

BACK TO BASICS

It's important to start the year on a high note.

January is the perfect time for a wake-up call. After all, what happens this month could set the tone for the rest of the year. While a pet trade publication might not be glamorous, my hope is this issue will help us lay a great foundation for the rest of 2023.

Katherine Heigl, the subject of our cover story, can easily be described as glamorous. After all, she's a former model turned movie star, but she's much more than that. I had the opportunity to speak with Heigl about her new pet brand, Badlands Ranch, and her animal welfare charity, Jason Debus Heigl Foundation. You can read our exclusive interview that explores her passion for helping needy animals and what motivated her to enter a very crowded dog food and treat sector.

This issue, as is the case with all editions of Pet Age, covers a wide range of topics, including business strategies, consumer relations, leadership, industry news and plenty of new and noteworthy product listings. As premiumization becomes a growing focus in the pet fashion and accessory market, we're honored to have Ashley Carestia become a regular columnist who will provide expert commentary on how to properly navigate this exciting sector as well as creating a strong relationship with today's demanding consumers. Similar to Heigl, Carestia is a former model turned award-winning retailer, having founded the luxury pet boutique Bark Fifth Avenue in 2013.

There are many challenges to being successful in the pet industry, be it as a retailer or manufacturer, and the act of connecting and engaging with consumers to build a relationship and gain their trust can make or break a business. That's a goal that's easier said than done. As Robert Wheatley so eloquently wrote in his April 2022 Management column, "The Right Strategy," "Trust is a feeling, not a rational experience. What makes a brand trustworthy is defined by the consumer – not the brand." With pandemic pressures and economic conditions in flux, consumer trust is even more important to the pet industry. To further examine the topic of consumer trust, this issue includes a special report that contains insight from several brands that have incorporated pet parents into their mission and business strategy. I recommend everyone examine the valuable advice being offered from Annamaet, Barkworthies, Guardian Pet, Precious Cat and SodaPup.

As we look forward to another year of prosperity for the pet industry, it's important to get back to basics. That's why you'll find more than 100 product listings in this issue, as we once again keep you informed on the new and trending items that you should consider carrying on your store shelves.

We thank you, as always, for reading Pet Age and helping us be the leading media brand in the pet industry. Pet Age will continue to deliver our news in content that is compelling, entertaining and informative, and we wouldn't be here without you. Now read on and enjoy!

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PRODUCT PROMOTIONS

Tip and tricks for retailers to drive sales.

BY ASHLEY CARESTIA

New products keep your business fresh. They bring customers back into the store and get people excited about your brand. Plus, loyal customers will always be interested in your latest offerings. This doesn't mean that promotion of new products should be neglected. A carefully constructed release strategy is essential in the success of new merchandise. However, it is not just your newest offerings at stake as it's important to implement the proper promotion strategy and tactics for all your products.

There are ways of promoting new products that will lead you to early sales and overall success, and the following methods of release will get people excited about your store. Excitement over new arrivals will lead to an improved customer experience and an increase in overall sales.

The sudden spike in e-commerce sales in 2020 has fallen in 2021 and 2022 after the initial pandemic jump. Prior to the pandemic, the growth rate of e-commerce had always outpaced overall retail sales. Since restrictions started to ease and physical stores started reopening again in mid-2021, the e-commerce growth rate has remained lower than the growth of retail sales.

Meanwhile, brick-and-mortar is on the mend. The rebound for physical stores may be partially driven by some consumers making a conscious change. Globally, 47 percent of consumers said they were significantly more likely to purchase from retail stores that have a local presence, according to Omni Retail.

Research by Forrester predicts that in 2024, 72 percent of U.S. retail sales will still happen in-store. Amidst all these changes, there lies a significant opportunity for brick-and-mortar retailers to use their current momentum and capitalize on the slowing of e-commerce. A focus on personalized customer experiences will be the key to differentiating brick-and-mortar retail from e-commerce shopping.

What does this new shopping era look like? That's where the fun begins. For example, this summer the anticipation of the new Barbie movie had been overwhelming. We saw hot pink themes all over our newsfeeds and inboxes. However, that's exactly how to roll out new products with excitement that will get your customers excited, plus there is a significant opportunity to capitalize in on trends outside your industry. Brick-and-mortar stores can get , and here are a few suggestions:

SIP & SHOP

Hosting an event at your store is a way to encourage shoppers to buy directly from your business. It can be a shopping event, or a ticketed event for a craft or painting night, live music or a contest. You can also host a pop-up event and invite other local businesses into your store.

Let your customers get excited about your new products as early as possible. They shouldn't find out about a product after it hits the market. Make sure they know about it well before its release, as the anticipation makes the product more desirable. This ensures that people want it as soon as it becomes available. The result is an exponential increase in early sales. You can start this hype at a particular event or through digital channels. Doing a preview at a certain event increases the inclusivity of your new product. It makes everyone who attends (either physically or digitally) confident that they heard about it first.

Your business can also use social media or video marketing to promote your new products early. You can show off what's new and give customers an inside look at your brand. According to Biteable statistics, mobile video consumption has been rising 100 percent every year. In addition, social video generates 1,200 percent more shares than text and images combined. Use these tools to build hype and spread the word on your fresh merchandise.

Add a "New Arrivals" section on your website and on signage in your store. When you release new products, have a dedicated section for new releases. This will help current loyal customers to come across your latest item arrivals. It also illustrates to your customers that you update your stock frequently. The "new arrivals" section should be easily seen on your website's homepage. Include it under your products tab. It can also appear as its own section within the main navigation bar. This increases the exposure of your new products and will provide a better digital customer experience.

Window displays are always a favorite. Not only does it showcase your new arrivals, but it's also fun to create. Allow customers to see your new products by providing a variety of display products from different angles in your window. This will give customers a better idea of what your product looks like and how it functions. Besides, who wouldn't want a hot pink Barbie window display!?

EMAIL/SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

If you are not already sending out on-brand emails, the time to start is now. Use an email platform, like Act-On or Constant Contact, to organize and send communications to your users. You should

have the ability to segment your audience into different categories to target a specific group of customers. Email campaign categories may be separated based on engagement, abandoned carts, visitors who have not signed up for your loyalty program, recent purchases and demographics. This will increase the more you target your new products to relevant customers. In addition to email, you also need to embrace the power of social media. This is where you create an exclusive brand community and make your customers feel like they are building an authentic relationship with you. When crafting your new product promotions on social media, center it around the customer journey. Create content that is driven by customer experiences. Create stories and share pictures of your latest releases centered around your customers.

