

INNOVATION, TRENDS & PROJECTIONS

DESIGNERS BORROW FROM POP CULTURE

Trends in the collar, leash and harness category center on safety, innovation and fun. Many manufacturers pull from trends in fashion, social media and pop culture.

"Doughnuts are trending in memes? Here come doughnut collars," said Alisha Navarro, president of 2 Hounds Design, an Indian Trail, N.C.-based manufacturer of collars, leashes and harnesses. "New superhero movies are out? Here comes the superhero collar!"

Donna Bodell, vice president of Up Country, an East Providence, R.I.-based manufacturer of collars, harnesses and leads, agreed.

"The trends that perform best for us are seen throughout pop culture," she said. "When you see pineapples appearing on everything from clothing to housewares, it's a good bet people will want to put them on their pet."

At AK Bark, a pet boutique in Anchorage, Alaska, customers are moving away from plain collars to more of a fashion statement for their dogs, said owner Mark Robokoff.

"Our best-selling collars are locally made with beautiful Alaskan themes," he said, adding that he has noticed a shift away from collars and toward harnesses. "We encourage this because of the number of dogs that get lacerated tracheas from pulling on the leash while wearing thin collars. We carry harnesses that train dogs not to pull and ones that are made for pulling for ski-joring or bike-joring."

Other retailers reported seeing dog owners gravitating to harnesses over collars as well. Reasons include concerns about neck safety as well as the demand for products that offer safety features for both dog and owner, said Tara Belzer, owner of Pet in the City, a pet supply store in Charlotte, N.C.

Benjamin Pratt, store manager for Lucky Dog Barkery in Dallas, said his customers are trending away from nylon toward leather or rope collars, which are considered more durable and long-lasting.

"In terms of function, many of our customers have moved away from collars for walking, opting for a harness instead," he added.

On the innovation front, Pratt said customers enjoy the accessories—such as interchangeable bows and bow ties or bandanas—they can combine with collars and leashes.

"To many customers, it makes more sense to purchase a simpler leather collar that will last longer, and then spice it up with an accessory that can be changed seasonally or according to whatever holiday we may be nearing," he said.

More manufacturers are producing products with safety in mind, Robokoff said.

"[For example], an escape-proof harness for 'Houdini' dogs who are able to slip out of most harnesses," he said. "Many harnesses also are specifically designed for safety while riding in cars."

INDUSTRY VOICES

What is selling best right now in collars, leashes and harnesses?

"Puppy owners and new dog owners tend to stay in the red/blue/black/pink arena until they get to know the personality of the dog. Then the newer and more different they are, the better they sell. [Also,] if it offers a purpose, like a place for poo bags or lighted leashes." —**TARA BELZER**, owner of Pet in the City, a pet supply store in Charlotte, N.C.

"Higher-end products are selling well. Fewer people want plain, basic products, and car safety is becoming more of a factor. Our best-selling collars are locally made with beautiful Alaskan themes." —**MARK ROBOKOFF**, owner of AK Bark, a pet boutique in Anchorage, Alaska

"Leather materials sell best right now, especially customized—handmade with flowers, stones, bows, embroidery, etc." —**BENJAMIN PRATT**, store manager for Lucky Dog Barkery in Dallas

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