing on guerrilla-marketing tactics to get samples in the hands of influencers. The company has two silver catering vans that pull up to dog parks and community events and pass out chow to the pooches.

FreshPet is also reaching out to pet bloggers and has tasked Grand Central Marketing in New York to get samples to anyone with a dog blog. Almost everyone contacted has written back to say they'll accept a sample, Mr. Morris said, and 75% to 80% have written about the food.

Another hurdle, Mr. Morris said, has been getting prime grocery-store location: in the center aisles. Its pitch to retailers is that "center store is kind of boring; we're bringing life back into center store," he said. "You're looking at 40 to 60 feet of pet food and then there's a giant refrigerator."





CATERING TO ITS CUSTOMERS: FreshPet hands out samples at dog parks.