

Celebrating Customers' Pets

Breed-specific gifts and accessories are trending toward low price points and customization.

By Maggie M. Shein

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For many retailers, the breed-specific gifts and accessories market is a sustainable, reliable source of revenue. Successful retailers in this market have done their homework; they know the popularity of breeds among their customer base and the types of gifts that sell well.

"You have to research in your specific market to find out what breeds are most popular, so you don't have to carry all of them," said Christy Phelan, art and licensing director at Fiddler's Elbow/The Toy Works Inc., a manufacturer of breed-specific gifts for pet lovers. The company, located in Middle Falls, N.Y., sells its products worldwide to retailers and through distribution.

One of the long-standing challenges for retailers is how to stock breed-specific items, which not only include a large number of breeds, but also color differentiations for each breed. To stay successful and competitive, retailers have learned to be creative.

Lori Dotterweich, owner of Paws, a pet retail store with the inventory challenge as they come in.

"Most of our items online are possibly stock 100 breeds of retailer to have items drop-

In addition to the challenge of physical display

"I have to think about space Robokoff, owner of Paw away from breed-specific stuff that is practical and that basket."

About 25 to 30 percent of breed-specific gifts, including and don't weight very much; pads; and artwork by Lisa Krajewski.

"My shop is very limited in owner of Bubbles & Biscuits, S.C. "I choose to limit my most manufactured items many of which don't frequent

Customer knowledge is what convinced **Janene Zakrajsek, co-owner of Pussy & Pooch based in Los Angeles**, to avoid carrying breed-specific gifts and accessories year-round. Instead, she offers her customers a direct link from the store's website to order Obey the Pure Breed gifts and accessories through an ongoing affiliate deal with the company.

"It's a beautiful thing to not have the risk of all the inventory and still provide a place for our customers to order such items," Zakrajsek said.

Another approach she's taken to offer breed-specific products to her customers is a promotional event called Obey the Pure Breed and Celebrate the Mut, complete with shirts and posters of popular neighborhood breeds.

Tailsbythelake.com and Natural headquartered in Reno, Nev., deals by having suppliers drop-ship orders

not stocked," she said. "We can't every item, so it's really a benefit as a shipped."

of stocking, retailers face the space.

considerations," said Melissa Prince in Anchorage, Ak. "I try to stay items that come in sizes. I stick to I can hang on the wall or put in a

Paw Prince's inventory is made up of metal welcome signs, which pack flat Ruth Maystead playing cards and list Ballard, DJ Rogers and Ron

retail space," said Christine DeGraaf, a retail and grooming shop in Grier, breed-specific inventory because are the same top 10 AKC breeds—a grooming salon."