

product pricing, ingredients, reviews and recommendations, and shop; not to mention how pet businesses manufacture, deliver, market and sell to the pet loving customer.

Ms Riad from PETstock also shared advice about entering the pet tech space.

"Entry price points first and foremost need to be affordable. Create an environment in stores for live product demonstrations and have demonstration videos available online, too. Retailers may also provide additional support post purchase via direct personal follow up, website and YouTube content and/or product reviews from other pet parents," she said.

"Like all tech, staying across the latest innovation and technology that is being created around us to improve our lifestyle is desirable to many pet parents, and assists them in making the best decisions when it comes to enhancing the relationship they have with their pet."

This all comes back to trust and integrity, Mr Urquhart added. Customers want to be able to trust the pet service provider but if they're blind to technology, how can the pet owner trust their recommendations or services being offered, even if they are fantastic? Pet professionals also need to know what other consequences and the outcomes of technology rather than necessarily the processes.

"To a large extent, pet owners aren't interested in the process. What they want is a better caring, loving relationship with their pets which will enhance the lifestyle and wellbeing of their pet, said Mr Urquhart. "A big divide exists between 3D and real. Pets and owners love dearly the latter."

### BENEFITS OF PET TECHNOLOGY

Part of embracing technology comes with promoting the benefits to pets and their owners. Renown animal behaviourist Dr Joanne Righetti said pet tech can help pets and their owners manage behaviour issues, such as separation anxiety or noise phobic stress (ie thunderstorms, fireworks).

In fact, a newly available specially-designed technology, thePetCalmer, uses scientifically proven methods of calming animals (specific to birds, cats, dogs and horses) delivered through technology.

"Pets can have fun with our technology, too! Some cats love to play games

on Ipads and many games have been designed for them," added Dr Righetti.

Louise Harding, a master dog trainer, professional animal wrangler, presenter and author of the book Nose to Tail, is also embracing technology but with a bit of caution.

"I think there are some great pet tech inventions that are fantastic for helping people of all ages, shapes and sizes who have mobility issues interact with their pet. But pet ownership really is a 'hands-on, get active' kind of activity," she said. "When we talk about humans and their everyday living arrangement with dogs, nothing beats that connection."

For instance, when you're playing with your dog and throwing the ball yourself.

"Dogs aren't always predictable and they like variety, so that's something to remember when thinking that a gadget will solve your dog's digging habit or barking at birds," she explained. "It comes back to owners understanding their dog's breed characteristics and what makes them tick, and making the right decision about what will be best for them."

Another example - purchasing a ball launcher machine for your ball-crazy Border Collie isn't going to lessen his ball drive, it will feed it and probably escalate the issue, she added.

Ms Harding is impressed with the tracking technology available today but asks why we need it in the first place.

"As pet owners it's our responsibility to make sure our yards and properties are fenced appropriately so that our pets can't escape. APPs can help us to keep track of our pets' medical needs, exercise programs and diet but what did we do before these things arrived?" she asked.

"Technology doesn't replace the need for human interaction and input - both are required to ensure the dog's basic needs, safety and care are met. We need to embrace technology in a way that enriches

our lives with our pets and doesn't diminish our relationship with them."

Ms Bank from Sure Petcare said in many instances low tech solutions work well and there is no need for technology to intervene.

"At Sure Petcare, we are firm believers in "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" and do not seek to develop technology for technology's sake," she said. "Instead, we identify and focus on areas where we think that technology can be used to enhance the lives of pets and their owners."

Sure Petcare was founded by a pet owner who wanted to solve the problem of intruder cats entering his home through his pet door and upsetting his cat. He developed a microchip-operated cat door which remains the company's best-selling product 10 years on, said Ms Bank.

A major pet problem that tech can help with is obesity. Latest Association of Pet Obesity Prevention survey estimates suggest that as many as 59% of dogs and 52% of cats worldwide are overweight<sup>2</sup>.

"Pet tech is becoming more readily available, albeit slowly, to ensure our pets are getting the right amount of exercise and eating a balanced diet to manage weight issues," said Ms Riad from PETstock. "Staying across the tech advances is very beneficial in this case. Adopting and embracing them when you can afford to is also important."

Technology is certainly impacting the pet market and changing the way we care for our pets. The joyful pets and owners are the ones who embrace technology in a way that enriches the lives of their beloved companion animals and enhances their relationship with them.

The successful pet professionals of the future will be those whose operations are rich in technology, their teams engaging with customers and sharing their digital knowledge with pet owners who want to provide better care for their pets. ■



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