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## MEDIA & MARKETING

# Pet Sounds: Purina Hopes to Boost Its Brand Loyalty With Podcasts

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NEW YORK -- Even Fido is going wireless.

The marketing strategy, rolled out in the past week, makes Nestlé Purina PetCare Co. the latest among a handful of companies in the U.S. to try to market their brands by taking advantage of the increasing popularity of portable gadgets such as cellphones, iPods and BlackBerrys. Their efforts come as consumers increasingly are tuning out television and radio.

"These devices are a whole new communication venue for us to interact with our customers," says Michael Moore, director of interactive marketing at Purina, which is owned by Swiss food company Nestlé SA. "Consumers are no longer tethered to a desk or computer. It's all about getting information to consumers however and wherever they want to receive it."

The mobile-marketing effort is considered less intrusive than the usual forms of advertising because it is on an opt-in basis. Consumers choose to receive the information by signing up on Purina's Web site, [purina.com](http://purina.com)<sup>1</sup>. The aim is to build brand loyalty, not hound customers to purchase pet food.

Loyalty is particularly important in the pet-food category, where four companies, each with well-known brands, are battling to reach consumers.

Purina's podcasts -- sound files that listeners can download onto a portable music player such as an iPod -- will offer pet owners advice ranging from animal training to pet insurance. Weekly tips sent to mobile devices will provide similar information, such as how a dog or cat can shed a few pounds. Downloads of ringtones for cellphones, including the Friskies "Feelin' Alright" jingle, are part of the strategy. With that association, Mr. Moore says, Purina hopes to set itself apart from its rivals.

Purina is one of the first consumer packaged-goods companies in the U.S. to offer podcasting and wireless messages, says Pat Isom, account director at Publicis Groupe SA's Arc Worldwide, which worked on the campaign with the pet-food maker. "They've always tried to be innovative, especially because there's so much competition in the category."

Indeed, pet food is a lucrative and expanding business, dominated by Purina, **Procter & Gamble**

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Co., Mars Inc. and **Del Monte Foods** Co. More than 36% of all U.S. households have at least one dog, while nearly 34% have at least one cat, according to the Pet Food Institute. Those owners spent more than \$13.4 billion on food for their pets last year, up 4.6% from 2003, according to Davenport Co. LLC. In a bid to woo those consumers, pet-food makers spent \$327.7 million on advertising last year, with Purina accounting for \$79.3 million of that total, according to TNS Media Intelligence.

The four big pet-food companies "are investing a lot in the category...as the whole phenomenon of 'pet as children' takes off," says Ken Harris, a partner at consumer-products and retail consultancy Cannondale Associates in Chicago. "They're each competing with really excellent brands so they have to differentiate themselves."

That involves going beyond what is considered traditional marketing, Mr. Harris says. He pointed to the investment of P&G's Iams brand in a pet insurance company a couple years as an example. "They made the Iams brand all about a pet's wellness, not just pet food," he said.

Efforts such as Purina's are a similar step that allows the company to differentiate itself. The strategy enables the company to reach consumers that have an interest in its products, something mass marketing can't always achieve. "They're fishing where the fish are," Mr. Harris says. "I think we're going to see a lot more of that. Purina's perhaps one of the first, but by no means will this be an exclusive club a year from now."

Although such marketing techniques are poised to expand in popularity among advertisers, they probably won't diminish the need for the more usual types of marketing, such as TV and radio.

Mobile marketing and podcasting are "in vogue at the moment. Everyone is trying to figure out how to use these new tools to further their marketing activities," says Jack Trout, president of Trout & Partners, a marketing strategy company in Greenwich, Conn. "But companies are still going to have a blanket approach if they want to tell their story to a large group of people. I think traditional media is the only way to do that."

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<http://online.wsj.com/article/0,,SB112000488364472334,00.html>

**Hyperlinks in this Article:**

(1) <http://www.purina.com>

(2) <mailto:janet.whitman@dowjones.com>

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