

THE PASSION FOR PET FASHION

Exploring the industry's growing pet fashion category
By Colleen M. Murphy



Over \$60 billion—we all know the figure. It's the amount of money Americans are projected to spend on their pets this year. Food, toys, veterinary care, grooming supplies: the list of what owners buy for their best friends goes on.

A growing share of the more than \$60 billion people are spending on their pets is in pet fashion. Pretty much anything a human can wear, pets can wear, too. There are pet T-shirts, sweaters, footwear, parkas, holiday costumes, scarves and even sunglasses. Today's pets are as stylish as ever.

All Star Dogs is an industry leader in officially licensed pet apparel and accessories. According to the company's vice president of sales, Elan Ovardia, pet fashion is a way for the "human-pet bond to be extended."

"Effectively, when people are buying (fashion items) for their dogs, they're actually just buying it for themselves—an extension of what they would buy," Ovardia said.

Pet outerwear company Canada Pooch has been seeing the same trend of owners humanizing their pets through fashion.

"People want to dress their dogs like themselves," said Amy Eisner-Levine, the marketing and sales

specialist at Canada Pooch. "More and more, pets are becoming parts of our family. Owners want to reflect their own style, their personal taste, in the pet they care about."

History of Pet Fashion

While expressing oneself through pet fashion might be today's growing trend, it is certainly not new.

Collars, which are seen as the equivalent of a necklace, can be dated back to at least the Egyptian times, now that lavish collars have been unearthed from tombs. Then, collars signified ownership and wealth.

Small dogs being dressed in clothing goes as far back as 520 A.D., according to the website Pet Pavilion. Then, people settled in what is now Great Britain used clothing as a way to keep dogs warm and protect canines that were in battle. Royals also adorned their pets in jewels and fancy coats to signify their wealth.

It wasn't until the 19th century that clothing for animals became a profitable manufacturing industry, according to Pet Pavilion. And it wasn't long before there were canine couture boutiques popping up all around Paris. Little by little, the pet fashion industry grew into what we know it to be today.

Even within recent memory, companies pursuing pet fashion, like All Star Dogs—which started as a high-end pet fashion company in 1998—had a challenging time convincing people to embrace pet fashion.

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Amy Eisner-Levine,
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"When we got into the business, there was only—I want to say—less than a dozen of us in the space," Ovardia said. "People were actually, at the time, still shutting doors in our faces because we were making dog clothing, because it was kind of before it was accepted. And now everybody and their mother has a pet fashion section in their store."

Make it Fashionable

Many pet fashion company owners started their businesses to solve a

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problem. For PoochieBoots creator Karyn Pek, it was to help alleviate the pain her dog experienced after walking on the winter's salted sidewalks.

After much research, Pek figured out how to make the boot comfortable enough for dogs to want to wear them. The trick was in the strap-width-to-leg-width ratio. The bigger the dog's leg, the thicker the strap and vice versa.

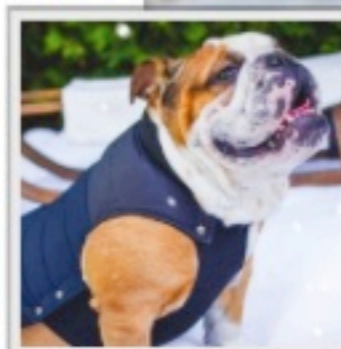
But as a self-proclaimed shoe lover, Pek didn't want to sacrifice functionality for fashion, so she made sure her boots were fashionable and stylish as well.

PoochieBoots straps are detachable and interchangeable, making it fun for owners to choose which strap to put on their pet. Dogs can protect their pads from both ice salt and hot pavement—and do so in style.

Functionality is also a major key in the development of Canada Pooch's fashionable items.

According to Eisner-Levine, Canada Pooch wanted to fill the gap between pet products that were "cute-sy" and "too utilitarian."

Canada Pooch found a happy medium between fashion and functionality in its new coat, the Summit Stretch Vest, by building adjustability into the coat through a stretchy belly panel. The Velcro that many items



have can get caught in pets' fur, and the sound of the Velcro can also scare animals, Eisner-Levine said, so the material has been replaced for sturdy, easy-use snaps to make for a happier, more comfortable pet.

Dog Gone Smart Products also offers outerwear that combines style and function. Its Nano Knit Sweater has a Nanosuede collar that won't chafe the dog's neck and a double-lined knit body that will keep dogs warm. The sweater comes in gray and brown and has buttons for added style.

And if your customers are saying that their pets' harnesses are getting in the way of their stylistic expression, look into Charlie and Spike. This

company really found a way to combine the functionality of a harness with the style owners want.