PRODUCT-GIVEAWAYS

Contests are a great way to increase visibility on social media. This also extends to giveaways on other platforms. This type of promotion is a great way to acquire new customers, with your loyal consumers sharing the contest or giveaway across their social media platforms. A stand-alone social media contest is a great way to promote new products. For example, say 800 people enter your contest by liking and sharing. You can then be sure that at least 800 people have interacted with your brand. The content will also have been seen by any friends or followers of the contestants.

Timing can make or break any new product release. Make sure you plan your product's release from the announcement to the end of the marketing campaign. Each promotion should be well placed within your product release timeline. Be sure to announce your new arrivals early.

You want the world to know about your product before its release, but you don't want the news to grow stale. Spread out your marketing and promotions to keep the momentum of your new release. Embrace omnichannel strategies – brick-and-mortar doesn't have to mean only in-person shopping. For instance, brick-and-mortar stores can also offer online ordering with in-store pickup, deals on social media for in-person shopping and more.

Lastly, have a plan for after release day. Keep the momentum going on your products after they are available. It will boost sales by keeping the release fresh in the minds of people who haven't made a purchase yet, and you can include sales and promotions after the release. So, come on retailers, let's paw-ty. PA

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TRENDSETTERS

Revisiting 2023 pet fashion trends, 2024 predictions.

BY ASHLEY CARESTIA

Dogs have always been man's best friend, and for most of us, they are more than just pets; they are family. We have seen over the recent years that pet parents want their furry family members to look just as stylish as they do.

Before we head forward with my predictions for 2024 among high-end fashion and accessories, let's look back on what new trends emerged in 2023 and the success they had in the per industry.

Matchy-Matchy. Matching outfits for dogs and their owners have been a popular trend for a while now and became even more popular in 2023. There's nothing cuter than a dog and their owner wearing matching outfits, and this trend showed proof of the human-animal bond.

Barbiecore. From Barbie sneakers, Barbie backpacks, Barbie swimsuits, and Barbie hoodies for your dog, we have seen it all! "There is not a corner of the globe that hasn't turned pink," Richard Dickson, Mattel's president and chief operating officer, said.

Accessories. In 2023, accessories for dogs were more popular than ever before. From bandanas to hats and jewelry, there were countless ways one could accessorize our furry friends and add some extra flair to their style. We saw sunglasses for fashion and protection, scarves for warmth and style, and plenty of fashion forward pet jewelry including the most popular, pet charm necklaces.

Sustainable, Eco-friendly Fashion. Dog collars and leashes made from recycled materials, jackets and sweaters made from organic cotton, toys made from natural materials such as bamboo or hemp, and beds made from recycled materials.

Bold, Bright Colors. Go bold or go home was the motto for color in 2023, and while I don't see that going away anytime soon, it's worth pointing out some popular items like, collars in bright neon colors, harnesses in bold patterns, dog coats, jackets, and chunky sweaters in eye-catching colors like bright pink, aqua, and green.

The pet clothing market is expected to reach over $7.66 billion by 2031. The market was valued at $5.19 billion in 2021. Shirts and tops for pets dominated the market by 37.2 percent in 2021, and sweaters and hoodies help dogs with short coats stay warm in cold climates.

As we head into 2024, I believe we are going to see some exciting new trends that will take the world of dog fashion!

There are Gucci hats made in Italy from pink bouclé wool, Celine travel bags with calfskin trim and a (waste bag) purse studded with gold spikes.

Thanks to more and more world-known designers that are creating fashionable wear for pets of different sizes. In the past year, numerous fashion houses have launched ranges for pets, including Gucci, Burberry, Versace, Celine, Tommy Hilfiger, Hugo Boss and Christian Louboutin.

Some of the newer offerings have been inspired by designers' own pets. Gucci's collection of jumpers, coats and travel carriers was made with creative director Alessandro Michele's Boston terriers Bosco and Osco in mind. Celine's range of leads, poo bag pouches and bowls, designed by Hedi Slimane, was created for his labradoodle, Elvis.

My top predictions for 2024:

Waste Bag Purses. Already a huge hit this Fall, the average plastic waste bag holder isn't going to cut it for the average pet parent it seems.

Leg warmers. Leg warmers always seem to be coming back in style, but did you ever expect dogs to get in on the trend? Well, guess what. Dog leg warmers (as well as dog leggings, believe it or not) actually exist, and there are surprisingly a TON of options to choose from. From furry and cozy, to chic and bold.

Faux fur everything. The Hyper Texture trend is in full must have mode. Sherpa, faux fur, waffle knit, leather, and quilt will be everywhere next year, no matter the season.

Jeweled Bangle Leads. We are seeing these pop up all over. The Bangle Leash brings the fashion-forward bangle trend of the runway to canine couture.

Sequin Glam. Many special occasion outfits contain sequins, sparkling stones, and beaded appliques.

In 2024, there will be plenty of exciting dog fashion trends to look out for. From waste bag purses, designer-inspired apparel, to yes, leg warmers, there's something for everyone and every posh pooch. As we know, it's important to remember that while fashion is important, functionality and practicality should also be considered. By incorporating these new trends for 2024 in your store, you will be ahead of the curb and your customers (and their pups) will thank you. PA

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WOMEN IN BUSINESS

Women leaders drive growth in the pet industry.

BY ASHLEY CARESTIA

The pet industry is thriving — and much of its success is due to the amazing women who are at its helm. Indeed, women are a driving force in so many corners of the pet space. In fact, 61 percent of women in business can be found in one of four sectors — administration, professional technical services, health care and the pet industry.

Business growth in these individual sectors has widened the margins for women to own their own business. Another reason 3.5 million women-owned businesses have opened in the last decade, is that many women possess innate skills that make them strong business leaders. Women are often adept with priority setting, people coordinating, and communication being driven by tenacity and proficiency.

Women-owned businesses have faced all those challenges and more and remain undaunted about starting and growing their own businesses. Women-owned businesses in the pet industry respond quickly to the needs of the modern pet parent, and they cover a wide range of goods and services. From franchises to the niche startups, we all benefit from the efforts of hundreds of other aspirational women influencing the way we care for and spoil our best furry friends.

Women continue to make significant strides in the business world, founding innovative companies, introducing revolutionary new ideas, and building a path to workforce equity.

Women business leaders play an essential role in their local communities, our economy and the world at large. They serve as a vital part of the world's economic engine and empower the next generation of women to reach their goals as entrepreneurs.

