

In the Fall, It's All About Fashion

Selling canine clothing and accessories can be fun, but challenging. Stay at the front of the pack by keeping on top of the latest fashion trends.

Over the past few years, dog clothing and canine accessories have become much more fashionable. By paying attention to the newest designs, fabrics and colors on the international catwalks, retailers can capitalize on the newest fashion trends. By merchandising fashion-inspired coats, pet carriers, leashes and collars properly, pet retailers can derive larger profits during the important last sales quarter of the year.

According to Euromonitor's report, Pet Food And Pet Care Products in USA, dogs are increasingly cared for in accordance with human aesthetic standards. The impulse to anthropomorphize pets is to care for them like beloved children. Especially in the United States, pet owners have the desire to spoil their pets by shopping for them.

Leslie Padget, editor of New York Dog and Hollywood Dog magazines, agrees that an increase in pet spending has to do with non-essentials such as clothing and accessories. She believes that factors such as fewer individuals having children, the growing number of same-sex relationships, and baby boomers having more disposable income, have benefited the family dog. As with their children, pet owners are willingly spending big bucks on their pets to derive instant gratification, all the while believing they are making their pets happier and healthier.

Padget says, "Like all good parents, these pet owners want their pet children to reflect their own lifestyle, and they dress them in similar styles and tastes. Also, unlike kids, dogs can't complain about what they are wearing." Leslie also observes that fashion houses such as Burberry, Ralph Lauren, Coach, and now even Sean John, all

bouchle will add panache to the body of coats and cloth harnesses.

Sporty doggy coats (a favorite for owners of large dogs) will look similar to what kids are wearing these days. These coats will be made of waterproof fabrics such as neoprene or stormtech and are increasingly available in popular colors of orange, lime green, pink and red, and adorned with reflective trims for safety. Also, fashion-forward manufacturers inspired by urban street-wear will preview the dark denim hoodie trimmed in wool.

Animal Wrappers' Gail Silverberg says, "No matter how fabulous the coat looks, it needs to be designed with the purpose to keep your dog warm." Small dogs that are really low to the ground need to have their bellies covered.

"This is especially true of our small babies in

Minnesota, where winters get to be very cold," says Karen Howe of the pet boutique Lulu & Luigi. Although she plans to buy some of the more fashion-oriented dog coats, she always first considers the fit and the functionality of the product.

Carriers—The pet tote bag is one of the hottest pet accessories. Pet owners like to dress well and carry their pooches in stylish carriers that reflect their personal style. This fall, the most fashionable carriers will be designed in the seasonal color of chocolate brown, in houndstooth styles, and in faux



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offer pet clothing.

What's Hot

Coats—This fall, canine clothing manufacturers will be showcasing coats to reflect a high-fashion, sporty or urban street-wear look. Like their human counterparts, canine high-fashion seasonal coats will be designed in fabrics such as wool and faux skins. Earth-tone colors and black will dominate these looks and create a warm, snuggly feel. While accents of faux fur will adorn collars, lace, satin and

crocodile prints or trims, and will look more like ladies' handbags. Carriers will have more or larger outside pockets and will come equipped with choices of matching cell-phone cases, dog coats and purses.

Leashes & Collars—While faux skins, and metallic collars and leashes are still popular, they will be glamorized with more “bling.” Swarovski crystals, rivets and sterling-silver charms, such as fire hydrants and holiday themed items, will adorn these doggy basics. Retailers should look for color and bejeweled training equipment such as martingales and greyhound collars, which will appeal to the more fashion-conscious pet owners who want to teach their dog good manners without ignoring style.

The Unexpected—This season we will also see the return of the sweater. According to Jae Lee, manager of marketing and sales for Puppia World, “Sweaters will be designed in brighter knits, emphasizing a sporty, cool look.”

Purple, yellow, red, pink and turquoise colors in geometric patterns will be the rage for girl and boy dogs. Also, don't be surprised to see more masculine small dog apparel and accessories. Although pink is still the color of choice, manufacturers are catching on that there are pet owners who do not want to dress their male dogs in feminine attire. Even some carrier bags will

have more masculine appeal.

THOUGHTFUL SELLING

Selling dog clothing is a lot like selling human clothing. A store's inventory must appeal to its customer base. Before purchasing clothes, observe the fashion sense of the local community. Ask customers what types of dog clothing appeals to them. Also take notice of what size dogs they have and focus on those particular sizes. Don't forget to stock accessories to match the clothing, because it is easy to up-sell a matching leash and collar with a new dog coat or sweater.

Although dog clothing usually appeals to small dog owners, train store staff to point out that all canine clothing keeps dogs warm, dry, clean and less matted. In addition, mention that dog clothing with a reflective trim will keep customers and their dog safe when walking at night.

To help customers notice fashion merchandise, display coats, jackets, sweaters and rainwear throughout the store and in the windows. Have at least one store employee who is very familiar with fashion merchandise and can help customers find appropriate clothing for their dogs. If that employee can fit, style and accessorize a customer's dog, patrons will gladly return and buy more clothing and accessories.

Consider placing a sizing chart to

reflect the breed sizes and how dogs are measured near the clothing displays. This illustration should emphasize the measurements of the neck, of the bottom of the head to the base of the tail, as well as the dog's girth. Having a tape measure on hand and setting aside an area where dogs will not be easily distracted will allow customers the time and the patience to try on dog clothing.

Like most fashion houses and department stores, consider having a fashion show, or ask manufacturers for help in selling their wares by having a trunk show of their latest designs. For more appeal, team up with the nearest animal shelter as a way to help them raise money and adopt dogs. An event like this can even draw local newspapers and television stations. This sort of media coverage will draw more customers into the store.

Pets are part of the family; and by selling canine clothing and accessories, retailers demonstrate how much they value customers' relationships with man's best friend. **PB**

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