

Pet Sales Nothing to Bark At

It's no secret that Americans love their pets. Friends are fickle, children move away, jobs are insecure. Our pets, though, are always happy to see us, purr on our laps, wag their tails in excitement or sing melodious songs as we enter our homes. Our love affair with our pets is something that isn't about to go away.

While sales of pet products have softened in recent years, according to a recent independent survey by Pet Age Retailer, the pet industry spending is still strong, especially among pet care services such as grooming. And, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, the overall pet market increased an estimated 3.6 percent from 2006 to 2007.



One of a kind Pet First Aid kit. 50 quality first aid items to care for a pet and a mail in coupon for 10 FREE styptic sticks. The Dr. Bag case is a bright yellow color, showered with a handful of fun animals & jam packed with all the basic necessities a household will need to care for their pets. Suggested retail: \$22. From **Me4Kidz**; 480/444-2332.

And while the economy would have you thinking that consumer spending has affected the pet market, think again. Manufacturers have developed complete product lines to meet the continued consumer demand for products—for both beloved pets and their human companions.

SPOILING THE BABIES

Retailer Marcie Thiesen, owner of Bow Meow, A Unique Pet Boutique (www.ShopBowMeow.com) in Royal Oak, Michigan, agrees that people will still spend on their pets and purchase items for themselves, despite economic conditions. Her two and a half year old shop is located in a state that has faced turbulent economic times in recent years. Nonetheless, her customers still enjoy indulging their furry friends even if it's not at the previous spending levels.

"Bow Meow sells a unique combination of one-of-a-kind products,



Our Name Is Mud has created this vibrantly colored whimsical mug for dog lovers. Designed by artist Lorrie Veasey, each mug is individually hand painted and crafted out of the most chip resistant dolomite earthenware available. Holds 16 oz. Suggested retail: \$14. From **Enesco**; 800/4 ENESCO, www.ournameismud.com.

by Megy Karydes

ranging from doggie dinnerware, hip doggie duds, cool collars and leashes, fun and durable toys, cozy beds, fashionable carriers, strollers, tasty treats and fun artwork for humans," says Thiesen.

Fashionable items seem to strike a cord with customers and manufacturers are responding to the trend. Giftware manufacturer Mud Pie is developing a fun holiday line with bright green and red colors for its pet line this season.

"Our pet category is usually strongest in the third and fourth quarter," says Adrienne Boyer, executive vice president of Mud Pie (www.MudPie.com), an industry-leading manufacturer of giftware sold to the retail trade both internationally and nationally. "But we've had one of our best quarters this spring and have only seen this category increase."

While traditional pet products such as bowls, collars and pet clothing sell well, it's the "people products" that really resonate with consumers, says Boyer. "People love to relate to their pets and our mugs and frames do extremely well as our personalized products."

Mud Pie recently introduced the Dog's Personalization Ornament after retailers asked for personalized pet products. The ornament is made from glass and the package includes a marker so a customer can personalize the ornaments as they wish. Suggested retail price is \$15-\$17.50 and it comes in an attractive window gift box for easy gift-giving.

Pet toys are always popular and building on a successful product last year, Mud Pie introduced the Flying Disk and Ball Set with appropriate sayings on the balls: Naughty and Nice. It also comes in an attractive window gift box.

Mud Pie is best known for its original designs that are well packaged and value priced which makes it easy for retailers to incorporate into their merchandising mix regardless if they are a pet boutique or gift shop.

Planet Dog (www.PlanetDog.com) offers a wide range of durable, fun toys, and is one of Thiesen's favorite manufacturers. In addition to their pet toys, the company also offers a great



Whether you have a dog, cat, hamster or goldfish, enthrone the king of the castle in an Armetale metal picture frame for the that one-of-a-kind pet in your life. Picture frames come in 5x7 and 8x10 sizes. Suggested retail: \$60-\$49. From **Wilson Armetale**; 800/826-0088, www.armetale.com.

variety of other dog-related items such as portable dinnerware to apparel for the pet owners. Additionally, Thiesen loves the fact that a portion of their proceeds go to help service dogs and rescue groups.

DON'T FORGET THE PET OWNERS

As Boyer and Thiesen suggest, pet owners are getting in on the act with products that incorporate their love for the pets into their everyday lives. From apparel, to jewelry, to home



SimplyFido (718/389-823) pet toys are made with certified organic cotton fabric. All of the soft colors come from natural ingredients. Toys have features like squeakers, stretchable parts and rings that ensure endless fun with peace of mind. SimplyFido pet toys are the only plush pet toy that is certified Non-Toxic. Suggested retail: \$12.99 - \$17.99. Contact them at www.simplyfido.com or e-mail info@simplyfido.com.



