

Four-legged friendster: Dog tech takes off

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You might call it doggy tech. Social networks, software applications, photo sharing, information tools, messaging, and even collars to monitor your dog's health have begun to sprout amid a surge in spending on pets.

"There is some exciting stuff coming out of the app world for dog lovers that goes beyond just being social with other dog owners," said Leslie May, principal analyst and founder of Pawsible Marketing, a Georgia-based firm that provides consulting services for pet-related businesses.

The new digital tools for dog owners are more than fun and frivolity.

The Dog Land app, which is free, is a social network that enables people to find and rate services and facilities for their [dogs](#), such as dog parks, animal shelters and dog-friendly hotels and restaurants. People can chat with other dog owners as well as share photographs.

"We want to improve the lives of dog owners," said Gareth Wilson, president and creative director of Los Angeles-based BetterPet, which created the Dog Land app. "We want our product to be more than a novelty."

Lesley Ramos, a Santa Cruz resident with a dog named Bob, uses an app called Dog Park Finder, which provides an array of information for traveling short or long distances with a canine.

"The Dog Park Finder app is specifically for dogs and covers everything from dog parks, dog-friendly places like parks and restaurants, all the

way down to hotels that allow dogs," Ramos said. "It has lists with icons that show the user if it's a fenced dog park, or on-leash area. Its database is pretty good and is constantly being updated."

Dog Park Finder is free and is offered by Los Angeles-based Dog Goes.

For those eager to monitor their dog's health, there are devices like Voyce, a dog collar with a high-tech twist. The collar tracks a dog's active and resting periods and measures both heart and respiratory rates. The information is then transmitted to the cloud, which the dog's veterinarian can access to provide expert advice about the animal's health. The whole idea is to provide dog owners with more insight into their dog's health, as well as offer additional treatment and training options.

"It's like a wellness coach for your dog," said Jeff Noce, president of Virginia-based i4C Innovations, which will put Voyce on the market this summer for about \$300.

Buyers will also need to pay a \$15 monthly membership fee for the data to be transmitted, processed and sent to a doctor for their feedback.

That sort of high-tech information can be valuable because dogs are predisposed by evolution not to tip off their owners that they feel distress over an illness. For thousands of years, dogs and wolves that displayed weakness often are drummed out of the pack and left behind to fend off other predators.

Other health-related tools are offered by Boston-based Petmobi, which has an app named after the company. The free Petmobi app enables owners to create a profile for their dog or cat, upload a photo and set weight and calorie goals for the animal, said company founder Alex Papanicholas.

"The app lets you figure out how much your pet should be eating to maintain weight or lose weight," Papanicholas said. "Petmobi is similar to a human health and fitness app."

New high-tech pet products have a healthy market because spending on dogs is on the upswing, according to surveys released by the American Pet Products Association. Spending averaged \$1,649 per pooch in the United States last year, up 4.7 percent from an average of about \$1,575 during 2012.

The rising spending comes at a time when dog ownership has flattened out. In 2012, an estimated 36.5 percent of U.S. households had at least one dog, down slightly from the 37.2 percent of households in 2007, according to a study released by the American Veterinary Medical Association, a nonprofit group.

Last year, Americans spent \$55.72 billion on pets of all kinds, ranging from dogs and cats to horses, reptiles and birds. This year, the American Pet Products Association expects spending on pets is expected to increase by 5 percent.

"There is really a lot of stuff out there these days for [dog owners](#)," said May, the Pawsible analyst. "These apps are fun and functional. The whole app world for pets has taken a really different and interesting turn."

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TECH FOR DOGS

Dog Land. Social networking, information gathering, [photo sharing](#), rating of dog facilities

Voyce. A dog collar that measures a dog's health and transmits the data to experts

Petmobi. Social networking with weight and calorie goals

Tagg. Mounts on a collar to monitor pet and track if lost

Sources: Pawsible Marketing, company reports

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