

# How One Walmart Store Could Change the Entire Pet Industry



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**W**almart has thrown its hat in the lucrative pet services ring, and while it's been a while since the mass retailer had made significant waves in the pet industry, I can't say that I'm surprised.

Last month, the mass retailer announced the opening of its first Pet Services center Dallas,

Ga.—the same location where it introduced the first Walmart Health center in 2019. The center combines veterinary care with grooming services—and even self-wash stations—putting it direct competition with the likes of Petco and PetSmart, not to mention independent pet stores across the country.

From where I'm sitting, it makes perfect sense that Walmart sees ample opportunity in the pet services business. According to the American Pet Products Association, nearly \$50 billion of the \$136.8 billion spent on pets in 2022 went toward veterinary care and other pet services.

And this just might be the perfect time for Walmart to strike. It has been widely reported that many pet owners are compromising in what they feed their pets, due to impact of

inflation, which poses a growing challenge to independent pet stores, which have always depended on their ability to deliver high-quality nutrition products as a competitive advantage. As pet owners trade down in the brands they feed their pets, retailers like Walmart will inevitably see more opportunity to steal those customers away from independent pet stores—especially if those customers are attracted to the ease of getting their vet care and grooming services in the same place they pick up their pet's food.

What should also concern independent pet retailers is the fact that online retailers like Amazon and even Chewy.com are surely watching from the sidelines—for now—to

see how successful Walmart's newest venture turns out. After all, Amazon already has a growing stable of chain of brick-and-mortar locations, and it has even flirted with the idea of opening its own hair salons. It's not a stretch to assume that, as some point, Chewy might seek a similar route.

I shudder to think at the implications that this could have for the broader

pet industry, which has always depended on diversity and entrepreneurship as the cornerstones of its ongoing success—and that begins and ends with our industry's independent retailers. What kind of industry would this be if it were completely dominated by just a handful of retailers? I, for one, hope we never find out. **PB**

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