Beautiful glass ornament is packaged with a marker to personalize this pet gift. Comes attractively packaged in a fun window gift box. Suggested retail: \$15-\$17.50. From **Mud Pie**; 800/998-1633, www.mud-pie.com.

It cannot be denied—Americans love their pets and consider them a part of the family. Thus, it's only natural that we will continue to shower them with toys, gourmet treats, high-end accessories and even personalized jewelry.

Dogs and cats still remain popular among most Americans although Jen Griggs Sebastian, owner of Scout Dog Studios (www.ScoutDogStudios.com), a Denver-based product design and manufacturing company that creates canine and feline inspired artwork, among other items, recently completed a commissioned painting with two Labradors and an iguana named Izzy.

Not surprisingly, though, it not just about products for the pets that make this market an important one for independent gift retailers and pet boutiques. Pet owners are partial to products that connect them with their pets, too, spending cash on high-end purses and carrying cases, home accents like frames and mugs as well as sterling silver jewelry for themselves.

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accents, pet owners are outfitting their lives with pet paraphernalia.

Chicago-based pet boutique owner Robin Phillips opened Zulu last year to help pet lovers, like her, find great quality items for their pets. Before taking the plunge into retail, Phillips and her sister, who co-owns the shop, researched the pet industry, visited other retailers and trade shows to see what they wanted to carry in their shop.

"People reward their pets with human rewards," Phillips says. "Like humans who give each other gifts, pet owners like to reward their pets with beds, clothing and all-natural products. They really are a part of their family and treat them as such."

When asked what type of product Thiesen and Phillips would like to carry in their shop that they can't seem to find right now, both unambiguously agreed it would have to be an indestructible toy. Phillips is also scouting for really cool and tasteful looking litter box covers.

PET-THEMED PRODUCTS HIT THE FASHION RUNWAYS

It's not exactly news that pet-themed clothing and accessories have been around, but pet-themed products are definitely becoming more fashionable as of late.

O Loves M (www.OLovesM.com) handbag designer Merle O'Brien designed her Camo Dog line of bags with pet lovers in mind and because she loves dogs herself. "Plus, I wanted to help our local animal shelter raise money for a fundraiser," O'Brien says. "After the fundraiser was over, people kept asking me to buy the bags—pet stores love them, and boutiques love them, as they are so unique and green to boot!"



Eco-conscious and fashionable are the O Loves M bags (970/925-8516). The bags are made from materials that manufacturing companies were going to throw away as waste, and from used Yoga mats. Messenger bag is 16" x 10" x 4.5" (suggested retail: \$70-\$80); Bernie large is 10.5" x 11" x 5" (suggested retail: \$50-\$55); Bernie small measures 8" x 9" x 2" (suggested retail: \$40-\$45). This one features dog-pattern lining.



Pet Futons Indoor and Outdoor Collections are lighter weight and portable. They can be used in crates, rolled up for travel or anywhere in the home. Outdoor fabrics are made with a weatherproof fabric that is mildew resistant. All futons feature a machine washable inner pad and zip off cover. Hand sewn in the USA. Available in 3 sizes in 15 designs. Suggested retail: \$45, \$55 and \$65. From **Up Country**; 800/541-5909, www.upcountryinc.com.

O Loves M bags feature hip, sunglasses-wearing dogs on the fabric of the bag while the other piece of the bag is constructed from yoga mat scraps, so it's a fashionable bag that is eco-friendly, too. The Camo Dog line comes in two styles and three sizes, a messenger bag and two tote bag sizes. Customers from 10 to 75 years of age sport her unique line of bags.

HOME ACCENTS PROVE POPULAR PET PRODUCTS

Home accents are getting into the act, too, with indoor pet futons, step ladders and pillows and throws among the line up.

To make nap time a breeze, companies like Up Country (www.UpCountryInc.com) have developed the Indoor Pet Futon with furry friends in mind. They come in stylish colors from stripes to patterns which makes it easy to complement existing furniture in the home. And, the cotton fabric covers are machine washable and zip off for easy cleaning (and an easier sell!).

The indoor pet futons are a great alternative to bulky, heavy beds and make it easy to carry in a retail store. Each is lightweight and portable, can be used in crates and rolled up for travel or to simply brighten up a corner of a home.

"A continuing trend for us is the coordinating collections of cross category products," says Donna Bodell, director of marketing for Up Country. "We have collars that coordinate with a fabric futon, a ceramic bowl set and placemat and a treat. This makes our retailer's job easier, they can do one stop shopping, they can create a color theme or look throughout the merchandise and they can up-sell one purchase easily. Why not buy the matching bowls if you love the futon?"

