

Pet Apparel

BY CHUCK ZAK

PET APPAREL MIGHT seem to be a novelty – until you realize just how passionate people are about their furry little companions. Tap into that deep emotional investment, and you have the beginnings of a powerful marketing campaign.

The pet market in general has remained admirably robust; pet owners spent \$56 billion last year – a record high. One especially interesting upward trend is what marketing research firm Packaged Facts calls the “humanization of pets.” Namely, people are more apt than ever to treat their pet as one of the family, and pamper them appropriately. This is where the appeal of pet apparel begins to transcend merely “cute” and starts to get serious.

For potential customers, consider any of the pet-centered services that may have once seemed marginal: sitters, walkers or groomers, for instance. And even as the number of homeless animals continues to rise, so too does the number of organizations which provide much-needed adoption services.

Becoming part of this healthy market is easy, and it begins by giving great products like these a good home.



▶ This fun pet scarf (SCV40) is made from anti-pill polar fleece and comes in a wide variety of colors from **FIEL** (asi/53509; circle 84 on Free Info Card). Embroidered by Stitch Designers (asi/741145; circle 118 on Free Info Card).



◀ Combed ringspun cotton doggie tank top (3902) features double-needle stitched rib binding from **S&S Active-wear** (asi/84358; circle 91 on Free Info Card). Embroidered by Vantage Apparel (asi/93390; circle 117 on Free Info Card).



◀ Soft dog sweater (PT8809) features a zippered opening and made from polyester/cotton/wool blend from **Atteff** (asi/37455; circle 89 on Free Info Card).



▶ Flex-fleece dog zip hoody (F997) features a kangaroo pocket, zipper closure and an opening for a leash from **American Apparel** (asi/35297; circle 83 on Free Info Card). Screen printed by Vantage Apparel (asi/93390; circle 117 on Free Info Card).



▶ Organic collar (PCA140) includes side-release buckle, slide adjuster and D-ring hardware from **WOVIN** (asi/92980; circle 85 on Free Info Card).



▼ Dog event vest (DEV-5) is made from poly/cotton poplin or nylon and hemmed with neck and chest Velcro closures from **Aprons 'n More** (asi/36563; circle 90 on Free Info Card).

▲ Cotton/spandex doggie tank (CST888-Doggie) has a contrast binding and is made in the USA from **Blanks Plus** (asi/40642; circle 92 on Free Info Card). Embroidered by Vantage Apparel (asi/93390; circle 117 on Free Info Card).



► Triangle-shape bandanna fits large and small dogs nicely from **Promotional Print Wear** (asi/33266; circle 93 on Free Info Card).



▼ Made from imported cotton, this pet bandanna (TSMSOL-100) is perfect for smaller dogs from **Caro-Line/Bandanna Promotions** (asi/44020; circle 88 on Free Info Card).

Three Selling Tips

1 Try unexpected markets. You can find opportunities for selling pet apparel beyond the obvious customers. Kimberly Damp, sales & marketing coordinator with WOV-IN (asi/92980), suggests college bookstores and alumni groups, or even hotels. “Hotels are becoming more and more pet friendly,” she says. “Many offer pet apparel and promotions in their gift/souvenir stores.” Acknowledging the importance of pets in your customers’ lives, says Damp, is a good way of helping to ensure repeat business.

2 Seek cross-promotion opportunities. Organizations that work to help homeless pets tend to get involved in a lot of the same activities, and donating your own product to a compatible group is a good way to increase visibility. Melissa Mariner-Loos, president and founder of Bella-Reed Pit Bull Rescue in Southampton, PA, sells its own logoed dog apparel, but has also donated it to groups such as Furever Free, an organization that helps pay veterinarian bills for people who might otherwise be forced to surrender their dog.

3 Look for adoption and community events. For organizations that provide adoption services, it’s a good idea to include an imprinted wearable with each adoption. Michele Muller of Philadelphia’s Main Line Animal Rescue sends newly adopted dogs home with a bandanna that says “MLAR helped me find my way home”. Bella-Reed’s Mariner-Loos also suggests local “beef and beer raffle baskets” as a good place to connect with potential customers in your local area.