



What's in a Brand? **MORE THAN JUST A NAME**

IN the cattle industry, animals are marked with a hot branding iron to set groups apart. Similarly, every company, product, and service wants to distinguish themselves, so they adopt a unique symbol, logo, or catchy jingle. For example, Apple wrote, “It’s mini in a massive way” to promote the Mac Mini in 2014 and early 2015.¹

Veterinary practices, especially new ones, may often spend considerable time selecting a name that will clearly identify them. Some practices also include taglines or images. A check of veterinary websites revealed these taglines:

- Caring for pets...and their people, too²
- Your pet’s health is our passion³
- Keeping pets healthy for over 100 years⁴
- We cater to cats!⁵
- For people whose pets are part of the family⁶

- Discover what we can do for YOU and YOUR PET⁷
- Your best friend deserves the best care⁸
- Cat care by cat people.⁹

Ark Animal Hospital of San Diego uses an image of an ark overflowing with animals¹⁰ to distinguish itself. Clients can easily associate the distinctive image with the practice.

Many practices also display their certification by the American Association of Feline Practices (AAFP) or



The mission statement concentrates on the present; the vision statement focuses on the future and can be a source of inspiration and motivation.

the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) to further set themselves apart.

Mission & Vision

There is more to effective practice branding than a catchy slogan or eye-catching image. Before considering the elements that will identify your practice, you must first define your vision and mission—what is called in the corporate world your “value proposition.”

The mission statement provides direction for the practice by defining its clients, processes, and desired performance levels. The vision statement outlines the long-term perception and future goals. The mission statement concentrates on the present; the vision statement focuses on the future and can be a source of inspiration and motivation.¹¹

The following are examples of mission and vision statements:

- Our mission is to provide excellent medical care for dogs and cats in an atmosphere where patients and

clients are cared for genuinely and compassionately.^{11,12}

- Our vision is for our practice to succeed through client satisfaction, personal and professional enrichment, and reinvestment into the practice and community.^{11,13}

Your brand, on the other hand, is who you are, how you want to be known, what you promise your clients, and what kind of experience your clients can expect. It is your “business system,” according to blogger David Kincaid,¹⁴ and is the same as your culture.¹⁵

Defining Your Brand

Look at the products and services in television advertisements and note how the advertiser:

1. Ascribes uniqueness or added value of the product or service
2. Uses images and words to communicate that uniqueness.

Then, take these steps to develop your practice’s brand:

- **Define your mission and vision:** Does your practice provide general medicine? Is it a specialty practice? Do you provide boarding? Grooming? What do you envision in one year, 5 years, 10 years?
- **Gather your stakeholders:** What do you want those who have a vested interest in your practice’s success (eg, owners, team members, clients) to think about your practice?
- **Know yourself:** Survey stake-




READ ALL ABOUT IT

- **David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants.** Gladwell M—New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013.
- **Are you a breed apart?** Shadle CC, Meyer JL. *Trends* magazine, American Animal Hospital Association (Apr 2015); www.aaha.org/professional/resources/trends-magazine.aspx#gsc.tab=0
- **Communication Case Studies: Building Interpersonal Skills in the Veterinary Practice.** Shadle CC, Meyer JL—Lakewood, CO: AAHA Press, 2011.

holders for their description of your practice. Is there a central theme? Does it match your mission and vision?

- **Know your competition:** What sets you apart from other area practices? Service fees? Scope of services? Hours? Team member experience? Patient care?
- **Engage your right brain:** Think of your practice in pictures and images. Look at magazines or do a Google Image search using key words such as *compassion, hope, fear, joy, and success*. Let the imagery inspire you to illustrate what is unique about your practice. Be sure to choose images that fit your mission and vision.
- **Change the rules:** Playing by the same rules as another area practice may be a losing proposition. Be different. For example, do not attempt to match a nearby practice that provides a broad range of services. Instead, promote your practice as a small practice that provides a more caring, personal experience.
- **Know your clients:** Use surveys, focus groups, and individual conversations to learn about your clientele and what they want.¹⁶
- **Look at other industries:** Marty Becker, DVM, says he had a *That's for me* moment when he studied the 7-Eleven stores that focus on convenient locations, hours, and one-stop shopping; he then established a practice that was open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.¹⁷ How do your goals compare?

