Even in a Recession, Pet Owners Will Provide for Their Furry Friends

If financial issues would lead you to trim your monthly spending, how likely are you to reduce your spending in the next six months on? *Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding. (PRNewsFoto/Fleishman-Hillard)

ORLANDO, FL UNITED STATES

Which of the following statements best describes your feelings towards your dog or cat? *Indicates a response of less than one percent.(PRNewsFoto/Fleishman-Hillard)

ORLANDO, FL UNITED STATES

If you would have to watch your personal finances more closely, how likely are you to limit your purchases of the following pet items?* *All 665 respondents were asked to respond to every item. However, the above chart shows responses for each item on a reduced base of those to whom the expense applies - leaving out those who indicated the item was "not applicable" to them. (PRNewsFoto/Fleishman-Hillard)

ORLANDO, FL UNITED STATES

National survey reveals consumers will sacrifice their own needs for their pet, but preventative medicine for pets could be at risk

ORLANDO, Fla., Jan. 23 /PRNewswire/ -- Relax Fido, if a recession hits in 2008, your owner is far more likely to pass on that plasma screen than cut back on your kibble.

(Photo: http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20080123/AQW110-a)

(Photo: http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20080123/AQW110-b)

(Photo: http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20080123/AQW110-c)

A national pet owner survey released today at the North American Veterinary Conference showed that if financial issues caused pet owners to curtail their monthly expenses they are far more likely to cut back on luxury items, electronics -- and even groceries and household goods -- than on care or supplies for their pets.

The online survey of 665 pet owners (including 602 who have a dog or cat) was conducted in late December by Fleishman-Hillard International Communications, the only global public relations firm to offer a dedicated animal care practice.

"We conducted this survey to help give our animal care clients better insight into how changes in the economy might affect their plans for 2008," said Brian Cox, Fleishman-Hillard senior vice president and member of the animal care practice. "Frankly, we're not at all surprised to see this type of loyalty among pet owners. Even if a recession does occur, pet owners will continue to provide for their companions."

According to the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association, animal care has become a $41 billion industry in the United States -- more than the gross domestic product of all but 64 countries and double the amount spent just a decade ago.

The Fleishman-Hillard survey offered insight into why pet owners may be willing to sacrifice their own needs for the needs of their pets. Most pet owners said they consider their pets to be members of their family, like a child, sister, or brother.

Yet amid this trend of increasingly pampering our four-legged friends, pet owners did concede that some of Fido's luxuries could be cut by a recession. If financial constraints led pet owners to reduce spending, they would be most likely to scale back on pet fashions, toys, and trips to professionals like pet walkers, sitters, and groomers.

The study also revealed a possible concern for veterinarians and animal health providers -- nearly one-third of the pet owners surveyed said they may cut their spending on veterinary visits and preventative medications if faced with financial constraints. "The key to preventing this shift -- and its detrimental effects on pets -- will be client education," said Doug Bell, Fleishman-Hillard senior vice president, senior partner and member of the animal care practice.

"We know that veterinarians' recommendations carry the greatest weight with pet owners when making decisions about their pets," Bell said. "If a recession hits in 2008, veterinarians and their in-clinic teams will need to take the time to remind clients that on-going, preventive care is as vital to their pets' health and safety as it is to the two-legged members of their family."

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This survey was conducted using a consumer panel provided by Greenfield Online, from December 20-23, 2007. Interviews were completed by 1,048 panel members 18 years of age or older living in private households in the continental United States. The sample comprised 478 men and 570 women. Of those interviewed, 665 were pet owners; 383 people were not eligible to participate in the survey because they did not own a pet. Survey results are weighted by three demographic characteristics: gender, age, and geographic region, to ensure a reliable and accurate representation of the total U.S. population, 18 years of age or older. The sampling error associated with sample sizes ranging from 602 to 665 is plus/minus two to four percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level.

To receive a copy of the full survey report, call Nader Ali-Hassan at 216.928.3477