

# Pet stores say Christmas is going to dogs, cats

BY TONY BRUSCATO  
STAFF WRITER

Christmas is going to the dogs and cats. Area pet supply stores say gifts for dogs and cats are high on the priority list for many families.

"Our business will jump 70-80 percent during the holidays," said John Agge, assistant store director for PetMart at Six Mile and Haggerty. "I think a stocking for pets is almost standard anymore. It's very similar to marketing for children's gifts."

The situation is similar at Superpets in Westland. "It gets absolutely crazy during the holidays," said Sasha Swanger, customer service manager. "It's amazing to see how much money people spend on their pets during this time of year."

Pet store operators say most of the gifts go to dogs and cats, with some others given to birds in the form of cages and treats.

"Business is great this time of year," added Gene Greed, director of sales and advertising for Pet Supplies Plus from his world headquarters office in Livonia,

where he oversees stores in Livonia, Canton, Redford and Farmington Hills. "There are a lot of last-minute gifts for pets, just like for adults and kids, and people buy extra treats and toys for the holidays."

Many of the stores have entire aisles with holiday gifts, including candy-cane-striped rawhide bones, stockings full of pet goodies, Santa squeaky toys, and for cats, toys with catnip.

"Many people think about their pets first," said Greed. "They're attached to their pets because they are part of the family."

Not only are local pet businesses thriving this season, so are mail order companies.

"Pets have become more a part of the household," said Linda Krehmeyer, marketing media manager for Doctors Foster and Smith, a dog-oriented mail order gift and supply company. "Many dogs used to live outside, but now most have become part of the family. They're treating them more like people."

The company, based in Rhinelander, Wis., has a holiday gift section for pets in its brochure, and Krehmeyer says

**"It's amazing to see how much money people spend on their pets."**

—Sasha Swanger

—customer service manager, Superpets

dog owners tend to buy what the owners like.

"Many people tend to buy flavored treats and toys they would like," said Krehmeyer. "If we show a picture of bacon with the owner likes bacon, many times they'll assume the dog will like it, too."

"Over the past two or three years, especially with our holiday insert, sales at this time of year boom," said Krehmeyer. "Many people buy out of love, and don't even consider price a factor."

During the holidays, the scale seems to tip in favor of the dogs.

"Cat buyers usually spend less on their companions," said Krehmeyer. "Cats are more independent and generally have little interaction, as compared to a dog. Did you ever see a cat beg for treats?"

Karen Berger, owner of Pet

Fourri in Farmington Hills, says the holidays bring out the best in pet owners.

"I'm amazed at what pet owners will buy during Christmas, and how much money they'll spend on stockings and treats," said Berger. "Many owners will buy the little Santa hats and beard costumes, reindeer antlers or angel halos for their dogs to wear during the season."

Julie Girard, marketing coordinator for Oink Oink, says the 7-year-old business is growing, but the Christmas season is even busier.

"Business is booming, and we've certainly picked up this time of year," said Girard. "People like to pamper their pets and make them a part of the holiday season."

Oink Oink, which manufactures more than 100 different kinds of dog treats makes holiday stockings and a Hickory

Farms-like box with various treats, which are big sellers this time of year.

The bottom line ... pets are big business during the holidays.

"Industry-wide, the holiday

season brings in millions of extra dollars for the retail pet industry," said Greed. "It's also the most fun time of year for us, as we see happy pets and pet owners."

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