MARKET ENTRY

Entering the Korean pet market

Written for a brand deciding whether Korea is worth the effort. What the channels are, how price decides which of them you belong in, and what a distributor here is for.

Four kinds of channel

Korean retail is not one market. A product that performs on an open marketplace can fail in a specialty mall and never get a hearing at a hypermarket, and the reason is usually price and packaging rather than the product itself.

Open marketplaces	The widest reach and the hardest price competition. Suits repeat-purchase items where volume matters more than margin.
Pet specialty malls	Smaller audience, much higher intent. Buyers arrive already looking for cat products, so a story about the brand is read rather than skipped.
Curated commerce	Design-led platforms where presentation carries the sale. Works for higher price points that would struggle on an open marketplace.
Offline retail	Hypermarket chains and their pet sections. The longest lead times and the most demanding paperwork, and the hardest to reverse once listed.

What a distributor here is for

A brand can technically appoint a forwarder and sell direct. What that leaves uncovered is the part that takes local standing: the importer of record, the regulatory filings, the Korean label, the channel accounts, and someone to answer a buyer at Korean business hours.

- **Importer of record.** Registrations and declarations are held by the importer, not the brand.
- **Regulatory route.** Food and furniture follow different laws; getting this wrong is discovered at the port.
- **Korean labelling.** Applied before goods reach any channel.
- **Channel accounts and listings.** Each platform has its own review before a product goes live.
- **Claims review.** Wording that is ordinary abroad can be unusable on a Korean pack.

How to read a Korean partner

Brands ask us how to tell a working distributor from someone forwarding an email. These are the questions worth putting to anyone here, including us.

- Ask which law their product falls under in Korea. A partner who has done it will name the route without hedging.
- Ask for a timeline *before* they have seen the documents. A confident number at that stage is a guess.
- Ask which channels they have actually listed on, not which they could approach.
- Be careful with anyone claiming exclusive rights to brands before any agreement exists.
- Ask what they will not do. A partner with a defined scope is easier to hold to it.

> For the record: we work in cat products only, we do not hold exclusive or sole-agency rights to any brand, and we give timelines after we have read the product documents rather than before.

A realistic sequence

01 **Documents and a sample**

Specification, ingredients or materials, origin, carton dimensions, export price.

02 **Route and shelf-price check**

Which law applies, and what the product would have to sell for here once freight, duty and channel fees are in. Some products end here, and that is a useful outcome.

03 **Terms in writing**

Supply price, minimum quantities, incoterms.

04 **Filings and labelling**

Declaration, quarantine where applicable, Korean label applied before release.

05 **One channel first**

Listing everywhere at once means learning nothing from any of it. One channel produces a readable result, and that result decides the next one.

> Note We publish no forecast figures, target volumes or launch dates on this site. Those depend on the specific product and belong in a proposal written for it, not in a page shown to every brand.

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