



Embracing technology is not a choice of 'if, but or maybe' - it's not negotiable

Millennials (25-to-39-year-olds) are the largest demographic of pet owners and have the greatest share of purchasing power¹. They eat, breath and sleep technology so it's no surprise these digital natives give their pets the high-tech treatment, too!

In fact, the 'Net Generation' is driving demand for new tech-infused products and services made to enhance the pet-owner relationship and contribute to the safety, security and well-being of their animal companions.

Pet tech is certainly the hottest market to watch across the globe, but are Australian businesses well-positioned to advance and innovate in the new digital age and are consumers willing to spend? Are high-tech products enriching the lives of companion animals and the people who love them or diminishing their relationship?

Pet Industry News speaks to pet industry experts, including internationally respected business strategist, consumer behaviour analyst and author Barry Urquhart, who was keynote speaker at AusPet, Pet Industry Association of Australia's national conference last year, on the topic of the pet industry's future, consumer trends and viability.

"It's an exciting time to have pets and a seminal period for the pet industry and particularly the vet industry," he said. "Embracing technology is not a choice of 'if, but or maybe' - it's not negotiable. It is a time of change and we must embrace technology but never compromise and sacrifice the personal relationship with our pets."

There's no doubt the pet tech space is growing globally. Besides market research reports predicting double-digits growth in volume and revenue in the pet technology market, we've seen several notable acquisitions and increased funding to pet tech start-ups, as reported by CB Insights.

World-renown tradeshow SuperZoo (USA), which sets the industry standard for showcasing the latest pet product innovations and emerging industry trends, this year featured a myriad of pet technologies in its first-ever Pet Tech

Centre and awarded the interactive, automated ball launcher iFetch the 2018 New Product Showcase!

Increasing popularity of pet tech products is also evident at Australian pet events like the Dog Lovers Show, which showcased many high-tech dog products to a record crowd of nearly 40,000 in Melbourne. The PIAA AusPet 2018 Trade Show, Conference and Public Expo held in Queensland next month will also see a larger number of exhibitors featuring their innovative pet tech products and services, said PIAA Events Manager Linda Chamarette.

PETstock's General Manager of Merchandise, Ann Riad, said Australia generally gets access to new technology well after the UK and USA, and this is no different in pet tech.

"The Australian sector of pet tech is a little slower to take off than some other countries. Pet tech - like any technology sector - is fast moving. No sooner is one device released than another improved or more advanced product enters the market!" said Ms Riad. "When it comes to technology in any market, the consumer is often seeking a reliable trusted brand to invest in and ensure confidence. There is definitely a need for more advanced, reliable and affordable pet tech that is not currently readily available for pet parents."

LEADING TRENDS IN PET TECH

Experts agree, high-tech products are changing what it means to keep our pets happy and healthy.

"Pet parents are always looking at new ways of protecting their fur babies and wanting to know more about what they get up to when they are not at home," said Ms Riad. "Cameras and monitoring devices are being actively installed not only for home safety/security but also to see how their pet's day is going."

Besides pet surveillance, some other popular pet tech involves fitness monitors, tracking devices and APPs, pet food/water dispensers and high-tech toys.

"Toys and wearables are of most interest to our consumers, with price points and reliability the biggest barrier to market

entry. So if pet tech companies can get that right, then pet parents are more likely to invest in the category," said Ms Riad.

Pet trackers, like Fitbark, Whistle and Biotraka, can crucially monitor pets' health, looking for tell-tale changes in behaviour that point to illness, and keep tabs on their location if they go walkabout.

Biotraka's CEO Chris Dafel said the challenge with animals has always been that they can't tell us what is going on.

"Pet technology is going to allow us to gain more insight into our pets and take us a step closer to talking to our animals," he said. "Using GPS tracker technology also means fewer lost pets. Plus, it gives people insight into what their pets are up to when they are not with them. This will help owners understand how to better nurture their pets. The more we can understand the ones we love, the more we can respect and nurture their needs - a great step forward in animal human relationships."

You can also keep an eye on your furry friend using a pet camera, which unlike a security camera, can dispense treats or allow you to interact with your cat or dog using your voice or a type of video chat, therefore helping to address common issues like separation anxiety and boredom.

Petcube home pet cam products offer numerous ways for owners to interact with their pets, such as flinging out treats on the fly or scheduled as a reward. Their Facebook Live and Amazon Alexa integration allow you to see, talk to and record video of your pet. Petcube's new update now allows your pet to video you! (One moment please, Buttons is calling!)

As for high-tech toys, many pups wag their tails for automated tennis ball launchers (ie iFetch, GoDogGo), light-up balls (great for a night-time game of fetch) and interactive puzzles. You can even combine the PupPod Wobbler and Pet Tutor dispenser to control the game difficulty from your smartphone to make the game harder as your dog gets smarter.

Designed for the multi-pet household,

