



IndiePet Toolkit: Own Your Customers When Brands Leave the Indie Channel

When a premium pet food brand or any product you've championed goes into PetSmart, Chewy, or Grocery, it's a pivotal moment. Especially when it's a line of consumable products requiring repeat store visits, such as food, treats, pee pads, litter, etc. It is no longer just about the product itself—it's about the experience, expertise, and trust you provide to pet parents.

Don't Panic—Make a Plan

When a brand makes the decision to expand into channels outside of independent pet, resist the urge for rash decisions, **but do make a plan and implement it.** Ideas to consider:

De-emphasize brands that are no longer good partners

- Stop promoting a brand that has shifted channels—**they've chosen another path**; it's time to pivot.
- **Pare down SKUs** that aren't strong sellers. Eliminate the puppy SKU and/or medium sized bags to begin with.
- **Focus your energy on recommending brands that align** with your mission and are loyal to independent stores.

Reallocate Shelf Space

- Use freed-up space to feature **new, innovative brands** or categories that your customers care about.
- Highlight **products they won't find** at big-box retailers with the most valuable shelf space.

Refocus Marketing

- **Shift** promotions, staff recommendations, and social media features to brands you want customers to buy.
- **Educate your staff** to enable them to help your customers understand how recommended **brands meet their pets' needs** and **align with your values.**

Stay the Trusted Expert

- Your **knowledge and community connections** are your differentiators.
- Offer **personalized guidance** and create experiences (events, consultations, workshops) that big-box stores and online retailers can't match.



Find New Brands That Work for You and Your Customers

Consider the following factors when **evaluating new brands**:

Brand Values & Mission

- Do they **support independent retailers** first? Talk to other IndiePet retailers for brand recommendations and learn about their experiences.
- Are they **committed to transparency**, sustainability, and pet health?

Profitability & Support

- Are margins healthy?
- Do they offer **IMAP and/or Minimum Retail Pricing** and protect you from online discounting?
- Are there marketing materials, samples, and staff training available?
- Will they offer funding for coupons to help you try their products, and to help you move your customers to these better brand partners?

Product Quality & Innovation

- Are ingredients transparent, traceable, and premium?
- Are they solving a real need (e.g., functional nutrition, limited-ingredient diets, sustainable packaging)?

Distribution & Availability

- Are they exclusive to **independent stores** or widely available on Chewy/Amazon?
- Can they **reliably supply** product and scale with your needs?

Category Gaps

- Are customers asking for it by name? If not, are the packaging and benefits strong enough for you to get your customers to try it?
- Does it complement or compete with existing products?

Your power is in your **expertise, community connection, and curation**.

It's **not** about carrying every brand—it's about being the trusted guide pet parents turn to when they want the **best for their pets**.

Membership in IndiePet provides you with resources such as this toolkit, **IndieChats** to learn and share with other retailers, and **IndieBrand Profiles** where manufacturers and brands answer the questions retailers want to know about brands (coming soon) and *Insights & Trends* reports to help you see what's coming. We hope you make use of your member benefits and resources!