The Charlie and Spike harness allows owners to detach and interchange the fashion fronts. Owners are now able to dress their pets for different holidays, formal events or birthdays just by switching the harness's front.

American Dog Apparel's The Doggy Dickey is another fashion item that was made with a harness in mind. Dogs can also even wear the Dickey underneath a coat. The American-made, polyester-fleece Dickey will keep pets warm by preventing heat from escaping from the chest.

The Doggy Dickey is available in safety orange, berry, charcoal and lime green colors. There is even a special-made size for greyhounds to ensure all breeds can keep warm with the dickey.

Gold Paw Series also combines functionality and fashion. Its snood and stretch fleece pieces are super soft and feature a four-way stretch to ensure the dog is warm and comfortable, in addition to being stylish. Gold Paw Series has also added a new patterned and colored stretch fleece: leopard and garnet.

Gretchen George, president of PetRageous Designs, thinks that it is the functionality of pet fashion that is actually driving the segment's growth.

"We take great pride in being able to meld (fashion and functionality) together by offering the latest in trending fabrics, patterns and colors with the latest demands in functionality," George said in an email. "Being able to easily put on and take off a garment is just as important as how the dog looks while they are wearing it."

A Style for Everyone

The companies that compose today's pet fashion industry cater to every owner's—and, in turn, dog's—personal style.

Some people are just as enthusiastic about a sports team as they are their pet, and All Star Dogs allows for sports fanatic owners to bridge the two passions. The company has licenses for MLB, MLS, NHL, NASCAR and Minor League Baseball. Its biggest and most successful licensing branch is the NCAA, as the company possesses licenses for over 400 colleges. Each team they stock now has 24 products, including cheerleading outfits and jerseys—the company's two biggest sellers.

All Star Dog's third most popular item is its winter coat line, according to Ovadia.

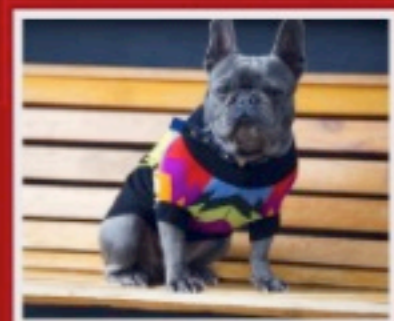
For owners who dress runway-ready and want their pets to be just as chic as they are, the U.K.'s Ruby Rufus might be a good fit.

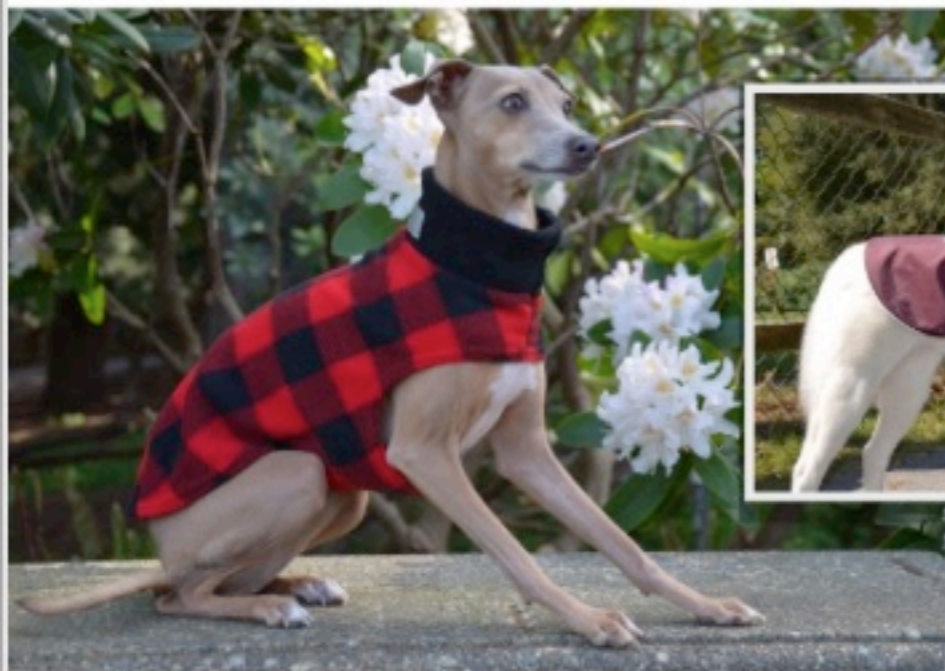
Ruby Rufus manufactures what it describes as "fashion-forward" sweaters and snoods that are just as trendy as they are soft and comfortable for pets. According to the company's website, the "luxury dog-wear label" offers "fun prints and bold knits" of the cashmere sweaters.

