

The Street

5 Wonderfully Weird Products That Small Business Created

By [Laurie Kulikowski](#) 04/11/12 - 06:00 AM EDT

NEW YORK ([MainStreet](#)) - What do duck-hunting whistles, ugly sweaters and even [The Big Lebowski](#) paraphernalia have in common?

They are just a few examples of the world of niche retailers - a place where small businesses and entrepreneurs can flourish.



Starting a small business with a crazy idea sometimes pays off.

"At the end of the day, it's what makes a retailer different that helps drive their business," says Kathy Grannis, spokeswoman for the National Retail Federation. "Companies that can separate themselves from the competition will usually always find customers who are eager and interested in what they have to sell."

But selling the strange and unique is not for everyone, especially if the merchandise is truly specialized. Many times, these businesses are created after a consumer sees a hole in the marketplace. But that's the key - making sure there is indeed a demand for the product. Entrepreneurs who have a clear picture of their target market and competitors as well as a strategy to keep customers coming back are more likely to succeed.

Here are five companies selling odd, yet popular merchandise.



1. Pet Petal Pullcart
Made by Pawsitively Purrfect Products
Palatine, Ill.

Sheryl Bass and her husband Neil Cline stumbled on an idea for a business as they were planning their wedding in 2006. Both wanted their dogs to participate in the wedding but didn't want anything that would be uncomfortable to wear or anything that would be toxic. Bass wanted her dog to fulfill the traditional "flower child" role, but no such product existed for the pet to hold the flower petals as they were distributed.

And so, [Pawsitively Purrfect Products](#) and its "Pet Petal Pullcart" was created.

It just so happens that Cline is pretty handy, Bass says. After testing various contraptions on their own pet, they came up with a wooden cart that attaches to a harness and dispenses flower petals from the back. The customizable hand-carved pull cart is for small dogs (less than 30 pounds) and sells for \$130 on the company's [website](#).

Bass and her husband, who both have full-time jobs as a publicist and psychotherapist, respectively, have hit on an explosive trend -- consumers are expected to spend [nearly \\$53 billion](#) on pets in 2012, according to the American Pet Products Association. Boutique businesses that offer pet outfits, treats (that literally look good enough for humans to eat) and toys are on the rise. And so is the trend of including furry loved ones in weddings.

The Pet Petal Pullcart is so popular that the couple cannot keep up with production (pull carts are made-to-order given the pet's weight and length specifications), Bass says. However, the couple has had to turn away customers, especially those looking to use the product for bigger breeds.

Bass says they hope to license the product, so that a bigger company can mass produce the item and come up with a solution to the big-breed dilemma. She also wants to add other products to the business down the line, she says.

-- *Written by Laurie Kulikowski in New York.*

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