

# Pet Product News.com

## Fall Emporium: Lappy Hour

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Fusing function with fashion, watering and feeding systems are hands-down winners when it comes to gift giving.

By Ramona D. Marek

Savvy pet parents know exactly what they want from products for their pets: everything. And everything means more than just providing physical and mental health; it also means offering ease of use, convenience, and a variety of styles, colors and price points. What kind of gift can you give someone who expects everything? Look no further than the numerous watering and feeding systems on the market.

### Fresh Food and Drink

Retailers and manufacturers reported that the hottest trend in gifts right now, whether bought by pet owners for their pets or purchased for pet owners, is the water fountain, followed by feeders.

"A key trend in fountains and feeders is the combination of function with fashion," said Jason Hart, director of marketing for PetSafe, a brand of Radio Systems Corp. in Knoxville, Tenn. "The fountains need to provide a solution such as improved health for your pet while also blending well into the home décor, as they are out in the open. If you can match those two factors, then you have a hot gift idea."

An example, Hart said, is PetSafe's Drinkwell ceramic fountains, which blend better water quality with a filtration system and a pop of color to fit home décor.



Radio Systems Corp.

Also with an eye toward function and fashion, Pioneer Pet Products offers its Raindrop Drinking Fountain in stainless steel.

"What is more important for your animal than its health?" said Shannon Supanich, marketing manager of Pioneer Pet Products in Cedarburg, Wis. "I am sure that's how every pet owner feels. The Raindrop Stainless Steel Fountain makes a great gift because it is not only for your pets, but it also has a unique design that looks great with almost any décor, plus it is dishwasher safe, making it easy and convenient to clean."

Customers are drawn to stainless steel fountains, said Cheri Zachow, manager of Natural Pet NW in Vancouver, Wash.

"PetSafe's Drinkwell watering systems have been the most in demand and reliable watering systems for pets in our store," Zachow said. "Our best-seller by far in that line is the 360 Stainless Steel. Our fur kids are important members of the family, so anytime you have friends who have fur kids they love, a nice watering system makes a great gift that is appreciated by both the pet and pet parent."

Water fountains are in high demand at Long Leash on Life in Albuquerque, N.M., said Norm ShROUT, co-owner.

"The use of fountains can improve the health of cats and dogs, so they make a very thoughtful gift," Shrout said. "Due to the evolution of the manufacturing process, the price of fountains has stayed reasonable, so they remain quite affordable."

Ceramic and stainless steel fountains, including Pioneer Pet's Raindrop Drinking Fountain in stainless steel, sell well, he said.

Petmate's Deluxe Fresh Flow pet fountain provides fresh water and is perfect for multiple cat or dog households, said Emilye Schmale, manager of corporate communications for Petmate in Arlington, Texas.

The fountain has a patented no-splash water slide and a modern design created to blend in with today's kitchen appliances, she added.

Lixit Corp. in Napa, Calif., offers a reversible-base Dog Feeder & Fount, said Joy Wood, director of marketing and general manager.

"The base can be used as a dry food feeder on one side, or flip the base over and attach it to the jar to be used as a water fount," Wood said.

### **Dining by Design**

Shrout said his store's top-selling interactive feeder for cats is the ceramic Tiger Diner from Pioneer Pet.

"The Tiger Diner is an ingenious way to slow down eating and prevent vomiting, and it makes the cats work for their food with their paws, which can help prevent obesity, a major problem for our relatively sedentary house cats," Shrout said.

Another popular interactive cat feeder at Long Leash on Life is the PetSafe Slim Cat Interactive Feeder with adjustable holes, Shrout said.

"We encourage the use of USA-made Kong toys from which to feed the pet's meals," Shrout said. "Our creative custom recipes provide pet parents with countless ideas for 'viscous' food additions that make the Kong freezable and much more challenging for the dogs."

Shrout noted that programmable feeding systems can be important for cats who need to eat smaller frequent meals, but they also can make it convenient for pet sitters to spend more time playing with a pet because the pet will have already eaten.

The Petmate Mason Inspired Feeder also allows pet owners to feed pets while away, Schmale said.

### **Show It Off and Shout It Out**

Retailers agreed that the best way to merchandise fountains is to have one available for customers to see.

"We have a 360 Stainless Steel set up and running at the front for our guests to drink from when they come visit," Natural Pet NW's Zachow said. "The fountain is a huge advertisement for watering systems because the dogs love it!"

The store has a full endcap display with several models along with filters and accessories, she added.

Shrout suggests offering a free filter with the purchase of a fountain. For those retailers with store cats, he recommends setting up the Tiger Diner so customers can see the product in action. He also recommends using social media to show videos of cats using feeders.

"When pushing high-quality and good-looking products, social media is one of your best avenues for generating buzz around your product," said Pioneer Pet's Supanich. "Of course you will want to center your promotions around gifts for your own pets or pet parents you are purchasing for. Doing a Black Friday or Cyber Monday promotion works well too."

Schmale recommends using social media to promote "a weekly giveaway highlighting particular products during the holiday months to build engagement on a retailer's social channels.

"Encouraging followers to post their pets and share what their favorite gift has been for past holidays is a great reminder to make sure pets are not forgotten when holiday gift buying begins."

Schmale also suggested an employees' top pick gift section, a holiday raffle that highlights certain products and encourages participation, or a charity drive for a local pet organization to promote holiday pet gift giving with the option to buy a gift for a pet and donate another to the charity.