As of 2019, the number of women-owned businesses has doubled to nearly 13 million (representing 42 percent of all U.S. businesses), and a 2022 study showed that over the past three years, the number of women entrepreneurs grew by 48 percent year-over-year, which outpaced their male counterparts by 22 percent.

The FCC notes that building a support network is necessary and that nearly half of female founders say they're held back by a lack of mentors or advisers.

Mentorship can make a considerable difference in your professional growth. Over the years, I've learned the importance and value of this, both as a mentor and a mentee, and how much more can be achieved when you pay it forward and help lift other women up. This can be done through providing programs and materials, serving as a confidant to a peer or encouraging women to look into new, educational resources. To lean into their network and not be afraid to ask for help.

"The importance of having a support system of fellow women business owners for networking, mentoring and sharing ideas/resources. But also, in accessing capital, women are falling short. Some of this may be attributed to poor financial record keeping and/or not making asking for enough when pitching, but there is also bias based upon the decision makers [VCs] being still very male-dominated," said Jill Goodrich, president of the Georgia Women's Chamber of Commerce. "It is important that we push for more women to be represented in the decision-making process in those VCs to help close the funding gender gap."

Having been awarded Pet Age's Woman of Influence award myself, I know that ambitious, hardworking females are influential in the pet industry, constantly pushing the envelope in pet care and are always looking for innovative ways to accelerate the development of the pet industry as a whole. Women entrepreneur groups are imperative as it allows us to share ideas and changes in the industry.

Jennifer Kirk, founder and CEO of Posh Puppy Boutique, agrees.

"I am part of many women entrepreneur groups where we continue to share ideas and changes in the industry," she noted. "I think that there are many more women owned businesses and brands since I started in 2007. There is more respect for women business owners and the playing field is broader with more resources to help women succeed.

"The business world is ever changing, and there has been an increased focus on women-owned brands, specifically small businesses," she added. "The focus has shifted to U.S.-based business support, which is something I strongly promote; that we are women-owned and operated in the U.S.A. The only way to be successful is to stay in tune with the ever-changing business you are in and to know your competition."

What's next? The answer to this question will depend on who you are. If you're a woman business owner, though, your next steps will be to consider how you can continue to grow your business. As women-owned businesses continue to flourish, so too will the nation as a whole.

Your vision, goals and dreams are waiting for you. PA

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RETAILER REQUESTS

Retailers seek assistance from the pet industry.

BY ASHLEY CARESTIA

The fast-paced landscape of the pet industry is constantly changing in terms of trends, new products, and new innovations. The pet industry is bigger than ever. According to APPA (American Pet Products Association), pet parents spent $147 billion on their fur babies in 2023, an increase of 16 percent from $260 billion in 2022. For context, the total U.S. beauty and personal care market is expected to reach $100 billion in 2024, according to Statista.

With the demand for more pet-friendly options, the trend is only going to continue to grow. Pet retailers are looking to the industry for insight. Not only in pet boutiques and pet specialty stores, but it's for any retail store, hotel, general clothing boutiques, and spas who also are looking to add luxury dog products and services to their existing catalog of items.

"I would like to see more of wellness/holistic practices from the pet industry," said Kelly Gasspari-Fleming, director of Spa & Wellness at the Waldorf Astoria Chicago. "When we consider our guests' needs during travel, viewing the pet industry through a wellness lens becomes paramount. Many of our visitors either bring their beloved furry companions along or leave them behind while they explore. For most, having a tangible keepsake from their time with us is essential. That's why we've introduced pet amenities to our retail space — a thoughtful addition that allows pet owners to reconnect with their four-legged friends, especially during potentially stressful travel moments."

The benefits of animal companionship are no secret to many in the hotel industry.

"Moreover, the surge in shelter adoptions during the COVID era has made pets an integral part of urban life. Our guests and residents alike embrace this lifestyle, and it's our responsibility to anticipate their needs even before they do. By prioritizing wellness and fostering connections between humans and their pets, we create a more enriching experience for everyone," said Gasspari-Fleming.

Wellness seems to be a topic of growing interest among retailers. Brooke Sommer of Sommer Dog Salon has a similar request.

"We have begun researching natural pet health products and have found information in this area contradictory," Sommer said. "Articles about supplements, oils, and CBD from a reliable source would be extremely helpful for retailers to feel confident in which product/brands to provide to their customers."

Quality resources and fact-based information that pertain to specific markets in the pet industry are beneficial for every retailer new or established.

"When we first began our journey in starting a grooming salon and pet boutique, we were not knowledgeable in obtaining quality informational sources for the pet retail industry and we have had to grow by trial and error. Having access to information available which pertained to our specific market would have been beneficial to our business" says Sommer.

An important aspect of the pet health and wellness category is the need for adequate sizing. Specifically, for larger dogs and breeds with irregular sizing. The accurate measuring of the girth, chest and the length of the back (from the base of the neck to the base of the tail) have always been the golden rule in accurate sizing. But what about those breeds who are not one-size-fits-all companions?

"People want more brands to do clothing for larger dogs. Especially, corgis and English bulldogs that are very hard to fit," explained Jodalee Tevault of Pixie Sticks Dog Boutique.

Perhaps an update in sizing and size charts from our industry is in order, as the clarity and accuracy will ensure the best fit possible for all breeds.

"I think what I would like to see most out of the pet industry is the sizing of pet apparel," said Brooke Sommer of Sommer Dog Salon. "I know that this will be hard to change, but we have a lot of requests for large breed clothes. However, when ordering, it's hard to find."

Regardless of the type of retail store, consumers share one wish: to include their pets in their full lives. Any retailer that supports this wish will benefit. Even beauty chains can add pet shampoos and skin-care products near the lipstick. With 87 billion pet-owning households, it's likely a good share of those lipstick buyers has a furbaby at home.

Fun fact: How much do Americans spend on non-human family members? Put it this way: If everyone put lipstick on their pet pigs, they might spend as much on beauty products as they do on their pets. PA

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DISPLAY STRATEGY

How you design your store layout can impact sales.

BY ASHLEY CARESTIA

Creating a memorable in-store experience is one of the biggest ways independent pet retailers can compete with big-box stores and boost their sales. The look and design of your store is one of the things that will make a lasting impression on customers, both existing and new. Taking a strategic approach to merchandising your store will not only improve the customer journey, but ultimately boost your bottom line. And, let's be honest, one of the most exciting things about having a brick-and-mortar is decorating.