Recently, Ruby Rufus teamed up with fellow British company Harper and Hugo to create a one-of-a-kind sweater-necklace pairing. Harper and Hugo makes "fun, trend-inspired" handmade dog necklaces "for style-conscious pups and fashion savvy owners," according to the company's website.

RUBY RUFUS

British company Ruby Rufus offers fashion-forward items to trendy owners who want their dogs to look equally as chic.





Together, the two companies created a camo-print necklace and sweater bundle.

Besides pet necklaces, animals also wear collars around their necks, and companies do not forget about style when designing their collars.

Up Country started in 1984 and had the goal of bringing an exciting collar to market. The company now has over 120 collar designs, as well as dozens of lifestyle accessories. The collars are all "hand sewn, pressed and finished with care" in their Rhode Island factory, according to the company's website.

“Shoes don't only make the man, they make the dog, too.”

Karyn Pek, creator of PoochieBoots

Their Marblehead and Expedition lines of collars are two of their best sellers. The Expedition Collection with the safari design is also new this year, according to Up Country Vice President Donna Bodell.

2 Hounds Design is another company that is constantly releasing

differently patterned and themed collars, and there is a section of collars under \$25 for those looking to order collars who also have people's wallets in mind.

Even preventive necessities, like a flea and tick collar, are getting the high fashion treatment. The Derevos flea and tick collar for dogs and cats is made out of cedar wood, has different styles from which to choose and can be personalized.

PetEdge has dozens of fashion products—from hoodies and sequined tanks to tuxedos and wedding dresses—so every owner is sure to find something to their liking.

If you're looking to help the environment and those in need through the fashion pieces you purchase for your pet, then take a look at Mister Migs, a nonprofit manufacturing and retail distribution company that uses recycled denim as the core product material for their fun items.

PetRageous Designs has seen an increase in demand for holiday garments and a comeback in T-shirts. And according to George, pet fashion is now the top-producing and fastest-growing category for her company.

Human Market Trends

Many founders of pet fashion companies got their start in the human fashion world.

Pek was an interior designer before starting PoochieBoots. While she was not designing human clothes, creating a great look and style for homes easily translated into designing fashionable pet shoes.

"When you do interior, you want it to have a great look, and that creative part of me thought, 'If the dog truly has to wear shoes for protection, why shouldn't they look good?'" Pek said. "Shoes don't only make the man, they make the dog, too."

The creators of All Star Dogs came to the pet space after experiencing the human fashion arena, and it is there they continue to look for inspiration for their pet clothes. According to Ovadia, the trends the company is seeing in the pet industry closely mirror what's going on in human fashion trends.

"We keep our ear on the wall—we're very much in touch with what's going on in human fashion trends," Ovadia said. "That's really the basis of where we put the line toward. The directions that we change or new styles we come up with is all based on what's in high fashion for men and women."

Harper and Hugo does the same when designing their contemporary, trend-inspired dog necklaces and poop bag holders.



comes in maroon and salt and pepper.

According to Teckelklub,

its products are 100 percent Canadian, adding that the trend of buying North American-made goods has made its way into pet fashion.

The North American classic pattern buffalo check is popular on fashion runways, according to Teckelklub. The company's Rover plaid collection borrows from that human trend and is available in tones from ruby red to graphic ivory with black check to pistachio plaid.

"We take inspiration from seasonal fashion trends and the creative world around us," the company's website noted. "(We're) constantly designing and updating our collection to compliment you and your dog's look."

According to Eisner-Levine, Canada Pooch is also influenced by the human fashion world. In fact, Eisner-Levine said that because flannel is big in the human market, store owners can expect to see more flannel within the pet fashion industry.

Eisner-Levine says pet fashion is so similar to human fashion that some of her customers have admitted to trying on and borrowing their pets' Canada Pooch scarves. The scarf, which is new to the market, is an infinity scarf that



Teckelklub reported that retailers should also look out for the colors that are big in the fashion industry right now when choosing the items to purchase for their store. Because of their successes on the runway, jewel tones, like burgundy, and bold, playful colors are expected to be popular

among pet owners.

Some companies have a foot in both the human and pet fashion door. Rubie's Costume Company is the "world's largest designer, manufacturer and distributor of Halloween costumes and accessories" for humans, according to its website. However, they also now have an entire selection of pet costumes.

Those in pet fashion are excited about the category's future. And as George points out, the items pets can wear are no longer limited to the fall and winter seasons. She is looking forward to showing new, creative, year-round pieces from the pet fashion segment. **PA**