

➤ the innovative and microchip-activated Surefeed Microchip Pet Feeder ensures the pets are unable to steal food from other furry family members.

TECH HELPS KEEP PETS SAFE

Then there's Finding Rover, an APP that uses a revolutionary facial recognition software to find lost dogs. The free service is backed by the RSPCA in hopes of bringing home missing pets and hopefully keeping them out of pounds.

What could also help keep cats out of trouble, Sure Petcare recently announced the availability of the most advanced cat door in the world! The APP-controlled SureFlap Microchip Pet Door Connect is used with the company APP and hub, allowing pet owners to control the cat door remotely from a smartphone/ tablet, as well as monitor their feline's activity and habits.

"Having a connected pet door and APP enables owners to check on the comings and goings of their pet even when they're away from home," explained Judith Bank, Sure PetCare's Head of Marketing. "This provides reassurance to the owner that all is well, as well as enabling them to control the door remotely; for example, to lock or unlock the door or to set a curfew so that the door will lock and unlock automatically at specific times."

Over time owners can also understand more about their pet's activity routines. Many customers have said they feel a greater connection with their pet now, knowing what their cat or dog gets up to while they are away at work, said Ms Bank.

"Some owners have also spotted changes in behaviour indicating a problem, which may otherwise have gone unnoticed," she said. "For example, one of our customers noticed that her cat had been outside for longer than usual when checking her Sure Petcare APP account. Curious, she decided to check her cat and found a bite wound on her leg which needed veterinary attention. Because the wound was caught early, the cat was able to get treatment quickly before his condition deteriorated."

The unique pet door received the 2018 International Cat Care (iCatCare) Cat Friendly award, presented to companies which have made a real difference to cats in the last 12 months.

TECHNOLOGY IMPROVING FISH AND REPTILE CARE

Technology is also transforming the way people care for their scaly friends. With tech-enabled aquarium products, owners can have control over virtually every setting – from lights and waves to temperature and feeding schedules – all connected to the company's APP.

Technology is everything when it comes to also caring for reptiles, said Ben Dessen, Reptile Department Manager of Sydney's Kellyville Pets. He is also a Sydney Wildlife member and manager of the Kangaroo Protection Co-operative Wildlife Orphanage and Sanctuary.

"It's been amazing to see the technology and products develop over the years as our knowledge about the environmental requirements of reptiles has increased," said Mr Dessen. "When I started keeping reptiles 20 years ago, no specific reptile products were available in pet stores. Today, I run the largest specialist reptile store in Australia that has literally hundreds of products designed specifically for caring for reptiles in captivity!"

Technology has been developed and improved to allow reptile keepers to accurately control every element of a reptile's environment, from specific temperature and humidity control, to rainfall and light cycles - you can control it all with the myriad of products available, such as the Biopod – the smart microhabitat.

"Modern day reptile keepers are certainly embracing the technology," he said.

"Many up and coming reptile keepers are young people who understand and use the technology well. Many 'old school' reptile keepers are still set in their ways, but even some of them are slowly beginning to realise that 'cheaper isn't always better'. Whilst reptile products and technologies are not always cheap, they allow total control of a reptile's captive environment, which ultimately leads to improved animal welfare outcomes and a happy and healthy animal."

PET TECH IMPACTING VET CARE

One of the biggest game changers in pet tech is how it's impacting veterinary care. Phone APPs and pet wearable tech are expected to increase communication between vets and pet owners, help vets monitor their patients in real time and

even allow for virtual exams and long-distance diagnostics.

Hill's SmartCare powered by Vetrax™ allows pet owners who are feeding their dog a Hill's® Prescription Diet® to observe their dog's progress in real time in the areas of weight control, arthritis or other mobility or skin and dermatological issues. The APP also allows their vet to keep tabs on their dog's condition and adjust the treatment plan accordingly.

Australia's \$3 billion vet industry is on the brink of a significant transformation being driven by increasing demand for flexibility, personalisation and convenience by both vets and consumers, said Guy Sharabi, founder of Pawssum, a national APP-based vet booking service that enables vets to make home visits and refer cases needing surgery to selected vet clinics.

"The technology is being embraced by vets looking for more flexibility in their career," he said. "With the fast pace of modern life and the challenges involved in getting to the vet before or after work and transporting unwell and even well pets to a clinic, this is an evolution that had to happen."

Today's tech-loving customers also expect online convenience, as seen with PetYeti's success as a 1stGroup solution, combining an online community of 6,000 plus health sites and 6.5 million online appointment bookings. The website states: 90% of all customers want to book appointments through digital channels and 40% will switch to a practice that offers the same online convenience provided by PetYeti.

TECH GOOD FOR PET AND VET INDUSTRY

Mr Urquhart said pet and vet industries must embrace technology and have it available for pet market consumers as a small component of their in-store or veterinary clinic ambiance.

"What retailers also need to recognise is that any technology simply opens the door, but it doesn't close the sale," he said. "We need to be careful about becoming too technical and losing touch with pet owners. If we don't open the door and engage with them, we can't enjoy the full fruits of the relationship that the owner has with their pet, or retailers and veterinary clinics have with that particular customer."