Unlike other retail stores, pet shops generally do not have large spaces to merchandise products, let alone space to merchandise them well. Your back room is stacked with boxes of new arrivals. How well it sells when you transfer it to your sales floor depends, in large part, on how you display it. Pet products can sometimes get a little tricky. Finding the right size hangers, forms and mannequins that work can be frustrating.

You have two goals: making it easy to shop and encouraging customers to buy more. Groupings serve both purposes. The key is to display your related items together, whether you group them by end use, lifestyle themes, fabrication, style, pattern or brands, which should always be kept separate.

Let's start with accessories. From leashes and collars to bows and adorable pet jewelry, it can look overwhelming. How can you properly display these items in your store without making it look cluttered? The easiest and most convenient way to display leashes is on a slatwall. You can also do this with collars. The trick is figuring out a way to showcase your star products on a slatwall.

You certainly have a lot of options when it comes to displaying accessories, no matter how you decide the décor. If you are looking to display a large amount of hair bows all at one time, consider some different types of floor displays. You could use a two-inch by six-inch grid panel and attach legs to it so that it stands freely. Then you can attach peg hooks of any size to display your bows. Another option is a rotating slatwall unit. Attach some slatwall peg hooks and you will be able to have a display that rotates for customer convenience.

There is also a rotating peg display that has four tiers where you can hang your hair bows. It rotates and is light and portable so you can move it around to suit the changing display needs of your store. There is also a counter-top version that is perfect for those impulse buys at the checkout. You could also use swivel clips to clip the hair ribbons and bows and hang them anywhere in your store. These all add personality, so let them inspire you.

We know that color and music have a big impact on our shoppers, but what about store layout? Does your store layout really influence your customers? It does — in both positive and negative ways. Understanding the psychology of store layouts will not only attract more shoppers through your door, but it will also give them a memorable shopping experience and plenty of opportunities to pick up impulse items.

Your store design can make or break your profitability, because shopping — especially trying to find that extra special furry pet bed and matching blanket — is tied to psychology. Lighting is an easy way to make your store pop. You need overheads, downlights and/or task lighting to illuminate areas. However, accent and decorative lighting, such as chandeliers, add visual interest in ways that showcase your store's individual character.

Even though functional elements of a store, like a cash wrap counter, are necessary, it doesn't have to be boring. Let it tell your story, whether it's simple and sleek or outrageously entertaining. Turn your cash wrap into a focal point display case for treats to jewelry and collar tags.

All in all, successful merchandising requires consistency and focus to set about doing tasks you can achieve and avoid taking on too much and leaving unfinished projects around your store. You can begin by taking the sensory approach and go one sense at a time. Or you could do something small like adding signs to your shelves and then something major like resetting your entire store. Regardless of what you choose these touches can create merchandising magic and improve the customer experience in your store. Improving the customer experience in your store can build brand loyalty and boost your bottom line so get started today using these merchandising tips to create some magic and reap the rewards. PA

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SEEKING SYNERGY

Take advantage of brand, distributor relationships.

BY ASHLEY CARESTIA

By every metric, the pet industry represents one of the most lucrative opportunities for retailers and brands. Savvy retailers know that who they purchase their products from is the secret weapon to scoring competitive pricing, accessing product knowledge and making smart purchasing decisions.

Retailers are pressed by consumers to have an ever-broadening array of products available to them. Having them all available is difficult, but meeting customer demands is important as there are more places that consumers can get products. Distribution provides ready access to a broad array of products that they otherwise wouldn't have to meet those consumer demands.

According to Pet Industry Distributors Association (PIDA), the trade group's distributors rely on pet specialty stores as the direct link between products and consumers. In turn, independents should take advantage of distributors to help them sell more and improve profitability.What are the values for retailers in working with distributors?

Inventory Management: Retailers can order quantities they can turn, rather than ordering a six-month supply because of manufacturers' minimums. This makes running lean and profitably a reality.

One-Stop-Shopping: The average distributor stocks more than 12,000 SKUs from more than 200 manufacturers.

Market Information: Distributors are in constant touch with market activities, trends and prices. They can offer retailers advice on management issues and keep them apprised of industry news.

Merchandising: Distributors bring in point-of-purchase materials to help retailers maximize sales and efficiently use space in their stores.

"The biggest thing I love about working with a distributor like Faire is that our orders interface with our POS (point of sale) system," said Jodalee Tevault, owner of Pixie Sticks Dog Boutique. "When we work directly with a brand, we have to enter everything in, which takes a lot more time but, sometimes, working directly with a brand you can get better pricing. I also have a distributor rep, which is nice, because she keeps me in the know and gives us samples to try before we buy. I think no matter which direction you go you should always try to create a relationship directly with the brand and really understand their products to help you better sell it."

Working directly with a brand creates "brand and retailer synergy." By collaborating, brand manufacturers and retailers can ensure a positive customer experience, track the sales funnel to see how customers arrived at the product, and capture the sale in the most convenient location for the customer. Collaboration with retailers and the creation of brand synergy across all purchase channels boosts revenue for both manufacturers and retailers. These alliances pave the way for brand loyalty and repeat purchases, which benefit both parties.

Many brands actually manufacture and distribute their own products. This helps them cut costs since they do not need to rely on outside suppliers as much and gives them more control over quality and pricing. Ultimately, it allows them more flexibility in how they serve their customers.

Manufacturers and retailers are expanding their collaborations by investing together in new ventures. Companies that broaden the scope of collaboration reap a variety of benefits, including increased promotional effectiveness, inventory costs, product assortments that better align with the retailer's customer needs, and extra funds to reinvest in the demand-driving in-store activities.

Manufacturers who have chosen to be transparent in their retailer partnerships — sharing insights and opportunities, aligning on metrics, and seeking collaboration outside of traditional commercial areas — have earned the trust of retailers and, as a result, outperformed their peers.

Wholesaling with manufacturers offers several advantages to retailers compared to traditional wholesalers. Brands can control the entire production process, allowing them to maximize efficiencies and reduce costs. Additionally, they are not limited in what products they can offer and have the capability to customize items according to customer demand. Furthermore, working directly with a brand allows them to build better relationships with their retailers since they provide a unique product that cannot easily be found elsewhere.

