



Source: Petaluma

# Petaluma: attracting flexitarian customers with plant-based dog food

## A Case Study

# WHAT WILL YOU LEARN?

Throughout this case study, we will be profiling Petaluma to demonstrate how they effectively attract flexitarian dog parents.

You will learn how to:

- Appeal to health-driven customers.
- Build trust with your customers and brand credibility.
- Create an engaged community on social media.
- Utilise the sustainability trend.

# INTRODUCTION

As the plant-based movement gathers momentum globally, the popularity of healthy, planet-friendly, plant-based food is spilling over into the diets of our companion animals – dogs, in particular.

Interest in plant-based dog food is already on the up, with a 2021 study finding that 72% of US pet parents were open to having plant-based protein sources in their animals' diets.<sup>1</sup>



72%

The study participants also indicated a high interest in hybrid diets – balancing animal and plant-based protein sources, lending further credence to the notion that flexitarianism is leading pet carers to try a similar approach to feeding their pets.<sup>2</sup>



“The plant-based, pet-feeding trend is much like the human practice – we see a larger proportion of pets fed plant-based as a component of their diet and a small proportion fed a plant-based diet exclusively. I predict that, as long as the [flexitarian] trend is growing in the human world, we’ll likely see similar growth in the pet-food industry.”<sup>3</sup>

**Dr Sarah Dodd**  
*Animal Nutrition Expert*



# INTRODUCTION

Innova Market Insight's Nutrition & Health Survey 2020 shows that the top reasons driving consumers to switch to flexitarian diets include health, sustainability, and taste – all things dog parents are increasingly demanding for their pets, too.

Satisfying these drivers must remain a top priority in the production of dog-food products in order to attract the value-driven pet parent.

So, how do we do this? Let's look at a plant-based dog brand that is thriving in the space to better understand how they attract flexitarian shoppers.

# WHO IS PETALUMA?

Petaluma is a US-based dog-food brand that creates nutritious food for dogs that is made entirely from plant-based ingredients. The brand's mission is to provide pooches with tasty food that is better for both the health of dogs and the planet.

Read on to discover how Petaluma attracts flexitarian pet parents and how you can, too.

“We started Petaluma because there has been a gap in the market for eco-conscious consumers who don't want to sacrifice quality for their dogs. We are delighted to report that a wide range of customers is compelled by Petaluma's mission – almost half of our customers report being omnivorous or 'flexitarians'.”

**Caroline Buck**

*Co-Founder, Petaluma*



Source: Petaluma

# FOCUS ON HEALTHY INGREDIENTS

Next to taste, health is the second most important factor that leads flexitarian consumers to choose plant-based foods for themselves.<sup>4</sup> As more consumers make the connection between a good diet and improved health for themselves, they are now taking extra care to choose the right foods for their beloved pets too, leading them to consider plant-based dog foods. Brands that can prove that their plant-based dog foods are packed full of healthy, nutrient-rich ingredients will, therefore, win flexitarian favour.



“We focused on highlighting ingredients, like peanut butter and sweet potato, that are known for being tasty and healthy.”

**Caroline Buck**

*Co-Founder, Petaluma*



# FOCUS ON HEALTHY INGREDIENTS

By drawing attention to recognisable and nutritious ingredients with demonstrable health benefits, Petaluma conveys the health benefits of their dog-food products and reduces health concerns that pet parents may have.



1. Use healthy, natural, and functional plant-based ingredients to attract health-motivated flexitarians with dogs.
2. Highlight recognisable and nutritious plant-based ingredients on product packaging and in marketing materials.





## BUILD TRUST AND CREDIBILITY THROUGH TRANSPARENCY

Pet-food is an incredibly personal thing for dog parents – it's a product that they interact with two or more times a day, that occupies a place in their pantry, and that provides their pooch with all they need to remain happy and healthy.

So dog parents put a lot of trust into pet-food brands – but trust needs to be earned, even from flexitarians who already consume plant-based foods themselves. With so many long-established, animal-based dog-food brands, how can a new player gain customer trust?



Co-founders, Garrett Wymore and Caroline Buck. Source: Petaluma.





We have found that it is extremely important to build trust through transparency. We achieve this in two main ways. First, we share all of our lab results – including full nutritional panels and in-vitro digestibility studies – right on our website for anyone to read. Most pet food companies share very little information and tend to just post their macronutrient profile (crude fat, protein, etc.).”

“Second, we avoid unsubstantiated or flimsy marketing claims about our products’ health benefits or outcomes. Unfortunately, it is a common marketing practice in the pet-food industry to make sweeping claims like ‘healthier skin, coat, and nails’ – and even ‘longer life’ – without any data to back it up. The bar is higher for vegan products to demonstrate that they are healthy and safe, and we want to give our customers straightforward information to make a confident choice for their dog.”

**Caroline Buck**  
*Co-Founder, Petaluma*

## BUILD TRUST AND CREDIBILITY THROUGH TRANSPARENCY


By creating transparency around their products and processes, Petaluma gives customers full insight into the performability of their products, and shows that the brand has no secrets to hide. By refraining from making over-zealous health claims, Petaluma gains credibility, which strengthens customer trust and willingness to purchase its plant-based dog-food products.