- **Create a need:** Becker suggested recently that an important future focus of veterinary practices will be to “safeguard pets’ emotional and physical well-being”¹⁸ and to decrease patients’ fear during veterinary visits. Look ahead. Research unaddressed client needs to find a niche.
- **Communicate your brand:** Once you have chosen your brand, communication is key. Convey your message using names, slogans, colors, images, and taglines that say what you mean (see **Need Help With Your Brand?**). Marketing consultant Jed Schaible, VMD, MBA, CVPM, invites stakeholders to rate each one and even presents different images to Facebook friends.¹⁹ Once a slogan and image have been chosen, use them consistently on all your materials, at your facility, and in conversation.

Branding is important to making your practice known; however, be sure that your brand is not only your name and logo but also what your practice stands for and aspires to achieve. 

Need Help With Your Brand?

On his website BrandonGaille.com, healthcare consultant Brandon Gaille lists 255 examples of slogans and taglines such as “Chosen for excellence” and “Care you can believe in.”²⁰

References

1. **Mac mini.** Apple; <https://www.apple.com/hk/en/mac-mini/>; accessed Apr 2015.
2. **VCA Pacific Petcare Animal Hospital.** VCA Animal Hospitals; <http://www.vcahospitals.com/pacific-petcare>; accessed Apr 2015.
3. **Home.** Acacia Animal Health Center; <http://aahc.us/about-us>; accessed Apr 2015.
4. **Our practice.** Miller Clark Animal Hospital; <http://millerclark.com>; accessed Apr 2015.
5. **Home page.** Cheshire Cat Feline Health Center; <http://cheshirecatclinic.com>; accessed Apr 2015.
6. **Home.** The Drake Center for Veterinary Care; <http://thedrakecenter.com>; accessed Apr 2015.
7. **Home.** Grand Animal Hospital; <http://grandanimalhospital.com>; accessed Apr 2015.
8. **SPVH home.** Scripps Parkway Veterinary Hospital; <http://www.spvet.com>; accessed Apr 2015.
9. **Home.** The Cat Doctor Veterinary Hospital & Hotel; <http://catdr.com>; accessed Apr 2015.
10. **Home.** Ark Animal Hospital; <http://www.arkahsd.com>; accessed Apr 2015.
11. **Your practice's mission & vision: What's the difference?** Shadle CC, Meyer JL. *Veterinary Team Brief* (Jan/Feb 2015); <http://www.veterinaryteambrief.com/article/your-practices-mission-vision-whats-difference>; accessed Feb 2015.
12. **Our staff.** La Jolla Veterinary Hospital; www.lajollavet.com; accessed Apr 2015.
13. **Our mission statement and vision.** The Pet Doctor; <http://www.thepetdoctorinc.com/about/mission-statement-vision/>; accessed Apr 2015.
14. **The secret behind true mentorship.** Blog post (April 9, 2015). Level5 Strategy Group; <http://www.level5strategy.com/the-secret-behind-true-mentorship-2/>; accessed Apr 2015.
15. **Culture equals brand (and vice versa).** Blog post (February 9, 2015). Level5 Strategy Group; <http://www.level5strategy.com/culture-equals-brand-and-vice-versa/>; accessed Apr 2015.
16. **Positive People Experiences.** Shadle CC, Meyer JL—La Jolla, CA: ICS, Inc, 2014.
17. Personal telephone interview with Marty Becker, DVM, Nov 1, 2014.
18. **2015 Western Veterinary Conference.** Dr. Marty Becker; <http://www.drmartybecker.com/upcoming-events/2015-western-veterinary-conference/>; accessed Apr 2015.
19. Personal telephone interview with Jed Schaible, VMD, MBA, CVPM, Nov 3, 2014.
20. **255 examples of catchy healthcare slogans and taglines.** Gaille B. BrandonGaille.com; <http://brandongaille.com/255-examples-catchy-healthcare-slogans-and-taglines/>; accessed Apr 2015.