"There are always pros and cons with both," explained Christina Calautti, owner of Speck's Pet Beverly Hills. "I enjoy working with bigger distributors because it's a more seamless process. But at the same time, I do love working with brands directly because you have that personal touch and can even get creative with them in the process with new ideas and pitching concepts back and forth." PA

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MATCHY-MATCHY FASHION

Pet apparel enhances the human-animal bond.

BY ASHLEY CARESTIA

The human-animal bond improves lives. The mutually beneficial, dynamic relationship between people and animals is influenced by behaviors that are essential to the health and well-being of both. This includes, but is not limited to, emotional, psychological and physical interactions of people, animals and the environment.

Pets and companion animals have been present in all cultures of the world since ancient times. Today, 85 million households in the U.S. are enjoying the benefits of the human-animal bond.

Spending 10 minutes interacting with a furry friend has the potential to reduce our levels of the stress hormone, cortisol, by a significant amount. In fact, strangers offer more smiles and friendly glances to people with dogs and are more likely to approach and have a conversation with someone with a canine companion. Moreover, a fashion-forward pup will catch the attention of just about everyone.

FASHION TRENDS

Our four-legged friends are leading the fashion industry and setting trends. The human-animal bond has officially entered the fashion world. They're strutting down runways, on the covers of fashion magazines and on billboards. Not to mention, making millions on television, Instagram and TikTok. Of course, our obsession with our pets is nothing new, but it's reached new heights amid the pandemic. To wit: The global dog clothing and accessories market hit $9.74 billion last year and is expected to balloon to $16.61 billion by 2028, according to market research and isn't expected to slow down any time soon.

Dressing up our dogs is a form of self-expression and drives our emotional connection with our pets. You could go as far as saying its science, in the form of anthropomorphism, which is the tendency to map human traits and emotions onto animals and inanimate objects. And it has an evolutionary purpose. For centuries, we've assigned human characteristics to non-human things to make sense of the world around us. Plus seeing our pets as human-like fulfills a social need — hence the rise in popularity during the past few years.

Although adorning our companion animals in pet apparel dates back millennia, modern dog fashion took off in the early 2000s. Pets are people's children and owners who twin with their dogs are no different from moms or dads who coordinate clothing with their kids. The trend of "matchy-matchy" is indeed a real thing. In fact, the first known use of matchy-matchy was in 1957. However, in the pet industry, we view this term as humans matching with their pets. New brands are popping up with matching apparel and accessories that are made specifically for people and their pets.

Since people are waiting longer to have children, they're raising pets instead. We buy them clothes. We feed them the best food. We bring them with us when we travel. We even tuck them in at night before bed — and if you're like me, they share your pillow at night (and steal all the blankets).

Millennials and Gen Z are two of the most fashion-conscious generations as they care a lot more about aesthetics, and that applies not only to their clothes and homes, but also to their pets. Many young dog owners dress up their pets to reflect their sense of style, and they have no qualms about investing in dog outfits and accessories. According to recent data, 35 percent of pet parents consider product design when choosing pet accessories. Moreover, 59 percent of dog parents have coordinated their outfit with that of their pet at least once, hence the matchy-matchy trend.

Indeed, putting clothing on your pooch can do more than just keep them warm and cozy. Dressing them up can also help them stand out so they're more identifiable, and if you "matchy-matchy" your clothing to that of your pet, you can create a stronger bond while having lots of fun.

Even if your dog doesn't really like wearing clothes, one can still coordinate, and match looks with your pet by matching your dog's accessories with your clothing. For instance, if you're wearing jeans and a turtleneck, a cute denim leash and a matching brooch pin on your pups' harness is all you need. You can also let your dog wear a scarf or booties that's in the same shade as your dress or shirt.

Even if the matchy-matchy trend seems absurd, there is a surge in engagement for matching with your pet, which is supporting the belief that fashion is more delightful when it's on four legs. This pet fashion popularity is good for business, and it's good for your psyche. PA

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PREMIUM PRODUCTS

Make your store a luxury shopping destination.

BY ASHLEY CARESTIA

The continually growing pet industry does everything to produce new market trends and capitalize on pet parents who are dedicated to their furry friends. By staying familiar with the most recent shifts in the industry, you can ensure that you're meeting the needs of your customers who want to spoil their pets with premium products.

For several years, experts in the industry have talked about the humanization of pets, a trend that reflects Millennials' increasing tendency to pamper their pets similarly to how they may pamper themselves: carefully reading the labels on foods, choosing high quality products and even treating them to luxuries like high-end clothing and spa days. So, you might not be surprised that today's pet owners bring the same scrutiny to labels and concern for quality to the pet store that they take to the grocery aisle.

When many brick-and-mortar retailers think of premium pet products, they tend to think of the early days of bulk item products from familiar manufacturers they have bought from for years. Though these manufactures are trustworthy and convenient, many of the items are relatively similar in style and most other retailers are buying the same thing in their stores. While this may not seem like it's not a big issue, the premium pet consumer is looking for unique, one-of-a-kind items.

Fast forward to today's trends of luxury pet homes, robotic litter boxes and kitty litter that changes color based on your cats pH levels; it seems the times have indeed changed.

People are happy to pay more to give their pets the best. This commitment is the driving factor for market development and makes it lively and highly competitive. As pet ownership continues to increase, we can expect the industry to grow with it. Personalization, creativity and innovation will help with industry change and growth for the next generation.

The same is said for pet fashion. In 2020, 40 percent of dog owners and 25 percent of cat owners bought clothing for their pet. The pet accessories market covers such a wide range of products, it is no wonder that the industry is planning on a growth of almost $10 billion over the next few years. Moreover, the pet apparel market is booming more than ever with Americans spending about $52 billion on pet apparel and accessories catering to both pets' and pet owners' needs.

By now you probably know that it's no trend — it's today's default style, and you can thank the $473.42 billion U.S. fashion industry; brands like Chanel, Gucci and Hermes, the premium product pet consumers, look for clothing they would buy themselves and to have their posh pup matching side by side.

Premium consumers that want the best of the best, look at quality, safety of the product and details like stitching. If they're spending $300, they want it to be worth the price tag. Simply the feel, color tone or squeak of a toy is what consumers look for to match their pet's style or what will work best in their home.

"My clients come in knowing we won't sell anything we won't use for our own pets," said Christina Calautti, owner of Speck's Pet Beverly Hills. "They know we are the pet obsessed lovers that treat them like our own children because in reality they are. They know our products can't be found on regular websites, so they love that feeling of quality, exclusively and the customer service that comes along with it because we understand their needs to want the best on the market for their fur children."