1. Share full nutritional panels.
2. Share digestibility studies.
3. Display all customer reviews on your brand's website – even less positive ones.
4. Avoid making unsubstantiated marketing claims.
5. Back up any claims with real data and facts.



# CREATE A COMMUNITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Younger generations, including Millennials and Generation Z, are the driving force behind the explosive growth of the plant-based sector. In general, flexitarians tend to be young women – 55% of US Millennials and 24% of US Gen Z — and they also tend to be educated, well-read, politically liberal, and big users of social media.<sup>5</sup>

Though still a young brand, Petaluma is on its way to building an engaged online community that trusts its products. The brand is doing this by creating and sharing engaging and humorous social-media content on Instagram and Facebook.

# CREATE A COMMUNITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA



Research shows that Millennials and Gen-Z consumers trust influencers twice as much as they trust friends and family when it comes to purchasing recommendations.<sup>6</sup> In fact, almost half of Gen-Z consumers have made a purchase decision based on a recommendation from a social influencer.<sup>7</sup>

Petaluma uses influencers to gain consumer trust and spread brand awareness. The company regularly sends its products to social-media influencers who share their dogs' love for Petaluma's products with their followers, as well as their own opinions.



# CREATE A COMMUNITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Source: @mostlyecomorgan



Source: @veganchefchristucker



1. Regularly post enjoyable educational content on social media with which your followers can engage.
2. Connect with social-media influencers who match your brand values to increase your visibility and expand market reach.
3. Once you've built meaningful relationships with social-media influencers, give them some free products for their dogs to try out. If you're a good fit, they'll spread the word about you to their followers.



# UTILISE THE SUSTAINABILITY TREND

The sustainability trend is present in every segment of consumer goods, altering consumer purchasing preferences and habits, especially those of flexitarians. Improving the environment is a factor that is driving many flexitarians to eat more plant-based foods.

“Increased awareness of America’s problematic food system will drive demand for products that can demonstrate they are better. You don’t need to be a scientist to understand the link between climate change and food production.”

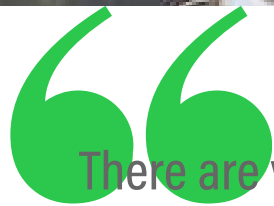
**Caroline Buck**

*Co-Founder, Petaluma*



# UTILISE THE SUSTAINABILITY TREND

So, how can you take advantage of the sustainability trend to gain the favour of dog-loving flexitarians?



There are very few brands talking (and doing something) about the negative environmental externalities of pet-food production. We're among a very small handful of companies that are Certified-B Corporations and go further as a Climate- Neutral-Certified and 1%-for-the-Planet company. If you ask the average pet owner who the 'Patagonia' of pet food is, they likely will not have an answer – unless they're a customer, of course!"

**Caroline Buck**  
*Co-Founder, Petaluma*

# UTILISE THE SUSTAINABILITY TREND

“There is a fair amount of greenwashing in the pet-food industry. It generally shows up as marketing the reduced footprint of packaging without any conversation about the ingredients in the bag, which is always the bulk of any food product’s resource use. I’d love to see more companies commission and publish life-cycle assessments so customers can wade past the marketing claims and really understand tradeoffs.”

**Caroline Buck**

*Co-Founder of Petaluma*

1. Focus on recipes that contain sustainable ingredients, sourced in an environmentally responsible way.
2. Reduce packaging materials and switch to recyclable or biodegradable packaging.
3. Where able, make use of leftover or unwanted human-food ingredients ('wonky' veg or surplus grains, for example) to reduce food waste.
4. Make sure all manufacturing processes and equipment adhere to sustainability best-practices.
5. Gain sustainability accreditations – become a B Corporation, become Climate Neutral Certified, and join 1% for the Planet.
6. Commission and publish product life-cycle assessments.
7. Don't greenwash; back up sustainability claims with proof – show what you are doing and how it's helping.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

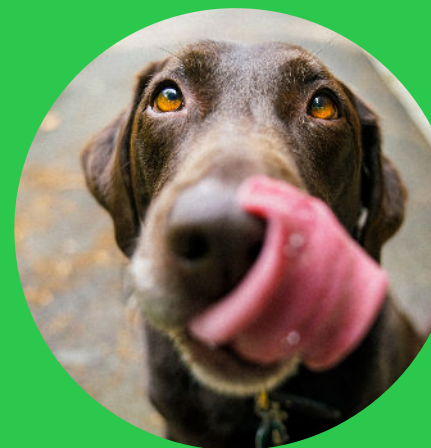
→ Focus on healthy, functional ingredients that attract health-focused flexitarian dog parents.

→ Build trust and credibility through transparency and avoid making unsubstantiated marketing claims.

→ Create an engaged community on social media and send free products out to influencers.

→ Utilise the sustainability trend and overhaul your business to become better for the planet.

**If you're looking to develop a plant-based dog-food product or improve your plant-based strategy to drive sales, ProVeg can help. Get in touch by emailing us at [corporate@proveg.com](mailto:corporate@proveg.com).**



# REFERENCES

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