

Bird Stores Making Changes To Combat State Of Economy

Economic downturn has affected bird businesses in varying degrees

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Despite the economic downturn, many bird store owners haven't had to cut back on staff or special services. Like most of the country's population, avian pet stores have been affected by the downturn of the U.S. economy, to varying degrees. As prices have risen and wallets have gotten lighter, these businesses have made steps to stay afloat and ease bird owners' financial burdens.

Many stores have had to compensate for higher prices across the board. Donna Garrou, manager and owner of BirdStuff in Orange, Calif., said the biggest problems her store faces are the cost of transportation and grain, especially corn.

"I'm not raising anything other than how my costs are affected," Garrou said, citing that food prices have raised "dramatically," "but unfortunately that does affect a lot of products."

Changes in customer shopping habits are also affecting bird stores. Omar Gonzalez, owner of Omar's Exotic Birds stores located in Placentia and Lake Forest, Calif., said people aren't buying as many large-ticket items. If they buy a bird, he said, they'll buy a \$400 cage as opposed to an \$800 cage.

Garrou said customers are still buying supplies for their birds despite the current state of the economy, but just budgeting more.

"They don't mind spending the money, but they don't want to buy anything that will just go home and sit [unnoticed] in a cage," Garrou said. "They want to make sure the bird will use it."

Some bird store owners have made efforts to help both themselves and their customers simultaneously, especially through sales.

"We have tried to make more arrangements to buy direct from manufacturers in larger and larger volumes, so I can pass on some savings," Gonzalez said.

At Bird Paradise in Burlington, N.J., Kathie Hahn and staff have put together "Birdie Bundles," which Hahn describes as a compilation of an exclusive bird diet, along with other foods, treats and a free toy. The value of the bundle might be \$140, Hahn said, but might cost customers only \$99 to help defray the cost of fuel and stock-market losses.

"I've also started putting coupons online," Hahn said. "I try to do items that people would want to buy but might not be able to buy with the current state of the economy."

Overall, many bird store owners haven't had to cut back on staff or special services. Garrou said she hasn't had to make changes in her daily routine, and Gonzalez said his business hasn't been affected that much. Hahn even said her customer count is higher this year than last.

"I think the pet industry is very resilient in times like these because you're home," Hahn said. "What we're finding is that a lot of people are not taking the vacations that they've taken before. I think that they're bonding better with their birds."