No matter the product, the premium pet consumer wants the best. If it will make their pets happier, they will buy it. Besides, who doesn't love that French bulldog on Instagram that rides a scooter in designer sunglasses and Louis Vuitton shoes.

"As a dog mom that posts a lot on Instagram, I like that I can always find something more unique and sometimes custom made at a small brick and mortar shop," said Shannon Enke, dog mom of Instagram star @midgiepudge. "I think that premium products are usually of better quality. I think often times the owners of theses shops are really creative and bring new fun ideas that keep them one step ahead of the big chain stores." PA

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TRAVELING WITH PETS

Consumers will need pet-related items for their road trips.

BY ASHLEY CARESTIA

As the number of pet owners across the country spiked during the pandemic, the need of adventure and travel needs to be fit for man and man's best friend like never before. Our furry friends are a part of the family. We want to take them on all of our family vacations so they can be a part of the fun.

The travel industry is ramping up the amenities for guests' canine companions, offering everything from cushy dog beds and gluten-free meals to massages and even facials. The surge in pet-related travel amenities appears to be yet another one of those big trends that the pandemic sent. The ASPCA reported last year nearly one in five households acquired a cat or dog since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak. And now that lockdowns are over, humans want to show their pets all the iconic sites locally and abroad.

As the lines are becoming more blurred between work, home and travel — from staycations to working from hotels — retailers must adapt to this new hybrid lifestyle and start thinking outside of the box.

This presents a new group of customers to be won and retailers and hotels are racing to offer the friendliest pet accommodations and travel products. At a basic level, that could look like offering to-go pet treats, beds, bowls and toys. Since we are talking about pet owners, a bustling luxury pet travel market has also sprung up.

Big ticket items like TSA-approved carriers are always a must in your store. While many of the everyday TSA approved carriers may seem the same, the luxury pet travel consumer is looking for unique carriers that best suits their needs and the needs of their posh pup. This can look like a quilted black carrier with a luxurious leather and gold chain strap that matches the customers handbag; think Chanel-inspired.

By doing your research, retailers can find niche manufacturers who specifically make these unique and gorgeous carriers. While there are no specific weight or breed limitations for pets, they must travel in either a hard-sided or soft-sided carrier that fits under the seat in front of you, and they must be able to stand up and turn around while inside.

Snow can be rough on a dog's paws, and it is crucial to keep their paws protected. While dog shoes or boots may seem "cute" or even unimportant, they should not be overlooked. Always prepare in advance. Travelling to a cold climate that is different from what your dog is used to, one must consider the protection of their pets' paws.

"Temperatures of 32 degrees or less, is painful for dogs, not to mention the snow, but the ice salt used on sidewalks can actually burn the delicate areas in and around the paw. There are many products to make sure your pets' paws are protected. For those pups who refuse to wear shoes or booties, try using a paw protector wax," said veterinary technician Katrina Steele of Western Reserve Veterinary Hospital in Cortland, Ohio.

Dogs are creatures of habit. Educate your customers on the benefits of taking items like blankets and toys that smell like home, so they don't feel so estranged or anxious when taking them on vacation.

"My top five must-have products for my girls when we travel are poop bags, foldable water dish, dog carrier, shampoo and container, a hairbrush and a toothbrush," said Lisa Umbelina, dog travel expert and blogger of Traveling With A Dog. "My favorite, and one thing I never travel without is a supply of hair bows. Also, if people are considering traveling with a dog, I would just say to go ahead and start. Don't overthink."

Jet-setting pet parents know just how heartbreaking it feels to leave a beloved furry friend at home while traveling, which means there's money to be made for retailers who are expanding their offerings and services in order to accommodate and serve the pet travel consumer.

One thing is for sure: these pet parents care deeply about nurturing the bond between them and their dog, which makes travel and activities they can enjoy together a high priority. In fact, 79 percent of dog parents agree that pet-friendly activities and pet-friendly travel accessories are their biggest consideration when planning a dog-friendly vacation.

So-called "revenge travel" has many people planning trips to make up for lost travel opportunities due to the pandemic, and pet parents are no exception. The majority (62 percent) of pet parents are planning to take two to three trips with their dog this spring and summer. Of these people, 53 percent said their primary motivation for traveling this spring and/or summer is "to have fun and enjoy time away from home."

Pet parents are planning to travel this spring and summer. Ensuring that your store provides these pet travel-friendly items is a sure bet your customers will be delighted. Bon Voyage and safe travels. PA

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CANINES CRAVE TOYS

Be the retailer who supports this dog demand.

BY ASHLEY CARESTIA

For dogs, toys are not a luxury, but a necessity, as they've become vital to our furry friend's well-being.

The world of pet toys is constantly evolving, and 2024 will be no exception. As pet owners continue to prioritize the health and happiness of their fur babies, several trends and changes have emerged in the market.

It's clear that Americans are spending more on pets as time goes on. According to the American Pet Products Association (APPA), Americans spent $136.8 billion on their pets in 2022, up from $123.6 billion in 2021. The APPA expects pet spending to keep its year-over-year increase, projected to hit $143.6 billion in 2023.

Fun fact, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) didn't even quantify pet spending as its own category until 2013. Before then, it was lumped into "pets, toys, hobbies and playground equipment." In fact, U.S. BLS data gives us a snapshot of pet spending trends, and it reveals that pet owners spent most on toys in 2023 at 74 percent than other pet related items.

Just like we eat with our eyes first, customers shop with their eyes first. So, it's important for retailers to take care with how they display toys to effectively capture attention, offering a thoughtful variety of products that are sure to stand out on the shelf. Ideally, the products being marketed should offer unique selling points from each other and be displayed in an organized manner to make the shopping experience more efficient.

Don't forget about your digital displays. Social media can be a powerful digital window display that draws customers to an online storefront or brick-and-mortar shop. When it comes to shopping destinations, online retailers are the top choice for 70 percent of pet owners. Approximately 63 percent of shoppers will support local pet stores, while only 23 percent plan to visit national chain pet stores for their pet holiday shopping, according to a recent 2023 MarketWatch survey.

Take advantage of social media to highlight different toys in the category. This can include posting demos of store associates or owners using the toys with their own dogs while discussing the benefits or features that make the toy their pups' favorite.

Most dogs love toys. They shake, catch, roll, chew and cuddle with them. Toys also stimulate a dog's brain, keep them from getting bored, help burn energy and comfort them when they're nervous. However, not every dog likes every kind of toy. In addition, not every toy can survive even a single play session with a determined pet.

