

➤ The future of pet preservation and aftercare industry as a whole looks promising, said Mr Michalowitz. However, developing industry standards would be beneficial for the industry as it would give pet owner some reassurance that the accredited business is doing the right thing in regard to the pet, he added.

New unique services and products in the marketplace

Nowadays, different pet memorial products are available to suit every pet owner's wishes to farewell and honour their pets. From padded pillow pet caskets, painted ceramic urns, photo plaques and heavy granite headstones to cemetery stones, memorial glass®, jewellery for hair or ash, and more.



In America, a new start-up called Rooted Pet is offering a new service that has been lacking in the pet aftercare space - composting dead pets. Letting kitty decompose in a mixture of organic matter uses less energy than firing up a cremation oven, requires less land than a graveyard and is a poignant, dust-to-dust type of process, the general manager Paul Tschetter stated.

Then there's Heart in Diamond Australia which creates genuine, certified laboratory-grown diamonds using the signature carbon taken from hair and ashes of people and pets.

"These unique diamonds are made to celebrate life's precious memories and become heirlooms passed on for generations to come," explained Bill Yeo, co-owner of the UK-based company. "Free from environmental harm and unethical labour or trade practices, the creation of a personal laboratory-grown Heart in Diamond is as pure and peaceful as the gems themselves."

Mr Yeo said the company services Australia and Singapore and is seeing a constant growth in 'pet diamonds'. "Pets make up about 20 percent of all their enquiries, and many of these calls are coming from veterinarians in response to customer enquiries. The majority of pet diamonds are .25 carat or under," he said. Mr Yeo sees a 'bright' future for the company in the pet memorial market as people are spending more on their pets and treating them like members of the family.

In an Australian first, RainbowPaws Memorials has enabled pet owners to create a lasting memorial by transforming their pet's cremated remains into new life through infusion into a living plant! Using organic science, an animal's cremated remains can support new life by converting ashes into nutrients that promote thriving growth in a chosen plant or tree, said Luke Roberts, the company's managing director.

"Untreated ash is damaging to the soil surrounding the delicate roots of plants, causing them to struggle to grow. RainbowPaw's unique process balances the alkaline and caustic aspects while releasing essential nutrients locked in the ashes to stimulate growth," he explained. "The technology used to transform pet cremated remains has been tried and tested with pleasing results. Trees under lab testing grew up to 30% faster and became stronger than non-treated trees."

The RainbowPaw's process continues the circle of life, passing a pet's energy into a tree, keeping memories alive for generations to come.

Western Australia-based Sweet Goodbye Pty Ltd also launched its unique and compassionate products at this year's Perth Royal Show, bringing comfort to those grieving and support to those disadvantaged and vulnerable. The company has international patents pending and registered designs for a range of unique biodegradable and transportable pet burial and farewell kits in a rainbow of colours.

"Our products are not only incredibly practical but also very beautiful, safe and comforting," explained Natalie Venosi, the managing director of Sweet Goodbye.

The company sources handmade wool felt from a Fair Trade certified supplier in earthquake damaged Kathmandu, which is individually hand-crafted into the unique 'Cloud' and 'Cocoon' flagship range through a rural family business development initiative in Bali. In addition to assisting these communities, the venture's ultimate 'greater good' goal is to raise funds for animal welfare and a minimum of 5% profits is committed to supporting organisations including Animals Asia and The Orangutan Project.

"Whatever an individual's personal or religious beliefs, the process of lovingly preparing their pet for cremation or burial is a true act of kindness," said Ms Venosi. "Veterinary staff can benefit from offering a more compassionate and functional range of 'tools' to help with the transition and ultimately ease some of the distress and pain for everyone involved. A vet's care and guidance during this difficult time is invaluable and the key is being prepared for when that time comes."

Having a Sweet Goodbye Kit can give pet owners peace of mind and a calming sense of purpose and focus for when that unbearable time arrives, she added.

Rise in home-based palliative care

What's also on the rise is home-based palliative care, including euthanasia - ending a life to relieve pain and suffering - which plays a vital role in 'setting the stage' for aftercare services. It's important to realise that palliative care/ euthanasia is not only a difficult experience for the pet owners but also the veterinarians who perform end-of-life procedures.

Veterinarian Dr Ari Ende from VETaround Sydney Mobile Vet Service provides patients with quality veterinary care in their own environment, which he says helps to reduce the stress often associated with trips to the vet clinic especially if the animal has a chronic and/or terminal illness. "People are typically telling me how hard the euthanasia of their pet is, and often semi-jokingly that it was harder than the death of their parent for example!" he said. "People are seeking ways of honouring their pets in their deaths in ways they would also treat their human family and in most cases really feel their pets deserve a loving, peaceful and stress-free death (euthanasia)."