

Mini movies help wholesaler Petmanufacturers.com spotlight products.

By Dennis Arp

The movies available for viewing at Petmanufacturers.com aren't likely to generate much Oscar buzz, unless the academy launches new categories for best supporting collar or best adapted squeeze toy.

But for companies that make pet products and the retailers who carry them, the short demonstration films are getting a host of thumbs-up reviews.

"I think the idea is genius," says Michael Young, president of Wacky Walk'r, a company that makes stretchable dog leashes made from fitness tubing. "My products need some explaining, so I was extremely eager to give my dog-and-pony show, if you will—to do a tutorial and show the features and benefits of my products."

The films giving retailers an inside look at manufacturers' new products are a key way New York City-based Petmanufacturers.com seeks to distinguish itself from other online wholesalers.

The website isn't yet a year old, and

it's a bit early to gauge the impact of the video presentations, which were added in the past few months. But Jessica Hewel, vice president of sales for Petmanufacturers.com, said in April that in the previous two months volume on the site tripled, and the product videos had helped drive that traffic.

Once retailers get to the site, they need to find more than just videos, of course. The company's goal is to save retailers time and money by giving them a central site from which to restock their selves.

"A lot of retailers want access to products before hours or after work so they don't have to take time away from serving their customers," Hewel says. "We also felt there was a void in serving owners of boutiques and pet groomers and veterinarians who want to distinguish themselves by carrying unique products."

Development on Petmanufacturers.com began in late 2006, and in early July 2007, Hewel and others reached out to manufacturers and hoped they would find widespread interest.

"We were able to sign up 100 manufacturers," Hewel recalled. "That's how we knew we were ready."

The site was launched at the H.H. Backer Christmas Show in October 2007, with an emphasis on user-friendly features and promotional specials to help achieve a good first impression.

Krystal Fleming has owned a Three Dog Bakery in Omaha, Neb., for about a year. Though her 900-square-foot store is known for its gourmet dog treats, Fleming turned to Petmanufacturers.com because she also sells bowls, collars, leashes, bedding and other dog products.

She's a prime candidate for online wholesale service because hers is a small operation and she

can't afford to devote operating hours to ordering and follow-up at the expense of serving customers.

"I like their site because it's a lot easier to use than most," Fleming says. "It's more organized, so I can go in and select a bunch of orders without having to sort through a lot of information I don't need. If I can do things quickly, it's a big plus for me and my business."

Fleming also appreciates that Petmanufacturers.com is a young company out to build a reputation for customer service.

"Since they're new, they're really friendly," she says. "Like today. I was interested in raised feeders, and I wanted to know if the measurement-listed was just for the bowl or the raised part as well. I e-mailed, and they called right back with the information I needed. They're always asking how they're doing and how they can improve."

There's no extra charge to retailers for using the online service; orders through Petmanufacturers.com are fulfilled by the particular companies.

The site is up to 140 manufacturers, which can be accessed individually or by category, depending on the retailer's preference. Young says it's a boon that that he can go to his Wacky Walk'r page and update his product listings to delist those that are no longer available.

"That allows us to turn around orders faster and avoid back ordering," Young

says. "It's almost like getting a real-time inventory analysis."

The Petmanufacturer.com site's menu also offers opportunities to click on discounted and featured items, best sellers, new items and the video channel.



The videos on the company's website allow manufacturers to demonstrate how their products work to potential buyers.



Antonis Polemitis, left, managing director of Ledra Capital; Jessica Hewel, partner and vice president of sales; and Bill Solosy, sales associate

The idea behind the tutorial videos is to give retailers the kind of information and demonstrations they might get at a trade show.

"When you're shopping online, it can be difficult to know exactly what you're getting," Hewel says.

So far, Petmanufacturers.com has posted about 70 videos representing 34 manufacturers, with the offerings expanding all the time. Can a rating system and an award season be far behind?

Don't hold your breath for the pet product Oscars.

It's enough for Petmanufacturers.com to provide a virtual trade show, Hewel says.

"You can learn about products in front of your PC," she adds. "Considering the cost of travel these days, that can be a pretty good thing."