If your cultured canine prefers a "ruffined" playtime, one of my all-time favorites is the Woof Clicquot Pawty Set by Haute Diggity Dog. It's an interactive plush toy that has smaller toys hidden inside of the main toy, which is contained in its chic trunk. It is perfect for small dogs and provides everything a pooch could pant for!

"Look for quality toys and ones that are made well and safe for our furry loved ones," said Christina Calautti, owner of Speck's Pet Beverly Hills. "The best types of toys are ones that are relatable to our pets' personalities. Ones they can easily take cute photos with and share with their friends and family."

Even a dog that loves squeaky toys or balls isn't impressed with every one of them. Some toys will hold a dog's attention for just a short time while others will quickly become a favorite. Consumers are looking at toys today in a much different way than ever before. Instead of fun and frills, they want something that will be engaging, durable, and easy to use.

Treat dispensers, snuggle mats and puzzle games have quickly become favorites among many consumers. Most toys are relatively easy to figure out – squeak a squeaky toy, chase a ball or chew a bone; however, some complicated toys require a dog to work a little harder. Many dogs enjoy the challenge, but others might get frustrated. Always inform your customers to choose toys based on their pup's personality and interests.

One product that mixes treats and toys together is Pupsicle by Woof. Jodalee Tevault, owner of Pixie Sticks Dog Boutique describes it as being "very popular" with her customers, adding that "people want healthy treat options for their pets, and this is a treat and a toy that keeps their pup busy for around 40 minutes."

We know a lot goes into picking out the right toy. At minimum, consumers want something fun that their pup can't get enough of, but just remember the best toys are also enriching, vet-approved and durable (up to a point, at least). PA

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TRENDING FASHION

Pet styles to keep an eye on this fall and winter.

BY ASHLEY CARESTIA

Before you know it, the scent of pumpkin spice will be wafting through the air as the leaves begin to change. With fall comes a changeover in products as retailers gear up for the different consumer demands. If you're seeking ways to set your store up to celebrate the fall spirit, here is a look at some of the best dog fashion trends and products of the year. From everyday apparel and accessories to high-end dog items, these products will turn your store into a runway and make all your customers and their pets look and feel their best.

This year, fall and winter are full of color. Think metallic yellows, pinks, blues and deep matte oranges. Products that pop on the shelf with color are more likely to grab the attention of a passing customer.

Starting with apparel, fall means sweater weather. Pet owners are looking to keep pups warm and stylish with fashionable dog jackets, coats and sweaters. They are perfect for protecting four-legged friends from the chilly breeze, fulfilling a functional purpose with style. Knit sweaters are timeless and each fall they are considered a staple in any closet. From chunky, cable-knit designs to sleek cashmere, it knit sweaters give every posh pup a new look for fall.

A pet parent favorite that never goes out of style is the hoodie. Dog hoodies are easy-to-wear and don't restrict your pet's movement. They provide just enough thermal protection when it's chilly, but not cold enough for a jacket.

Once the temerature drops, pet parents want to protect their pup from the elements and often look for puffer jackets. Puffer jackets that are soft with a waterproof duvet padded outer shell and filled with down and feathers are warm, yet light, to protect our beloved furry friend from the cold weather.

Whether your dog is wet from getting a bath, or romping in the snow, soft towel sponge robes are the perfect accessory. More convenient than a regular towel, these towel robes are easy to use for drying off.

What would a post bath nap be without dog pajamas? Not only are they ultra-cozy, but they also serve a bigger purpose than just making pets look adorable. PJs provide extra protection and body temperature regulation.

Next up are pet accessories. No dog fashion outfit is complete without accessories. Brands are making excellent choices for dogs that aren't all about dressing up for the occasion. Products come in many colors and designs and are easy to merchandise in your store. From durable collars and pet jewelry to furry berets (one of our personal favorites), a store should have something for everyone. Go for stylish beaded or studded sunglasses, bow ties or a fabulous charm tag that pairs perfectly with any dog collar.

The top trend in fall and winter accessories this year is the crossbody and wristlet treat bags, and jeweled bangle leashes. They are great for fitting all your walking essentials into one place. Not only are they practical for any type of pup parent outing, but they are also convenient. No more lost keys, headphone cases or wallets.

Many crossbodies and wristlets include a built-in waste bag dispenser, an interior pocket for treats and pouches for cell phones, keys and even sunglasses. Crossbody bags have a chic shoulder strap and while the wristlet bags have all the same features as the crossbody, it instead fits onto your wrist.

Next, what do you get when you combine the hottest runway fashion with the hottest product in the pet industry? Jeweled bangle leads. They are an essential luxury item for all your fashion-forward customers. They bring durability, comfort and style to a whole new level. Don't let the pretty crystals fool you, most quality leashes are extremely strong. The rule of thumb is to always check with the manufacturer to verify if they have been pull tested to at least over 100 pounds.

With these pieces in your store, your customers will feel like they are walking their favorite companion down the ultimate fashion street of the world.

Finally, don't be afraid to mix and match colors for your customers. Personal fashion statements bring out the fun side of your customers and their pets creating a fun human and animal bond.

With all of this in mind, don't forget to educate your customers on which style is appropriate and comfortable for their pet. I can't say it enough, "If they reject the fashion trend, don't force them."

Educating the customer on sizing is one of the most significant factors you should focus their attention on when shopping for the latest fall fashions. If they don't know their pet's size and don't select items according to their pet's breed and size, their posh pup will feel uncomfortable and constantly try to take the item off. Today, there is a large variety of dog apparel and accessories, from simple to the most sophisticated, and in a variety of sizes, so advise your customer to seek apparel and/or accessories that are fashionable, functional and comfortable. PA

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READY FOR SUMMER?

Stock the essentials for your warm weather fans.

BY ASHLEY CARESTIA

We are quickly approaching months of warm weather and there are plenty of ways to enjoy the dog days of summer with the pets you love most.

For many pet parents, the warm weather means road trips, beaches, swimming, boating, barbecuing, hiking and many other outdoor activities. It's important for pet retailers to make sure they get their store summer ready with all the essentials that pet parents are looking for the most.

While some items like doggie pools and canopy beds may take up some floor space, it's important to know your customers are looking for them. If this is the case for your store, a great way to maximize space is to create a display with the larger items, (canopy beds, pool floats, etc.) in the front of your store or as a window display. Let your customers know they are available and keep the excess supply in your backroom.

Other summer must haves include carriers, bathing suits, healing balms and life vests.

