

**You have asked:**

> Our marketing program needs a breath of fresh air. Where should we start in devising a new one?

**The Expert Says...****It's Time to Reevaluate Your Practice's Marketing Program**

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A great opportunity has just arisen and you are invited and encouraged to get on board! It's time to put on your creative thinking cap and implement a new and exciting marketing program for your practice. This means that you have to start thinking outside the box and make a conscious effort to enhance your approach to marketing your practice and its services. Following are some tips:

- Create a program that keeps new clients coming in your door and makes existing clients eager to remain loyal to your practice.
- Establish an approach that showcases your

wonderful customer service and highlights the high quality care your patients receive.

- Don't be reluctant or complacent when it comes to marketing—make it a priority. Constantly and enthusiastically inform both potential and existing clients of what your practice can offer them.

By more effectively marketing your practice and the services you provide every day, you are taking on what could be perceived as an overwhelming task—and perhaps it is—but at the same time it is very likely that you will have lots of fun.

**The Advent of New Technology**

Your marketing program of 10 or even 5 years ago needs to be revitalized. Not only do you have to identify what should be marketed, assess the needs of those you will be serving, brainstorm with your staff both potential obstacles in your approach as well as any ideas they may have for marketing, and consider client commitment and loyalty—now you have to incorporate technology. Technological advances inescapably motivate and compel us to keep our marketing programs modern and exciting. The following discusses several resources and tools that will bring your marketing program out of the dark ages into the present and even the future.

**Brochures**

Hospital brochures are an excellent way to give clients a complete overview of your practice and

the services you offer. However, the old-fashioned printed brochure can be updated by having it professionally prepared for viewing on a CD. You can play the CD during an initial visit or mail it to a potential or new client before the appointment. This method of marketing provides your client with a unique visual summary of your practice. Clients can share this CD with family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers.

**On-Hold Messages**

Placing clients on hold is never your goal, but it will inevitably happen. When clients are put on hold, even for a short time, it provides an excellent chance to educate and inform them about your practice. Instead of just playing music—have customized messages! These messages can discuss services, products, and/or diseases specific to your patients. You can have health care team members introduce themselves, providing a positive image of the professional health care team that will be caring for their pet. Make the messages fun and informative to hold the client's interest so that even for a brief period, you can market your message to a captive audience.

**Advertising: Print & Web**

Advertising in the business section of the phone book is another great way to reach clients. The phone book is often the first place people look for information on local businesses when they move into an area. In addition to finding a new home they are often searching for a new veterinarian. The Internet is being used more than ever; thus, having a Web site for your hospital is



Illustration by Bill Celander

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critical. The Web allows clients to learn your practice's philosophy and the services it offers from a visual and sometimes auditory perspective. You can include new-client forms and others, so clients can print and complete them before their first visit. In addition, there is the opportunity to offer on-line shopping or prescription refill services. There are numerous ways to use the Web to communicate with your clients—it provides a nearly effortless way to inform your clients 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Be sure to make your Web site interactive, upbeat, and informative.

### Your Kennel Services

Imagine your kennel attendants speaking with potential or new clients about the wonderful boarding services that your hospital offers. Educate and inform these personnel on how to present the boarding experience as one that will be memorable and exhilarating for pets. Not only are patients that board at your facility walked and fed, but they have the opportunity to participate in playtimes, extended walks, and/or

brushing or cuddling sessions. Also be sure that your clients are informed that your boarding services include photo journals of their pet's experience, including daily photos that the client receives at discharge. You will impress your clients and reassure them that not only is their pet being properly taken care of, he is interacting and having fun with the health care team. Clients need to know all of the special things you are doing. Capture these extra tidbits in a boarding brochure.

### Your Dental Services

Consider a scenario in which a client knows that her pet needs dental prophylaxis and is at the point of considering her options. A dental brochure that highlights the positive results of a complete dental prophylaxis is your answer. Not only will this brochure walk the client through what to expect the day of the procedure, it gives a tour of the experiences the pet will have. The brochure highlights your monitoring equipment and advanced dental equipment (dental x-ray unit). In addition to the dental brochure, give

clients before-and-after pictures of their pets' teeth. What better way to show that they have received a top-notch service for their money? It also personalizes the dental visit. Reluctant clients may be more inclined to have the recommended procedure when you add value by walking them through the process and thoroughly discussing the benefits. The dental brochure is a pictorial display of all of your dental procedures and is a tangible item that can help clients make an informed decision about what to do for their pet.

### Resourcefulness is Key

These are just a few examples of what you can do to enhance your marketing program. You can see that these tools will be helpful to your clients and keep you on the cutting edge. Marketing programs have to be resourceful and original. Seize the opportunity to market the areas that make your practice unique. There is no longer any excuse for keeping clients in the dark. Well-informed, satisfied clients will be your best advocates—which creates a win-win situation for the pet, owner, and health care team. ■

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#### IVERMECTIN TOXICITY • Brandy R. Sobczak

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**Adverse drug reactions in herding-breed dogs: The role of P-glycoprotein.** Mealey KL. *Compend Contin Educ Pract Vet* 28:23-33, 2006.

#### Ivermectin: Macrolide antiparasitic agents.

Mealey KL. In Peterson ME, Talcott PA (ed): *Small Animal Toxicology*, 2nd ed—St. Louis: Elsevier Saunders, 2006, pp 785-794.

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#### JUVENILE PUBIC SYMPHYSEDESIS: IS THIS DOG A GOOD CANDIDATE? • James Farese

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#### PARENTERAL NUTRITION • Kathryn E. Michel

##### Suggested Reading

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**factors associated with administration of total parenteral nutrition in cats: 75 cases (1994-2001).** Pyle SC, Marks SL, Kass PH. *JAVMA* 225:242-250, 2004.

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