

Even the vet offers a logo bag — with a discount

By Lisa Bertagnoli
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Reusable shopping bags aren't only good for the environment: At some small retail businesses, they're good for a discount, too.

Medical receptionist Miriam Balinsky, 22, bought a reusable bag from Mid North Animal Hospital in Lincoln Park in late October. Mid North offers a \$1 discount on food or medicine with each reuse, a selling point for Ms. Balinsky, who has four cats. Plus, "I'm a fan of anything reusable," she says.

W Grocer, a market with locations in Bucktown and the South Loop, began giving away reusable canvas bags in late October. Customers who took bags received a 10% discount on purchases that day.

Co-owner Gregory Stellatos says the stores eventually will charge for the bags, which cost about \$3.50 wholesale, and offer a discount to customers who reuse them. The stores save money on plastic bags, and "people have been asking for them since we opened," Mr. Stellatos says.

Soggy Paws, a pet grooming and supply store in the Logan Square, South Loop, Uptown and Mayfair neighborhoods, sells reusable insulated bags with logos for both Soggy Paws and Deli Fresh, a brand of refrigerated dog food, for \$3.99. Customers who spend more than \$25 get the bag free, and those who reuse the bags get a 25-cent discount on their purchases.

Sales of the bags "are pretty slow right now," with each store selling two to five a week, says co-owner Paul Rathe, but "it's nice to have our name out there."

Isidore Kharasch, owner of Green Hospitality Certified, a Deerfield-based consultancy, predicts more small businesses will start to offer the bags as loyalty programs — and to one-up bigger retailers that offer them without the incentive.

"At home, we have everybody's bag in the world that doesn't give us a discount," Mr. Kharasch says. For small businesses, "this is the next big thing."

