

SA retailer Absolute Pets boosted by pandemic, growing pet spend

South African retailer Absolute Pets is on a positive growth trajectory, having expanded from just eight stores in 2013 to 137 in 2022.



Source: Supplied

Launched in 2008, the company's growth has been spurred on by an investment in 2021 by Sanlam investment managers. In the last five years, the retailer has created 300 new jobs and Absolute Pets branches can be found at many popular shopping centres across the country.

Consumers spending more on their pets

The growing trend of treating animals as family members, or "pet humanisation", and the consequent willingness of owners to spend money on quality pet products and services, is a key factor that has underpinned growth in the pet industry both internationally and locally.

South Africa is a nation of animal lovers, with over 10,5 million dogs and 4,8 million cats as pets. Industry statistics show that along with an increase in the number of pets owned by South African households, there has been an approximately 40% increase in spend on pet products when comparing 2015 to 2020. Absolute Pets has worked to take advantage of these trends.

"Pet parents are looking for better quality products for their pets, particularly good-quality vet-recommended nutrition as opposed to lower quality food options available in the mass market. Absolute Pets is the leading stockist of vet-recommended pet food brands and other high-quality products," says CEO Stephen Warner.



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Investing in customer experience

“The company has also invested heavily in its store design and layout creating an enjoyable shopping experience for customers that is fresh approach to shopping for your pets,” Warner adds.

Ensuring that staff are well trained is a key focus for Absolute Pets and the company has a training academy that provides ongoing training and development for team members. Store managers, for example, have on average completed 60 training courses across various topics such as nutrition, behaviour, hygiene and customer service.

Job creation

A point of pride for the company is the fact that not only were there no retrenchments during Covid, but that just short of 80 new jobs were created in the period. Pet food was seen as an essential service during the lockdowns, enabling stores to remain open for trading. But the need to keep pets fed was not the only reason for growth in this period.

“A common theme across many countries across the world was that as people stayed home more during the lockdowns, they spent more time with their pets and many families ended up adopting new pets. These factors resulted in increase in demand for pet-related products which Absolute Pets was able to fulfill,” explains Warner.

“And as a result of the pandemic vacancies opened up at shopping centres, creating an opportunity for Absolute Pets, which was one of the few companies looking to take on more space during the period.”



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With bricks and mortar presence well established, the retailer has invested in its e-commerce strategy to broaden its reach. The Absolute Pets website offers click-and-collect, and has an Auto Order service that allows consumers to automatically receive their order at intervals of their choosing.

Furthermore, an on-demand delivery service on the Absolute Pets App allows customers to shop and receive orders in as little as 60 minutes. The aim is to further expand the range of products available on the company's e-commerce platforms.

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