



Is It Time for an App?

Life at the practice is good. Your facility is top-notch, your clients are great, the patients are happy, and the team is running like a well-oiled machine. You have met your marketing goals for 3 successive quarters, and you have new clients coming in the door, thanks in part to your excellent website and dynamite presence on Facebook.

Is it time to sit back and enjoy the fruits of your labor? Hardly. It could be time to add an app.

Why? Because an app can be a critical client-retention and image-building tool. "Today, a good website just isn't enough," says Cathy Lawler, managing director at Chicago veterinary marketing company Cheshire Partners (cheshirepartnersllc.com). "An app shows the client that your clinic is cutting edge and into technology," both key attributes for an animal healthcare

professional, she says. "And apps are the only way for existing clients to search for you from a mobile device *without* also seeing your competitors."

App Attributes

An app can put your practice in contact with clients 24/7. When your phone number and address are available with one click, clients can contact you—and even get turn-by-turn directions to your office—whenever and wherever their pet needs veterinary attention. Your app could remind clients

who visit only once a year about your practice whenever they see it on their mobile phone or tablet.

Your app could also serve as an invaluable referral tool, Lawler says. For example, a client casually chatting about veterinarians with another owner at the dog park can recommend your hospital with the push of one button.

A good veterinary practice app includes:

- An app button with your logo and brand colors
- Links to your mobile website, with the ability to click through to your full website
- One-click phone and address
- Easy-to-use email form
- Appointment request form
- Prescription refill form
- Emergency contact information
- "About us" information
- Special offers.

Adding an App

First, choose whether to develop and maintain an app yourself or to hire a professional. You can create an app for free and maintain it for as little as \$10 per month using services such as Appy Pie (appypie.com), through which you can develop an app for iPhone, iPad, Android, Blackberry, and Windows and publish it on iTunes and Google Play. You may also need to create QR scanner widgets so clients can easily download your app from your website and at your practice. Appy Pie and other do-it-yourself services use drag-

“Embrace the Button”

David McDonald, DVM, owner of White Pine Veterinary Clinic in Park City, Utah (whitepinevet.com), commented on the practice's app: “I think that having an app for our clinic provides another easy way for clients to contact us and request appointments, prescription refills, etc. We live in a very tech-savvy community and the majority of our clients appear to have smart phones, so it seems like a logical avenue to offer our clients to contact us.”



White Pine has an attractive button on its website home page that proclaims, “Our Apps Are Here.” The button links to a page that has Android and Apple QR codes, as well as easy-to-follow instructions for downloading the practice's app and a QR code reader. White Pine also displays posters in each examination room that give clients instructions for downloading the practice's app during their appointment.

and-drop templates and claim that an app can be built in less than 10 minutes. Templated apps have been approved for publication—for example, Apple approves all iTunes apps, Lawler says—but they may not support any unique features or represent your practice to its best advantage.

Technology changes so quickly that it likely is more practical for busy veterinarians to stay focused on patient care and hire an expert to help develop, promote, integrate, and maintain their practice's marketing and communication programs. Most veterinary practices need help deciding what technology to employ and how to use and analyze it, but whether you decide to hire a consultant or go it alone, “the timing is right for every veterinary clinic to have an app,” Lawler says. “Embrace the button.”

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