

The big interview



As he celebrates his 10th year at the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, now's the perfect time to catch up with chief executive **Michael Bellingham** on current trends, exciting innovations and his tips for success in the pet industry.

What are the PFMA's aims and goals?

The Pet Food Manufacturers' Association represents the industry in the UK. We have 70 members, which accounts for over 90% of the market. Our principal aims are to be recognised as the responsible voice for the pet food industry, to support our membership and to promote prepared pet foods as a fundamental element of good pet care.

What services do you offer the industry?

We offer a range of member services from support on technical and legislative matters to a weekly media monitoring report. One of our most valued services is our annual market data scheme. While we share a snippet of our statistics with the public, our members get a much more in-depth report and analysis. With regular events and training, we ensure that members get great networking opportunities and with committee groups dedicated to specific pet types, it means that each sector has the chance to focus on their unique needs.

What's the biggest change you've seen in the industry over the last ten years?

The increasing humanisation of pets — we're no longer pet owners but pet parents, reflecting the strong relationship we have with our pets and our responsibility to them. This trend has definitely had an impact on what pet owners buy.

I believe you have a cat. How do you choose the products you buy for him?

We have a very lively kitten — a ginger Tom called Custard. I'm lucky to have access to PFMA's nutrition team and their advice is to feed a diet appropriate to life stage and lifestyle, so we feed a kitten diet. I think access to good advice is important, so I also speak to the specialists in pet shops.

What's the most exciting thing about being in the pet food industry right now?

There are some really exciting innovations

Tackling pet obesity is high on the agenda — in a new survey, vets told the PFMA that they'd seen a rise in obesity since the previous survey five years ago.



coming through. The desire of PFMA members to continually improve their products, whether by incorporating the latest nutritional knowledge or through packaging developments means the industry advances at a fast pace. From a PFMA perspective, we are particularly excited to have introduced a new PFMA Charter, which members sign up to each year to say they are following the large amount of guidance we produce. Pet food is heavily regulated with over 40 pieces of legislation. Despite that, our members go beyond

legislation in developing and following voluntary guidelines. We know our members operate to a high standard; through the Charter we also hope to encourage non-members to come onboard as they see the benefits of being part of the PFMA family.

What's the biggest challenge facing the industry and what advice can you offer?

Tackling pet obesity is a massive welfare challenge and continued education has to be the way forward. Overweight pets are sadly becoming the norm, and we need to help owners understand what a healthy sized pet should look like. Our educational messages are about greater portion control and the right levels of exercise for pets. Going forward, we need to think of fresh and engaging ways to educate, as there's a danger of switching pet owners off.

What trends are you seeing in pet food?

Premium products with an emphasis on wellness still lead the way continuing a decade-long trend. Many pet owners make food and health-related decisions for their pets just as they would for any other family member. High-value pet foods positioned as 'natural' or certified as organic are growing in popularity.

What are your plans and aims for the next ten years?

I would like to increase PFMA membership from the already high numbers to reach 100%. Virtually impossible, but it's good to have an ambitious goal!

What other activities do you carry out within the industry?

As well as being an information resource on pet food nutrition for our members and the

We've become a nation of pet parents, and customers are buying for a full member of their family. This has changed the demand for products.



"People are keeping an increasingly diverse range of pets — even jelly fish! Pet chickens are becoming popular."

public, we're involved in broader pet care sector issues, particularly related to animal welfare and promoting responsible pet ownership. We are a trustee of the National Pet Month charity; we sit on the Pet Advisory Committee — a group that looks at policies around animal welfare. We're also part of the Animal Welfare Education Alliance. That's a group of welfare charities united by the belief that children and young people should be educated about caring for animals and the importance of providing for an animal's Five Welfare Needs.

Do you have any advice for success for the small retailer?

Retailers stand apart from the crowd in the service and expertise they offer pet owners, this is really their unique offering, along with a carefully selected product range. Helping owners understand the choices available and guiding them towards their final decision is of great value.

We're also here to help support pet shops to offer something different. We can supply retailers with Pet Size-O-Meters — handy weight check charts for owners — and other tools including our food facts poster for pet shops. We also have lots of downloadable information on our website such as guides to reading pet food labels and pet food ingredients fact sheets.

