



## Tidy Cats Helps Rikki's Cats Think Inside the Box - Part II

Special to Rikki's Reflections by Lou Gato, Your Creature Chronicler

If you remember from Part I, we discovered that Edward Lowe invented Kitty Litter in 1947, and he was selling \$200 million of it by 1990.

If you remember from Part I, you're doing better than old Lou here, who doesn't even remember what he had for breakfast today. But, let's move ahead, and see what happened to Kitty Litter after 1990.

It was in 1990 that Edward Lowe realized that he was getting older, and he decided that the best way to assure the successful continuation of his company was to sell it to venture capitalists with proven management expertise. The venture capitalists did okay for themselves, because they sold Golden Cat Corporation (the renamed Edward Lowe Industries, Inc.) to Ralston Purina Company in 1995, just five years later.

Ralston Purina was then acquired by Nestlé S.A. in 2001, which merged Purina's pet food and cat litter products with their own Friskies and Alpo brands to create the Nestlé Purina PetCare division.

Sounds like big corporate business. But not so big that Ralston Purina couldn't come visit us here in I'il ole Virginny. In 1997, based on their experience with cat litter, they decided to invest some scratch right here in King William County, VA. \$20.1 million, in fact! For a spiffy, new 150,000 square foot factory, producing nothing but cat litter, and employing about 80 people. The site was chosen because of the presence of high-quality clay deposits, the raw material used in cat litter. The factory mines its own clay, processes it, packages it, and ships it all over the mid-Atlantic region, to the tune of about 175,000 tons per year. And these are the very guys that so wonderfully donate "factory seconds" to Rikki's, so that our cats can potty with Purina.

But, wait! What Nestlé Purina manufactures here in Virginia is Tidy Cats litter. What happened to Kitty Litter? It's gone. The brand name has been retired. Perhaps because people used it generically to refer to the product of any manufacturer. Yes, Tidy Cats does have competition, although they do have about 30% market share.

Edward Lowe started the Tidy Cats brand (actually, it was called Tidy Cat back then, but who has only one cat?) in 1964. So, for a while, Tidy Cats competed with Kitty Litter, even though they were both manufactured and marketed by the same company. Why not? Whether you buy an Oldsmobile or a Chevrolet, you're still giving your bucks to General Motors.

And whether you use Tidy Cats or another brand, you're still tossing out a lot of cat litter. Over 2 million tons per year (well, maybe not you personally, that's the USA total), which is about 100,000 truck loads heading off to the landfill. No wonder it's so hard to find a break in traffic to pull out of your driveway!

It's kind of a shame to toss out all this perfectly good (albeit used) cat litter, because it keeps getting better year after year. Yup, cat litter's come a long way since being just plain old clay in 1947.

Way back in 1977, Kitty Litter added a microencapsulated deodorant. Did you know there was such high tech back in 1977? Did people even know what "microencapsulated" meant back then? Do people have any idea what it means today? Where can I get the stuff for some of my co-workers?

Scooping, or clumping, cat litter entered the market about 1990. Instead of having that smelly, gray blotch in your old-style litter, you can have a nice, hard ball of urine-created cement in your litter box, a ball that you can just scoop out

and toss away. Tidy Cats even advertised, in 1999, that their Scoop (brand) formula enhanced clump hardness over time. Sounds like something we need to help rebuild our crumbling bridges and other infrastructure; if anybody has an in with the government, I'm now taking offers on my extensive collection of used cat litter.

Tidy Cats has always been an innovator. In 1998, they introduced their High Performance Formula for Multiple Cats. Gentlemen, start your engines! In 2000, they introduced a Disposable Box — buy one product, let your cat use it, throw it out when you're done. As much of a throw-away society as we are, I guess that wasn't a best seller, because I don't see it on their website now. I understand that it was a big hit among New Coke drinkers, though.

But there are still amazing things happening in the cat litter biz. Also in 2000, Tidy Cats introduced their Crystals. These are made from silica gel, and are designed to go 30 days between changes (less if more than one cat uses the litter box). They can go this long because of their super absorbency for urine; you still have to remove solid matter from the box daily.

And the latest and the greatest from Tidy Cats is Breeze — a complete litter box system that separates urine from solid matter, making the entire shootin' match easier to clean and less likely to smell. Of course, which type and which brand of cat litter you choose is a very personal decision (made with your cats' input, naturally), but what a great country we live in where the number of options is so enormous! I wonder if I should have said "made with your cats' output, naturally."

It doesn't stop there! You've probably all seen the automatic litter box cleaner (sounds like something Ronco would sell — maybe I should do an article on Ron Popeil some day), that senses when your cat leaps out of the litter box (and out of the way), and brings a rake across the top of the litter to clean things up.

Or, for those of you who would just as soon forget about the litter box altogether, there's the Kitty Transfer System, that teaches your cat to use the toilet. Unfortunately, it's a bit more difficult to teach the cat to quit that incessant flushing, as your water bill approaches the gross national product of a small European nation.

Nor does the latest in cat litter technology ignore the modern green movement. Nestlé Purina didn't call it Tidy Cats, but they do offer a cat litter made from recycled newspapers, called Yesterday's News. For the more adventurous among you, you can even make your own recycled newspaper cat litter. Just do a web search for "Make your own cat litter from old newspapers". And be prepared to spend about 45 minutes getting you, your utensils, your clothes, and everything you touch smeared with wet newsprint. But, you and your cat should be able to have intelligent discussions about current events when you're done.

Well, time for me, your old Creature Chronicler, Lou Gato, to have a serious chat about current events with my cat. I just wish he weren't such a know-it-all! Remember; if there's anything you'd like to see me write about in a future Rikki's Reflections, let me know immediately at [lgato@rikkisrefuge.org](mailto:lgato@rikkisrefuge.org).

Until next time!

