

Internet Interpet

While some people search the Internet for information on pets and their care, others manage to unearth hidden treasures of the bizarre, so before we point you to some new sites, check this out!

The digital pet of the month award goes to... iDog, a small white plastic and chrome desk pet which can easily be plugged into an iPod to respond to music input by shaking its head, ears and displaying a series of disco lights in its head. Though not likely to replace a real hound, it's a cute contraption that at \$50-60 is a fun toy along the lines of the Singing Bass, Dancing Flowerpot, Tamagotchi or other gadgets that had their moment of fame before heading to the remainder store.

It's actually got a minor use as an extension speaker for an iPod when jacked into one. When you place it in front of speakers since it has a microphone in its head, or plug it into a headphone jack of any hand-held music player, its face lights up and it moves its head and ears. There are 7 LED lights in different colors on its face which flash with strength of rhythm. It is compatible with most portable music devices such as Discman, iPod, or Rio MP3 players.

Left alone without music, it barks and yelps and acts annoyed until you pet its head (it has a sensor there) press its nose or feed it more music. It also comes with a toggle switch for tail that turns him from good dog to bad dog if you irritate it and can play up to 70 built in melodies which, as tinny as they are, can easily irritate you! Though the legs don't move, the ears flap and it does go to sleep in the dark. Thankfully. To find a local outlet, tap iDog into Google or check your local Myers or games shop if not Apple dealer.

Another wild device we found is detailed at www.globalpetfinder.com and is the latest in global positioning systems (GPS) and two way wireless communications to help you keep track of your beloved dog-it's not for cats, kids or locating Alzheimer patients yet.

With this device that straps around a pet's neck with a wireless transceiver, you can define a virtual fence of any size-whether yard or neighbourhood-and program it so that if your pet leaves this area, you are immediately and automatically notified and sent the continuously updated location of your pet to the two-way device of your choice; cell phone, PDA or computer on a map.

Creating the 'fence' is as simple as logging into a command centre and mapping out the territory and up to five 'fences' can be programmed which could be home, second home or holiday house, street area or any size territory. You can also go into 'walk mode' so that you can walk or travel with your pet, but should you become separated, tracking can be initialised remotely by dialing F-O-U-N-D from your mobile phone or PDA.



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The Global Pet Finder will respond and the pet's location and movement can be tracked on the device of your choice.

Technology this fancy comes with a price and a continuing monthly service fee. Though small and unassuming with only a small rubbery antenna sticking out, the collar is US\$350, there's a US\$50 activation fee to start the service and the monthly fee ranges between US\$18 for a 'homebody' dog that's not likely to roam to US\$20 for the 'Escape Artist'. And on top of that, there is a 'locates' fee that slips in each time the animal leaves its perimeter which can ratchet up costs if you have a Hound Houdini.

On to some more interesting sites, I was tipped to the local Boomerang Books company which uses SeekBooks and can supply a broad range of pet books at a discount. The site is at <http://books.boomerangbooks.com/popcat.asp?CatMain=PET&StoreURL=boomeran> and generally has a 10% discount on each book which is offset by freight. But it's a better deal than using the US Amazon site which can be costly in international freight charges.

It's interesting to view the mix of pet books and you can see which category has the most titles. Where there are 1041 titles about dogs, 328 on cats, 154 bird books, 175 fish titles, 65 for small furry critters and 46 for the scaly variety of reptiles and amphibians. Many are Australian books with a great assortment of overseas best-sellers including some books that are hard to get here.

Looking for a vicious guard dog that is child safe, doesn't need feeding or water and responds to people as they approach the front door? The Electronic Watchdog (<http://www.guarddog.net/halarm.htm>) is a microwave sensor that allows it to detect motion through doors, windows and walls up to four inches thick. When an intruder comes within 30 feet, it begins barking like an angry Alsatian and the closer they come, the more fierce and louder the barking. It's only US\$75 and plugs into outlets or can be battery operated.

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