As a bonus for retailers and cus-

tomers who are asking where products are made, most of Up Country's products are manufactured in Rhode Island, including the pet futons.

Humorous home décor pieces can be found through Tumbleweed Pottery (www.TumbleweedPottery.com). Lisa Teja, national sales assistant of Tumbleweed Pottery, couldn't agree more than Americans often think of their pets as family.

"That's why our pet category products are so popular, especially your adorable, top-selling Pet Frame entitled, 'This is hard to ask, but I have to know... Am I adopted?'" says Teja. "Many pet owners can relate to that!"



Juno's Garden (888/738-8390), a manufacturer of organic pet bath and body products introduces its new Pal Dog Soothing Care System Set. Designed to target sensitive skin problems, the set features three full-sized products that can be used on puppies and dogs of all ages and breeds. Suggested retail: \$34. www.paldog.com.

Another pet category favorite from Tumbleweed Pottery is their brand-new paw print Pet Mug Collection, featuring 36 humorous titles including "Cats like obedient people," "Let me get this straight, my grandchild is a dog?" and "BEWARE: Dog can't hold its licker!" These 16 ounce mugs are microwave and dishwasher safe and make great gifts for any dog or cat lover.

Planet Dog offers sassyt-shirts who says like "Who's your doggy?"

ONE-OF-A-KIND GIFTS TO MATCH ONE-OF-A-KIND PERSONALITIES

Scout Dog Studios (www.ScoutDogStudios.com) has found great success with her customized, one-of-a-kind pieces such as Wooden Step Stool. The stool can be developed with one or two steps, can be created from photos that are e-mailed



The little fish pendant for cats — one size, tradition meets style! Solid sterling silver fish adorned with an authentic good luck eye glass bead on tubular style black rubber necklace. Sizes 8", 10" or custom made. Matching pieces available for the discerning cat lovers! Suggested retail: Little Fish pendant for cats: \$55-65. **The Lovepaw Co.**; 305/371-3190, or thelovepaw@bellsouth.net.

to the company or chosen from a dropdown list online. In addition, a customer can detail the background colors, add a name to the stool, or even offer specific details about a pet to incorporate into the piece to really personalize it. It takes about two to four weeks to create the stools.

Another company that has found success among its customized product offerings is Manual Woodworkers & Weavers (www.manualww.com). The company sells its Woven Moment Box to appeal to consumers who really want a true one-of-a-kind piece since the image on the heirloom-quality throw is a picture they provide. At just \$108.00 retail, the customer receives not only a wonderful throw to treasure for years to come, but it features a picture of their own pet. It's a great gift idea that takes up very little space in a retail store but allows for so many possibilities. The throw is made from 100 percent cotton and arrives within four to six weeks.



Orbee-Tuff products are what the company is best known for and which sell the best. The compound is award-winning, FDA approved, non-toxic and recyclable. All products made from Orbee-Tuff are buoyant, minty, 100% guaranteed, and made in the USA. Suggested retail: \$9.95. From **Planet Dog**; 800/381-1516, www.customerservice@planetdog.com.

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CAN FIDO BE ECO, TOO? INDEED!

The eco-friendly movement hasn't forgotten about our petseither. Planet H produces the SimplyFido (www.SimplyFido.com) line, one of the world's first lines of organic pettoys, in response to requests by pet owners for organic goods and healthy alternatives to pet products.

SimplyFido pettoys are made with certified organic cotton fabric and all of the soft colors are derived from natural ingredients such as Madder Roots, Gardenia Seed or Chestnut Bur extracts, according to Jean Chae, Director of New Business and Development for Hosung New York, the parent company of SimplyFido. The toys have fun features like squeakers, stretchable parts and rings that ensure endless fun for a pet with peace of mind. They are also certified Non-Toxic.



Borrowing from the Native American tradition of giving people spirit names to fit their characteristics or personalities, "My Indian Name is Walks with Poop," is a must have for any responsible dog walker with a sense of humor and conscience for keeping the neighbors happy. 100% cotton. Suggested retail: \$15. From **High Cotton**; 800/762-7172.

the pet gift market," says UpCountry's Bodell. "With the recent scares in pet foods, children's plastic toys and lead glazing on ceramics, customers are very conscientious about sourcing products from the U.S."

Phillips has also seen an increase among her customers asking where products are made. "They are especially interested in our products that have paint or are made of rubber," says Phillips.

In fact, Planet Dog took matters into its own hands about a year ago when it made the decision to manufacture its molded toys again "so that we could regain the control of our product quality and give the work back in our state," says Stephanie Volo, Planet Dog's Top Dog.

