

Pet projects bringing home the cash

By AIDA AHMAD

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THE pet industry in Malaysia has evolved and is still evolving from just being your typical neighbourhood store to a billion-ringgit business, said Pets Wonderland & Co Sdn Bhd director Gary Lim.

Many animal lovers today consider their pets as members of the family and even an adverse economy will not stop them from loosening their purse strings to ensure continuous care for their pets.



Well-equipped: Saw with a range of imported special diet cat food.

It is also fair to say that the pet industry is quite resilient to volatile economic climates as two of the industry players are expanding their businesses to cater for the growing demand of animal lovers all over the country.

Pets Wonderland, “where pets are family”, will open two new branches in IOI Mall, Puchong, and Paradigm Mall in Kelana Jaya.

They currently have two outlets — one in MidValley Megamall and Great Eastern Mall in Kuala Lumpur.

The company says the cost to set up the two new outlets will be over RM1mil.

“We are not just a pet shop where you can come to buy a cat or a dog. Pets Wonderland is a one-stop solution for all your pet’s needs — from livestock to food, to the services of our in-house veterinarians,” said Pets Wonderland director Gary Lim.

Since its inception in January 2001, the company has built up a product inventory with 17,000 items.

Their business model is to have a one-stop pet centre combined with a superstore concept, which will benefit families and children.



Pampering time: An employee of Pets

More grooming a terrier.

At their Mid Valley outlet, for example, you won't just see the usual cats and dogs, but also an array of more exotic furry creatures such as sugar gliders, hamsters, guinea pigs, rabbits, birds as well as reptiles like iguanas, geckos and bearded dragons, which come with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) permits.

But the business goes beyond just selling these animals to the public.

Pets Wonderland is also instrumental in educating their customers on the intricacies of pet keeping and the veterinary care needed, which is why in each of their outlets, vets are available to provide their expertise in caring for animals.

"Pets Wonderland also has a petting zoo where our customers, especially children, can spend time interacting with the animals," said Lim.



Additional items: The pet

stores also sell other necessities for the care of pets.

Moving beyond the cuddly and cute, Lim said he expects a return on investment of between 15% to 20% for each outlet

Lim says there is a change in lifestyles now and more people are willing to spend their disposable income on exotic pets.

“For us, it’s about providing convenience for our customers. Having knowledgeable staff also plays a big role in the success of our business,” added Lim, who has been in the business for the past six years.

Dry food and pet accessories makes up about half-a-billion ringgit of our business, he said.

Their in-house veterinarians are always available to answer any inquiries pertaining to pet care.

“Veterinary services make up a big portion of our business. It is quite expensive to engage the services of outside veterinarians. It is important that we have vets on our payroll to oversee the wellness of our in-house pets.”

Each new staff member of Pets Wonderland also goes through a week of orientation to learn the guidelines of the company and pet care.

“On our side, we practise stringent criteria in terms of selecting the animals before we take them in. We have good partnerships with the Malaysian Kennel Association (MKA) and Malaysia Cat Club.”

It is no surprise many of their regular customers have signed up to be members of the company’s Privilege Card loyalty programme.

They have 9,000 memberships to date.

Electronic engineering graduate Sean Saw, who is the CEO and brand founder of Pets More Sdn Bhd, started working in the pet shop when he was in secondary school, helping out his girlfriend’s father with the business at the first outlet in Jalan Sultan, Kuala Lumpur.

What started out as an online business — Petsmore.com, by husband-and-wife team Chin Kong Han and Lee Ah Peng in 2003 and their children Fionne Chin and Ys Chin, is now a major pet retail chain store, which has 20 outlets all over Malaysia.

“When the website first started out, business wasn’t picking up. People did not do a lot of credit card transactions. Back then, our main target was pet food and accessories and not so much animals,” said Saw.

He said with the help of various business connections, they managed to build up the name of the store with some hardwork and passion thrown in.

Pets More will also be opening two new outlets Carrefour Puchong and Setia City Mall.

All the Pets More outlets are wholly-owned by the family.

“The pet shop business is not only about selling pets and pet food. We believe in building a lifestyle of making your pets as part of the family. We always tell our staff to have the

passion to work in this business because, without passion, the business won't work," said Saw.

He said the start-up cost for Pets More was about RM1mil, adding that to maintain each outlet takes about RM300,000 to RM400,000 a year.

"The size of the outlet will determine the investment. At Empire Shopping Gallery, the outlet is 1,700 sq ft. The largest one, measuring 3,000 sq ft, is in One Utama Shopping Centre.

If you want to shop for a dog, Pets More has a good range of rare and exotic breeds including Chow Chow, Golden Retriever, Chihuahua, Japanese Chin, Shih Tzu, Pomeranian and the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel.

"We also register with MKA to get the certificates for the dogs. The association always encourages pure breeds and proper breeding. We also have grooming facilities in 15 of our outlets. Our clientele generally falls between the ages of 18 and 40 years," he said.

Other exotic animals available at Pets More include hamsters, sugar gliders, chinchillas, guinea pigs, rabbits and reptiles.

According to Saw, they sell about 300 to 400 hamsters a month.

"It's the most common pet for a person to start off with. Children will mostly go for them as a hamster is quite simple to maintain."

So what is their secret to success?

"The staff needs to be educated about the industry. We even send them for training where the cost would be about RM15,000 a month. We ask our staff, can this business be your future for the next 10 years? It's important that they have the passion for animals and how to care for them."