Life vests/floats are a must-have in store option if your customers plan to let their four-legged fur-baby take a dip in the pool, lake or ocean.

Bathing suits are always a big hit- besides, what little pooch doesn't look fabulous in a bikini or a pair of swim trunks?

Healing balms are perfect for warm-weather months. Pet parents should take extra measures to protect their pups from the harsh sun and hot pavement.

A probiotic ear cleaner is an essential during this time of year especially for pets that love to play in the water, as swimming often leads to more frequent ear infections and irritation. Cleansing the ears after a swim, while also populating the ear canal with probiotics, will proactively fight against yeast and fungus that cause itch, odor and inflammation.

Seat belt safety harnesses provide ultimate safety for pets while traveling, whether driving across town or across the country. Available in multiple sizes, the harness will ensure your customers' pet's safety no matter where their summer adventures take them.

Pure essential calming oils are another must for travelling pet parents. Dogs can become uneasy or nervous from separation anxiety, thunderstorms and traveling in a car or on a plane. These blends of essential oils provide all-natural relaxation and can create a relaxing, spa-like environment for any dog.

It's impossible to talk about travel essentials without mentioning carriers. No matter the season, carriers are a must have in your store. Pet parents who travel often like to have different options to choose from when purchasing a carrier. Whether it's an everyday carrier, or a carrier on wheels, they are always a necessity. During the summer, many pet parents like the option of a larger carrier to carry not only their pup, but their pup's stuff like SPF, portable water bottles, treats and toys.

Some rather overlooked but necessary items are portable dog water bottles and food dishes. Regardless of the season, dogs should always have access to fresh water. But, during the late spring and summer months, it's even easier for dogs to get dehydrated.

While it's common knowledge to protect our skin from the harsh sun, did you know your dog needs protection too? SPF is of the utmost importance during the summer because dogs can also get sunburned. Canine companions are at risk of all the same dangers as we are when it comes to UV rays.

Dogs are also subjected to sunburn, tumors, skin cancer, etc. While all dogs are at risk, some are more susceptible than others. One way to help protect your pooch is to apply a little dog-formulated sunscreen before outings. Moreover, make sure to educate your customers on the importance of using a dog-specific SPF. Never use human sunscreen on your pooch. Most human sunscreens contain zinc oxide, PABA and other chemicals that should not be licked or ingested. They are toxic to dogs.

If your store has a food and treats section, summertime favorite is ice cream. There are many powdered ice cream mixes you can add to your shelves that don't need to be refrigerated or in a freezer. A great way to start the summer off is hosting a summer ice cream social at your store. Pet parents love to gather amongst other pet parents and with a complimentary sample or two, it's a great way to get your customers in the door to show off all your new summer arrivals.

By being strategic about item placement in your store and of course, the fun images on your social media, you can craft the narrative that will remind customers of summertime activities and how their pets will play into those, while creating a demand for your products. With fresh new inventory for the season, you're sure to drive interest and have customers returning to see what you stock next. PA

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INFLUENCER CULTURE

Is there value in social media pet celebrities?

BY ASHLEY CARESTIA

The popularity of pet influencers on Instagram and TikTok, to name just a few social media platforms, reflects the recent and growing importance of the pet industry. These companion animals captivate audiences with their endearing antics and irresistible personalities, turning them into #InstaFamous celebrities. But what impact do these adorable influencers have on the pet industry, and influencing pet store owners purchasing decisions?

Influencers play a significant role in shaping consumer habits. By promoting products or brands to their followers influencing their purchasing decisions, thus making influencer marketing a valuable and powerful tool for businesses. They have become an integral part of the online space, creating communities, showcasing products, and forming human connections online.

A 2024 Trust in Influencer Marketing report surveyed 1,200 American consumers to see how impactful influencer marketing was in their daily purchases, reaching a whopping 83 percent of adults. According to the survey results, 51 percent of all respondents have made a purchase after seeing a product used by an influencer. In addition, 40 percent of 18-to-29-year-olds turn to TikTok for product research before making big purchases Consumers under the age of 45 say influencer posts are the No. 1 way to get them to try a new product.

The rise of influencers has also created new economic opportunities. Influencer marketing has emerged as a powerful tool for brands to create connections with their target audiences.

Naturally, many companies have leaned on human influencers, but the increasing popularity of pet influencers represents a new avenue for brand promotion. Retailers can capitalize from effective marketing campaigns in that they are designed to familiarize audiences with a product and drive consumers to make purchases.

POTENTIAL DOWNSIDES

While influencer culture has its positives, it's also important to be mindful of its potential downsides, such as promoting unrealistic standards, consumerism and the potential for misinformation.

Is their portrayal on social media a true reflection of their lives, or is it all a facade curated for commercial success? How can brands, retailers and consumers collaborate to uphold ethical standards in this burgeoning industry?

If you are considering a pet influencer to assist in promoting your brand, it's important to note several key factors before hiring an influencer to promote your brand or store:

First, be sure to have realistic expectations. Don't expect to double your sales the month after a pet influencer promotes your products or services via an Instagram story. These things take time- especially with the ever-changing algorithms these platforms set in place at any given time.

Next, it is essential to hire genuine and trustworthy pet influencers to achieve positive online consumer purchasing intentions and make more sales as an organization. It is also crucial to collaborate only with influencers who are total experts in their niche.

Lastly, it is crucial to practice a transparent product promotion online that does not hyperbolize a product which inflates the consumer expectation only to disappoint their intentions.

Not every company will benefit from working with an influencer. Sponsored brand content can quickly go from "everyone needs to buy this" to an unrelatable influencer lifestyle post. Your influencer's audience may not connect with your product for the following reasons:

- The influencer doesn't use your product.
- The product doesn't have a direct connection to the audience or their pets.
- The influencer doesn't disclose that they received the product for free or are getting paid for their opinion.
- The influencer's posts about the product seem unnatural or staged.

A good example of a pet brand-pet influencer partnership is one that team up with an effective partner which will help build awareness for the product and drive people into the stores looking for the product. and most important, the authenticity of voice which is a critical component in impact.

While this type of partnership might be regarded as a tried-and-true marketing strategy, never downplay the amount of thought that goes into each of these campaigns. Influencer-brand partnerships are only effective if the match is not only a good one, but a smart one.

All in all, influencer culture has its positives and pet influencer marketing is indeed a powerful tool, yet it's important to really do your own due diligence and take the time to see if it is something that will work for your brand. PA

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