

GIFT & HOME

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Only the Best for Pets & Owners



Stock gifts for pet owners and animal lovers who want style, function and fun from your store.

by Natalie Hammer Noblitt

Pet owners have a special place in their hearts for the animal companions who share their lives. That's why when it comes to catering to shoppers buying for their pets or other pet owners, your store's selection must be bold and unique. Helping shoppers express their individual style and love for their animals is key. We've gathered the latest products from specialty pet gift producers to help make your store a destination for those who love furry friends.

To generate an exciting atmosphere for pet owners, make sure you connect with shoppers on a personal level. Retailer Melinda Vitale Shaw of MeLinda's Fine Gifts in Picayune, Mississippi (HYPERLINK "<http://www.melindasgifts.com>" www.melindasgifts.com), hosts events that show her devotion to animals. As an owner of a Pomeranian that comes to the store many days, Vitale Shaw knows that pets are an important part of

her customers' families. "Once a year we hold a SPCA Fundraiser here in the store for two days," she says. "We promote it quite largely. We tell the customers to bring cleaning supplies or pet toys for the local animal shelter, and they will get a 10-percent discount on their purchase. After the event we donate 10 percent of the total sales to the local SPCA. We have been doing it for years and it is a fun event." Another way MeLinda's attracts shoppers to the event is by publicizing that the SPCA will bring dogs and puppies to the event and will conduct adoptions on site. Pet gifts are displayed in one designated section of MeLinda's that includes items like key chains, pedigree magnets for cars, mugs, dog dishes, animal-themed coasters for the car and home, as well as animal-related designs on clocks, traditional gifts and more. "We love pet gifts!" she says.

Trends in pet related gifts tend to include upscale, modern style that helps the owners better fit the pet into their existing décor. Not only do gifts like frames and decorative items that celebrate pet ownership remain popular, but also selling well are practical items that make life with a pet easier but still stylish. Think gourmet treats for dogs and healthful and great smelling bath products for pets.

When a pet passes away, it is a difficult situation for families. Many people may feel there are not enough options to help them express the love they feel for a lost pet. Keep the pet's memory alive with the resin urns from the Serenity Heart Collection by ArgosStar (800/264-3577 or www.argostar.com). The Beloved Companion Pet Urn for cats measures 6.5 by 7.75 inches (with photo space that is 1.75 by 2.5 inches). The Dog Paw Prints Companion Pet Urn measures 5.25 by 5.75 inches (with photo space that is 2 by 2.5 inches). MSRP is \$49 each.