Why is it important for retailers to help promote responsible pet ownership and animal welfare?

It's important for all of us in the pet care sector to promote a healthy population of responsibly owned pets. Of course, we'd love to see an increase in the pet population but only if they're responsibly owned. The danger otherwise is that we'll see more barriers to pet ownership such as restrictions on where we can walk our dogs.

What's been the biggest surprise for you over the years?

The willingness of all the welfare organisations and our trade associations to work openly with each other to improve the welfare of our nation's pets.

Tell us something about the industry that we might not know.

Back in the time of the BSE crisis, the pet food industry took the lead in banning serious risk materials from pet foods even before they were banned from human food. The safety and quality of our products is paramount.

What do you think are the most important PFMA statistics those in the industry need to know right now?

Back in March, we released our report Pet Obesity: 5 Years On, looking at how the needle has moved since our first report back in 2009. There were some worrying results, with 77% of vets expressing the belief that pet obesity is on the increase. There's also a real disparity of views: vets estimate that up to 45% of pets they see are overweight, yet 63% of owners believe their pet is the right weight. With almost two-thirds of pet owners not reading the feeding guidelines and a similar proportion

Custard the kitten benefits from the best nutritional advice courtesy of PFMA experts and specialists in pet shops.



unsure of how to check their pet's weight, it's a cause we all need to champion.

As well as cat and dog food, what else is big business?

Our recent trade trip to Interzoo showed us that people are keeping an increasingly diverse range of pets — even jellyfish! From speaking to our members, we know that pet chickens are becoming popular.

PFMA NEWS HOT OFF THE PRESS



The PFMA wants to hear from anyone involved with programmes to improve pet fitness — there's a £100 prize.



New award aims to recognise those who help to get pets fit

The PFMA's new award acknowledges the great work undertaken by organisations to 'getpetsfit' through promoting weight management and fitness. The inaugural Get Pets Fit Award will look for the most innovative and educational initiative that has helped pets improve both their waistline and fitness levels.

Whether you run a successful weight management clinic, have implemented a new pet agility course or launched a bespoke regime for clients, the PFMA wants to hear from you! Pet shops, groomers, trainers and veterinary practices should visit www.pfma.org.uk/GetPetsFit-award between September 1 and November 30 to complete an entry form.

Entries must include the organisation and initiative name, background and a summary of the activity along with

examples of pets getting fitter and any good feedback from clients.

PFMA will work alongside National Pet Month to judge entries to the competition and the winning initiative will be announced in December and will receive £100 worth of high street vouchers. There will also be two runners up who will be officially recognised for their efforts.

If you'd like to get involved in helping pet owners keep their pets at a healthy size, there are lots of tools on the PFMA website to get you started. The online tool box includes Pet Size-O-Meters (handy size-check charts), food diaries, weight logs, and display posters for retailers. For more information, visit www.pfma.org.uk/GetPetsFit-award and like the campaign Facebook page at www.facebook.com/GetPetsFit.



Michael (far right) with Nicole Paley, Lana Oliver and Sarah Horrozi (centre, left to right) from the PFMA stand up to take their award for Best Website.

Website of the Year winner

The PFMA has won Website of the Year at the prestigious Trade Association Best Practice Awards set up to recognise, reward and promote best practice among UK trade associations. The TAF (Trade Association Forum) Awards and Dinner was held in Liverpool recently as part of the International Festival for Business.

The awards event gives trade associations the opportunity to showcase their hard work and achievements during the last 12 to 18 months, and PFMA has now been recognised for two years running for its high quality communications, having won Publication of the Year in 2013.

Nicole Paley, PFMA communications

manager, says: "We are absolutely delighted to have been recognised for our communications activity but particularly for Website of the Year. Our website aims to cater for different audiences from pet owners to pet professionals and other interested groups. Over the last 12 months, we have really focused on content with the ambition to be the first port of call on all pet food nutrition related matters. It's great to have our hard work recognised."

The website has the latest pet population and market statistics, downloadable healthy pet toolkits for both pet care specialists and pet owners, and guidance on pet food ingredients and labels. 🐾



PFMA surveys show that pet owners are choosing premium foods, with an emphasis on health benefits.

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