

Haute couture for dogs

If it's haute couture and top class accessories that customers want, Koko von Knebel is one of Europe's foremost suppliers.



Exclusive "Puppia" brand clothing.

When Friederike de Jong von Knebel established her store chain four years ago in Germany, it was to have "fun from pleasure" more than anything else. She now runs five "lifestyle" boutiques selling exclusive canine accessories in up-market

city centre locations in Hamburg, Berlin, Düsseldorf, Kiel and on the island of Sylt. In Berlin, her dog boutique is directly opposite Udo Walz's hair studio, which numbers many celebrities among its admirers, and Walz himself often pops over to Koko von Knebel with his dog Oscar to have a look at what's on offer. In Hamburg and Düsseldorf, the shops look out onto Chanel stores.

"Every dog is a star... and for that your faithful companion has earned a little luxury too," is the company's philosophy in a nutshell on the Internet. Hand-made liver sausage crackers from Hamburg pastry shop Weber belong in the luxury category as much as high-quality dog beds with hypoallergenic mattress interiors and elegant design-



Exclusive dog bar in various colours.

er bowls made of top class materials. Friederike de Jong von Knebel has been mad about dogs since she was a child, and at the Villa Martius in Kiel, where the company is based too, twelve (!) dogs live as if in paradise. Because she is very animal-oriented, she attaches particular importance to selling only products that are not harmful to animals.

Right from the outset, Koko von Knebel has also marketed dog accessories via an online shop – albeit "without any great passion, actually," Friederike de Jong von Knebel concedes. It's far more important to her that dog owners seeking something special for their four-legged friends become acquainted with the special shopping experience that her stores offer and take advantage of the expert advice available there.

High export quota

Nevertheless, the online shop has dramatically raised the profile of the company at home and abroad in just a short time, as have its frequent appearances in the media. The company now sells products in all Euro-



Friederike de Jong von Knebel is mad about dogs.

Photo: Paul Schmitz/VOX.

pean countries and even to America, Israel, Dubai and Saudi Arabia. The share of overall sales accounted for by exports has long since passed the 70 per cent mark. "Demand for our products is extremely high. For many customers from abroad, our stores are rather like Neuschwanstein Castle – one of the 'must-see' sights on a visit to Germany," explains office manager Sabine Thomaschefski.

The full range at Koko von Knebel currently comprises over 10 000 products. The high number of items results from the many different colours and sizes that have to be provided for dog clothing and also for leads and collars if customers' wishes are to be satisfied in full. In the online shop and in the stores, however, only a portion of these are offered for sale.

The Koko von Knebel service

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The "Fringe" model from the "Chrome Bones" collection retails at € 1 199 for the bag and € 199 for the matching feeder.

also includes offering products that can be obtained in the conventional speciality trade too. But the focal point of the collection is formed by exquisite fashion brands from all over the world, many of which are distributed exclusively by Koko von Knebel.

Koko von Knebel also supplies other dog boutiques – individual specialist advice is a prerequisite – and exclusive department stores with high-class luxury dog items via a separately run wholesale business. The company refuses to supply businesses that do not come up to the quality standards it sets, or those in a city where there are already enough distributors for Koko von Knebel products.

"Always a step ahead of the competition"

As the number of dog owners wanting to buy beautiful products for their four-legged friends has increased, so has the number of online shops and dog boutiques that sometimes merci-

lessly copy the Koko von Knebel concept. Friederike de Jong von Knebel appears unperturbed by this development. "If a business idea goes down well, one has to live with the fact that people will imitate it. That always provides confirmation that one has done something right," says the entrepreneur. The important thing for her company is not to stand still when it comes to development, and to consolidate its lead over competitors. In this regard she backs quality and the swift realisation of current fashion trends in the first instance.

In the hunt for new market niches, Koko von Knebel even dares to tread a new path and is now producing fan merchandise for well-known football teams as well as certain custom-made accessory products for television stations. The firm also perceives growth potential in many European countries, such as Spain for example, where the market for dog products is growing strongly at present. ■



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2. Reduction of phosphate content by up to **10%**

(Source: Tetra feeding test)

Clearer water

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