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## Create a Sensation

Posted: Oct. 4, 2011, 5:30 p.m. EDT

**Offering novel and unique grooming styles to customers can boost sales and garner repeat business.**  
*By Sandy Robins*

Groomers face consistent challenges, not the least of which is declining business and difficulty retaining customers. To combat these issues, many have turned to offering creative grooming options to customers.

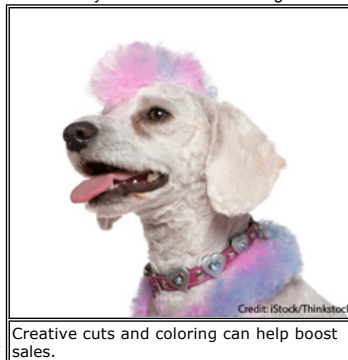
Clients report they like this kind of treatment, and seek it out specifically. Valentina Bloomfield said she likes to book regular appointments for her five Yorkies at Animal Crackers Salon in Vacaville, Calif., a year in advance to ensure that her pooches always look stylish. Her male dog, Eiffel Bleu has a little goatee creatively styled by groomer Yuki Milano that prompts compliments wherever the dog goes.

"My dogs are not show dogs, but I like them to look trendy," Bloomfield said. "I am always being complimented on their looks the same way women compliment a good haircut and want details about the stylist. People often take their photographs to show their own stylist the look they want for their own dog."

Groomers Yuki Milano and her husband Robert Milano said they love a creative challenge.

"We have a background in the dog show world, and mostly recommend to our clients that their dogs should be styled according to breed standards," Yuki said. "But it's wonderful to be given the opportunity to be a bit creative too."

The chance to try different things can energize staff, too. According to Zack Grey, owner of Moon Shine Grooming in Silver Lake, Calif., his staff, consisting of five groomers, is always excited when clients ask for something out of the ordinary, as it gives them the opportunity to express their creativity.



"I do encourage clients to experiment with different styles rather than sticking to breed standards," he said. "Our groomers possess excellent interpersonal skills, and this contributes to client confidence in experimenting with something new. Slowly, we are building a reputation for alternative lifestyles. The 'mohawk' seems to be gaining popularity amongst our clientele. We also have many requests for the 'lion cut,' which is always a fun way to go."

Grooming is a service business; therefore, it's all about listening to a client's personal request.

"Our salon focuses on what the client desires for their pet," said B.C. Henschen, owner of Platinum Paws in Carmel, Ind. "Most often, this is a 'modification' of the breed standard. For example, the owner may want a skirt shorter than the standard on a Schnauzer because its easier to maintain. We do have a small percentage of clients that request truly creative cuts for their pets, but this is a very low percentage.

"We do a lot of point-of-impact marketing in our salon with videos and pictures that show custom haircuts, dyes, nail polish, mud baths and the like," she added. "If a client is the type of person to be interested in a picture on the screen, it will usually spark their interest to inquire further.

"If a client mentions that they would like something different, or, that they have a special occasion, then we ask a lot of questions to try to illicit what they have in mind. It's a matter of knowing your clients too, as some people would be completely turned off by the suggestion of a mohawk or a hair dye. Again, the video display gives them access to a series of pictures and we can judge by

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their expressions what they are interested in.

When it comes to hair dyes, Henschen confirmed that the salon gets such requests mostly around a sports activity, or during Halloween and the holidays.

"The dye that we use is a permanent dye made for pets so you have to spend some time with the client explaining the implication," she said. "We also 'counsel' them to let them know that some people they encounter will not like the idea that they dye their pet and might be vocal about it. Dying a dog's hair is very controversial and owners need to be prepared for that.

"We have found that most of styling we do involving dye focuses on color accents on the tails and ears or doing a symbol for something," she continued.

"It's the same with nail polishes," Henschen added. "We offer over 35 colors of pet nail polish. We display these colors and attempt to advise clients what will work best on their pet's nails, depending on whether the nails are dark or light as some of the colors will not appear as vibrant as they do in the bottle."

There are alternatives to applying actual nail polish to pets' nails. According to Janene Zakrajsek, who, with her husband Robert Gaudio, owns two Pussy & Pooch salons in Los Angeles and Belmont Short, Calif., colored Soft Paws nail caps are a good alternative to nail painting.

"The look is more dramatic and longer lasting," she said. "Fur dying for dogs or cats is a new service that we are just in the process of launching."

Creative grooming isn't only about haircuts and styles; it's also about accessories such as bows, bandanas and perfumed finishing sprays.

"Our most popular colognes are the Papaya Mist and the Comfort Cologne from our SPA line and our Fresh Breeze Deodorizer, said Michelle Neuhaus public relations and web assistant manager for TropiClean based in Wentzville, MO.

"Water-based colognes and spritzers are generally more popular," she said. "Those that contain alcohol tend to dry the coat and skin. Many groomers sell cologne to their clients so that they can continue using them between salon visits."

When it comes to accessories for finishing touches, Karen Fuhrmann, director of product development-softlines, at PetEdge in Beverly, MA said that the company has found that classically shaped bows are in the most demand.

"Leopard and pink fashion bows are trending well for us," she said. "We also have several other offerings that do very well like our barrettes, bandanas, scrunchies, ribbons and bands.

"Traditionally, groomers prefer bows with rubber bands on the back. Consumers seem to like barrettes, and often groomers will purchase them for re-sale," she added. "We have found that dividing our bows/barrettes into two categories in the catalog works well for selling purposes. We have a retail-ready 100-count canister of bows that groomers love! These canisters contain 100 count of bows in a variety of assortments— all with band backings, no UPC codes and value-priced.

"The barrettes are sold with UPC codes and are trendy and more fashionable," she said. "Barrettes are packaged in lower counts, making them a more consumer oriented and retail friendly item."

In addition to bows and barrettes, the company makes a selection of bandanas in playful colors and designs that groomers also consider a perfect complement for finishing work or, as a resale product.

"My customers always comment on the bandanas or bows that I use for a finishing touch," said Patty Corban a groomer at Alpha K9 Pet Services in Houston, Texas.

"I like to change things up seasonally and always use something appropriate for holidays such as Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas."

Zakrajsek has the last word on finishing touches.

"Some customers do expect it, but the majority do not," she said. "Either way, many seem to appreciate the extra detail. We typically keep the look the same, or a variation of the same, to create a consistent look that corresponds to our brand."

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