



Pet Food Experts

Supporting Independent Pet Retailers Coast to Coast:

A new facility layout enables Pet Food Experts to meet the ever-changing needs of their retailers and brand partners



Pet Food Experts is a leading distributor of pet food and supplies, serving over 6,000 Independent Pet retailers from its six distribution centers across 39 states. For over four decades, the company has been setting the industry standard for quality products and exceptional customer service. When they found their Des Plaines, IL, facility experiencing growing pains, they needed to determine whether it was time to stay or go.

The Challenge ▶

To Stay or Go

From its humble roots as an independent pet retailer in the 70s, to a distributor of pet products from coast to coast today, Pet Food Experts (PFX) has drastically expanded its distribution footprint by maintaining trusting partnerships with independent pet retailers and vendor partners. When their business in the Ohio Valley expanded to include 10 states and over 600 customers, PFX knew it was time to increase their Des Plaines distribution operations and began a search for a new building.

According to Jim Bettencourt, Chief Operations Officer, "The option to stay in our current facility wasn't at the forefront. We were in a 100K sq ft facility and we thought we would need more space than that in a few years' time. In the end, we were able to stay put and expand our footprint on the current site. We feel confident that our new layout will enable us to meet customer demand in the Ohio Valley region for the next seven years."

The company decided to bring in a "turbo shot" of expertise to help them assess their current operations and plan for the future. They partnered with Alpine Supply Chain solutions.

The Challenge

continued

As Bettencourt explains, “We were considering ways automation could help us be more efficient, but we really weren’t sure which direction to head in. We needed to be sure we were doing the right things the right way and investing in automation at the right time. We tapped Alpine to help us build a plan for the future.”

Engaging Experts in Facility Design & Slotting

The Process

From the start, Alpine set their sights on collecting and analyzing as much data as possible to understand both the short and long term needs. They focused on how growth by SKU and volume would impact operations over the next seven years. They determined that an improved layout would be key to rapidly increasing capacity, and developed several options for PFX to consider.

One key challenge that needed to be navigated was the fact that PFX has two main lines of business: bulk dry goods and smaller non-food items and assortments that are continually shifting within both areas. When Alpine arrived, the dry goods area was under a lot of stress. The company’s temperature controlled business was increasing so more freezer space was needed. PFX had been using chest freezers and reefers, but they decided the time was right to add a permanent 6000 sq ft freezer to the distribution center. This meant reorganizing both lines of business.

To determine the ideal layout for the building, Alpine conducted a Storage Type Analysis (STA). This exercise considers detailed SKU data, including size, shape and velocity, and determines the best storage option for picking and replenishment locations based on each SKU’s unique characteristics. With this information in hand, Alpine developed multiple layout options and an optimal facility layout was collaboratively finalized by the Alpine and PFX teams.

The chosen layout included improved rack configurations that increased storage capacity throughout the building. A pick module located on a new mezzanine was also developed to minimize employee travel, improve replenishment efficiency, and increase space utilization. Future layouts were also developed for PFX to implement when the timing is right.

According Operations Manager, Gary DeKroon, “The pick module option developed for our smaller non-food items was a really nice solution. The density of the storage area really reduces travel time for our associates. In the dry goods area, we were able to relocate about 1000 SKUs to make room for the new freezer space and the resulting new layout has made the way we replenish dry goods much more efficient.”

The Outcome ►

Alpine delivered a three-phase plan to address PFX's immediate and future needs. According to Bettencourt, "In the end, we ruled out a lot of things we were originally considering, not because of cost, but because the initiatives would change our processes too much, be unable to integrate with our current technology, or create inconsistencies across our network that we weren't willing to introduce. Alpine delivered a solution that works well for us now as well as a great list of options that we can tap into down the road as new needs arise."

This is great news considering pet ownership is on the rise. According to the 2021-2022 APPA National Pet Owners Survey, 70% of U.S. households now own a pet, which equates to 90.5 million homes. It's estimated these pet owners will spend \$109.6 billion on their pets in 2021, and almost half of that will be spent on pet food and treats. The future will be a time of rapid growth for PFX, and they are now in a great position to respond to the ever-changing needs of their independent pet retailers and brand partners.