

# **Wearable tech goes to the dogs, with connected collars and more**

March 13 2015, by Patrick May, San Jose Mercury News

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With the cognoscenti breathlessly occupied with the launch of the Apple Watch, we thought we'd check in with another distinguished group of users just drooling for the latest wearable technology: Dogs.

It's practically raining cats and you-know-what in the burgeoning subcategory of tech gadgets and accessories that can be attached to our four-legged friends, usually for the owner's peace of mind. Wearable tech for animals has been around for years: Decades ago, scientists began tracking endangered species with radio-tracking collars, and police and soldiers can attach devices to their [dogs](#) to receive commands electronically. More recently, the marketplace is awash with all kinds of cool tracking and monitoring devices for the canine set, typically in the form of a tech-laden collar that can be accessed through Web browsers and mobile smartphone apps. And there's more on the way: one device still under development, No More Woof, is a headset that claims to be able to read your dog's inner emotions by monitoring its brain signals.

"Wearable tech for dogs was really big at the Consumer Electronics Show this year," said wearable-tech evangelist Tom Emrich, founder of a collaborative hub called We Are Wearables, "and the latest trend is devices that quantify your pet's health, just like Fitbit does for humans. We're now pushing that technology on our dogs so, for example, you can see if your pet's been running or playing or getting any exercise while you're at work."

I recently got my hands on a few of the latest products and used our

lovable - though hyperactive and food-obsessed - 10-year-old Beagle named Lucy as my guinea pup.

First up is Voyce, a \$299 lightweight, waterproof and Jetsons-worthy collar that uses Wi-Fi to monitor the heck out of your pet's health, serving up all kinds of diagnostics to help you and your vet take care of Fido. Voyce even sends you articles by renowned animal experts, each custom-tailored to your dog's breed and ongoing health statistics.

"It's got sensors on board that allow us to monitor things that are typical with human-based trackers, like rest, calories burned, distance traveled," said Voyce's director of program management, Ben Maphis. "But our secret sauce is reading heart and respiratory rates in a noninvasive way, using low-frequency, radio-based technology. And it works on every type of dog, with any size of neck or fur length."

The band comes in a smartly assembled package, like an Apple product. After giving it a quick charge through a base connected by a USB cord, I attach the band to Lucy's neck and set up an online account. As I fill in Lucy's profile, I'm asked about her physical condition, from a skinny state with bony ribs "evident from a distance" to "massive fat deposits." I give Lucy a middle-of-the-road score of 5, or "ribs palpable without excess fat covering." Directions are simple and the tutorial video helped me in just a few minutes to get the device up and running.

I wish I could say the same thing about Lucy, a pint-size hound who's far more prone to mope around or sit out in the sun for hours. I left the house for an hour and when I came back to check the website, I found basically a flat line on the graph indicating, well, rest. In other words, Voyce had confirmed what I'd instinctively known all along: My dog's a spoiled and lazy little beast.

Next was Tagg, an adorable little band the size of a wristwatch that

attaches to your dog's collar and basically keeps track of his whereabouts through GPS and satellite technology. Thanks to its geofencing feature, Tagg acts like a digital pet-sitter you can monitor through your smartphone app and Web-based browser. It was recently purchased by San Francisco-based Whistle, a canine fitness tracker that raised funding from partners including Nokia and the venture fund of New York Knicks basketball star Carmelo Anthony.

I take it out of the box, which contains a few too many parts for my liking, connect the docking station to a wall plug, and while the band is charging I overcome a few glitches to create an online account and download the mobile app. The band costs \$99.95, there's a one-time activation fee of \$14.95 and subscription plans that start at \$6.95 a month.

On the home page, a map of my neighborhood comes up and I'm instructed to create a Tagg Zone within which Lucy is supposed to remain, as in "Stay, Lucy!" In the middle of this square covering my house and neighbors on each side is a golden paw, signifying Lucy's location. After clipping the device onto Lucy's collar, I take her for an on-leash walk, intentionally leaving the Tagg Zone. A minute or so later, the alarms start ringing - cellphone alerts, smartphone notifications and, in my mobile app, bright red notices saying "Lucy: I'm outside of the home Tagg Zone." They repeat every three minutes, each identifying the specific address to which Lucy is closest.

Had she been on her own, I could have hopped on my bike or jumped in my car and tracked the little brat down. After we go back into the house, Tagg sends me yet another notice, this one more reassuring:

"Hi. It's me, Lucy. I'm near the home [docking station](#)."

Finally, it's time for some fun. While the \$149 Narrative Clip, which

calls itself "The Wearable Camera for Moments That Matter," is primarily intended for human use, this postage-stamp-sized device seemed like a perfect fit for Lucy. It's simple: clip it onto your dog's collar and it'll take a photo every 30 seconds for up to 30 hours. Upload the photos to the Narrative website and - voila! - you've got a shareable timeline, with only the better-quality photos included.

"Narrative helps you capture photos without losing presence in the moment, without having to stop and actually take a photo," says co-founder Oskar Kalmaru. "And while we initially intended this for humans, we see people putting it on their dog during a walk or hanging it on their cat to see what it's been up to when they were at work."

I clipped the Narrative to Lucy's collar and, leash attached, headed out into the neighborhood. She was like a fury four-legged paparazzo, snapping up everything in sight as she sniffed her way from car tire to lamp post to well-frequented shrub.

Back home, I uploaded the pictures and sat back for the show.

"Done," the message said. "Your moments are ready to be viewed."

Lucy and her camera did good. There was a nice shadow of me against the pavement, my blurred finger while I was adjusting Lucy's collar, a couple of lovely trees shots, some bushes that looked like a Jackson Pollock painting, and then, last but not least, a perfectly framed shot of my face as I was bending down to disconnect the hipster Beagle from her oh-so-techie bling-bling.

**POOCH ACCESSORIES**

**VOYCE**

A lightweight, waterproof collar that monitors your dog's health and fitness and uses Wi-Fi to sync the data so you can access it anytime, anywhere.

Cost: \$299, plus a monthly membership fee of \$9.95

mydogsvoice.com

## TAGG

Set up a geofence around your house and be alerted when your dog goes beyond its parameter.

Cost: \$99.95, and service fees that start at \$6.95 a month.

[www.pettracker.com](http://www.pettracker.com)

## NARRATIVE CLIP

A tiny camera that clips onto your dog's collar and snaps a photo every 30 seconds for up to 30 hours.

Cost: \$149

getnarrative.com

-Source: Mercury News reporting

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