"We received an enormous amount of positive feedback from across the country letting us know how incredible it was for us to do this and that we have made loyal customers nationwide because of it," Volo adds.

It must be working. Planet Dog's Orbee-Tuff products are what it's most known for and sells the best for the company. The compound is award winning, FDA approved, non-toxic and recyclable, according to Volo.

And, all products made from Orbee-Tuff® are buoyant, minty 100% guaranteed and made in the United States.

GIVE THAT FELINE PRINCESS SOME BLING

Consumers can't seem to get enough bling for their pets (or themselves, for that matter)! Olympia Zacharakis launched LovePaw (www.lovepaw.com)

after spending years in the business world. Just a couple of years old, LovePaw caters to retailers from jewelers, pet boutiques and gift shops who love her line of sterling silver jewelry for both pooch and companion!

Her newest collection, the Artemis Collection, features her signature paw design. The line was inspired by the great Olympian goddess Artemis, the goddess of hunting, wilderness and wild animals and is available in two

sterling silver chain or tubular style black rubber, as a pet I.D. tag and pet charm. And, it comes with matching pieces for the discerning pet owners.

For cat lovers, Zacharakis is introducing the little fish pendant in one size. Each is handcrafted using solid sterling silver and the "little fish" is adorned with an authentic good luck eye glass bead on tubular style black rubber necklace. It, too, is available in matching pieces for the discerning cat lovers!

EVENTS AND DEALS FOR PUPS AND THEIR FRIENDS

Despite the fact that most retailers have a loyal clientele, it is more important than ever to market your shop. Most pet retailers, including Bow Meow and Zulu, do this through events that support non-profits such as animal rescue groups or adopt-a-pet programs. Planet Dog even set up its own foundation (www.PlanetDogFoundation.org) to help promote and celebrate programs in which dogs serve and support their best friends whether that is visiting children in a hospital or alerting a deaf person when someone is knocking on the door.

Candace Canty, owner of two pet boutiques in Chicago called Dog-a-



Pet Feeding Bowls have wrought iron stands with stainless steel bowls. The stand is a black-grey finish. Two sizes: Large: 7"H x 17.25"W x 8.5"D (suggested retail: \$60); Small: 6"H x 13.75"W x 6.25"D (suggested retail: \$40). From **Caffco International**; 800/933-5888, www.caffco.com.



"...and then you came true. Happy Anniversary," says the inside greeting. Notes, cards, invitations and calendars use photos of rescued dogs printed on recycled paper. Suggested retail: \$2.99 card. Part of price goes to animal welfare charities. From **Dogonfunny Creations**; 410/692-0426, www.dogonfunny.com.

IS THIS MADE IN THE U.S.A.?

In addition to products that are eco-friendly, the fact that their pet's toys and products are made in the U.S.A. is important to some customers, too.

"Made in U.S.A. is a huge trend in



Tumbleweed Pottery (800/880-5117) introduces its line of 36 different pet mugs. There are 18 different cat and dog sayings. Each pet mug comes in a designer gift box. Retail is competitively priced at \$9.99. www.tumbleweedpottery.com.

sizes. LovePaw's pieces are handcrafted in Greece of sterling silver and adorned with an authentic good luck eye glass bead. The Artemis line is offered as a pendant, necklace with



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Good Kitty Pillow is a 12" x 12" reversible tapestry pillow. Graphic, retro style, for the "cool" cat-lover. Suggested Retail: \$16. Also tapestry throw reproductions of a buyer's pet photo: \$108. From **The Manual Woodworkers & Weavers Inc.**; 800/542-3139

holics, developed a postcard with her shop's information that complementary businesses can use, too. "We produce a postcard with space on the back of the card to allow other businesses to promote their business, too,"

Cantysays. Complementary business—could include pet boarding facilities or veterinarian offices.

"Our postcard offers a one-time 20 percent off discount," Cantysays. "And, each card has a code that corresponds to the other business so we can track where the card came from."

Canty also allows the other business to send her information so she can promote them, too. The postcard program has been very successful, is a low-cost way to attract new customers to her shop, and a great way to develop partnerships with other small businesses in her community.

At the end of the day, though, our pets are still our friends and family, and Americans will continue to pamper their loyal companions. "Pets are a part of the family and pet parents acknowledge that by spending exponentially on them," adds Volo. 🐾

Megy Karydes is a freelance writer and president of the marketing/public relations consulting firm, Karydes Consulting. Contact her at megy@KarydesConsulting.com.



Display the love you have for your pet with these adorable wooden plaque expressions! Suggested retail: \$8.50. Dog and cat designs available. From **Linda Grayson's Pet Project**; 800/869-9619, www.printwickpapers.com.

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