

Designed for Play

By: Maggie Marton
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When it comes to dog toys, the product development focus has historically centered on durability. Dog owners wanted a toy that would last, and since most dogs destroy toys pretty quickly, toys with innovative materials—seat belts, fire hoses, ballistic-grade fabric—emerged as bestsellers. However, many dogs were still

able to destroy these toys, and owners continued to look for alternatives.

There are also perennial favorites that are simple and help dog owners bond with their dogs.

According to Lisa Kamer, founder and CEO of **Knots of Fun**, consumers looking for an interactive toy are attracted to bright, colorful toys with lots of texture. The toys that her company produces from fleece tick all of those boxes.

“Most people don’t really think that fleece comes textured, thick, thin, heavy, not heavy, pebbled and on and on,” Kamer explained. “Using combinations of colors and textures is very eye catching.”

The fleece toys are substantially sized, with ropes reaching up to three feet in length. Kamer explained that her store displays catch customers’ eyes because of the bright colors, but the versatility of the toys entices them to buy.

“My customers are looking for a durable toy,” she said. “It also floats. It can be used for beach sports or even frozen. It becomes a whole different toy, a whole different experience.”

Beyond that, though, her customers love Knots of Fun’s made-in-the-USA commitment.

“They seem to be attracted to the USA component,” Kamer said. “That’s what I sell. That’s all I know. I think that’s one of the reasons that people are coming to me. I do manufacture a 100 percent USA-made toy. I am very pleased to be able to say that not only are my toys manufactured here, but the material is also made here.”

Regardless of the play style, safety is paramount in this category. Kamer’s toys are safe enough that, if a dog chews off a piece, it will pass. Hyper Pet’s toys comply with children’s toy safety protocols and, in some cases, exceed those standards. PetSafe’s ball launcher has a series of built-in sensors that prevent the ball from launching if a person or a pet happens to be in front of the toy.

Interactive and fetch toys are not chew toys. In other words, customers should not expect to leave these toys out and have them last. Instead, these are items that should be brought out for specific play sessions. Educate customers on this specific class of product to prevent disappointment.

These toys can also get lost in the bigger toy aisle. Consider endcaps and signage that call attention to benefits of play and interaction between dog owners and their pets.

Kamer’s sales pitch for these toys?

“Use the toy; play with your dog,” Kamer said. “Enjoy that bond that you can establish with your dog through play.”

<http://www.petage.com/designed-for-play/>