

## **MARKETING WITH A CAPITAL “E” FOR EDUCATION**

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The perception of marketing in the veterinary profession has traditionally been associated with selling. And, the thought of selling something, a service or a product, has long been considered unprofessional and unethical.

However, if you think about it, everything you do every single day is marketing – from the way your practice looks and feels, to the smells and sounds it projects, to the way your team conducts itself and to the way you communicate with your clients. Disregarding this fact puts you at a disadvantage in creating the right perception among pet owners.

Don't you think it's about time you change your perception of marketing?

Take another look at your website. Does it send the right message you are trying to convey? Forget your sporadic direct mailer reminders. They don't work.

The best way to change the negative perception of marketing is to change the way you educate your team and your clients.

Let's then take marketing from the boardroom to the classroom. In other words, let's change from glitz and flash to teaching and education.

The first premise: We are in the problem solving business and that is what we should focus on. The second premise: The only thing we sell in a veterinary hospital is peace of mind. And the final premise: It takes a team commitment, from top to bottom, to make premises one and two work.

Educational Marketing has three parts to it:

1. Educate yourself (hospital leaders, owners, associates)
2. Educate your team
3. Educate your clients

## **Educate Yourself**

If you are not interested, if you don't have complete understanding, if you don't appreciate a service you hope to provide or a product that you expect to make available, your staff will never consider it important. Identify an interest and do your due diligence. Learn the good, the bad, and the ugly. Investigate various options, costs and benefits.

Let's use dental radiography as an example—if dental care is not an important part of your practice, don't get involved with radiography.

On the other hand, if you have a team of well-trained, dedicated, focused individuals, go for it. Their knowledge of the importance of dental care from a preventative and therapeutic standpoint will be a great asset when you progress to dental radiography.

Once committed to dental radiography, educate yourself. Attend seminars. Visit conferences and exhibit halls. Speak to colleagues. Speak to technicians. Meet with the primary companies that offer dental radiograph machines and make sure you are 100% committed BEFORE introducing the technology and its concepts to your team.

## **Educate Your Team**

With your interest piqued, initiate discussions with your team. Discuss the need to provide a higher level of care.

Give the team examples of the benefits of the new technology to the pet and client. Explain how if it is beneficial to the client and pet, it will be beneficial to the practice and ultimately to them.

Bring in external resources for seminars. Send team members to specialists.

Encourage team members to learn more about the new 'toy'. Find a staff advocate for the new service. Let the staff take the ball and run with it to its ultimate success.

Continuing the dental radiography example: Discuss your basic dental prophylaxis and what it is. Then discuss what you are missing with the basic dental approach. Ask your team how they might bring dental care to a new level.

Identify those who can think outside the box and recognize the need for advancing your level of care. Then offer additional educational opportunities: have a lunch sponsored by a dental radiography company; have a boarded dentist come in and have a lunch seminar; have a dental product company buy lunch. Send your techs (paid) to a local boarded dentist. Use the easy extrapolation from pets to people and the staff's own dental care. There are always lots of takers for new technology.

### **Educate Your Clients**

You're excited, the staff is excited, now extend this excitement to the clients. Introduce a new product or service by identifying the need that will be filled by this new venture.

It can take up to 12 exposures or contacts with a need before a client may understand and buy into the solution offered. Don't give up!

Repetition is the key to successful educational marketing programs. Keep it simple. Use a variety of marketing tools (e.g. newsletters, emails, website, social media, handouts, posters, phone calls, etc.) If you're always addressing the pets' needs and the ability to either identify or solve a problem, you are not marketing, you are educating.

The dental radiography example: Introduce your dental X-rays in a newsletter. Send letters/emails to clients who haven't had their pet's teeth cleaned in 6 months or more. Talk about identifying hidden, painful problems, caries lesions, severe periodontal disease that you couldn't diagnose before.

Explain how dental radiography may allow for early identification, pre-emptive care and thus decrease the likelihood of pain or extractions later on. All of your communications are educational and problem solving. You are NOT selling the dental radiography, you are educating on the need for a better and higher level of care for 'Fluffy'. And if you can relate it to something that they are already experiencing or have been educated about, e.g. their own dental x-rays, BINGO!! They'll ask for it themselves.

Educational marketing is using a desire by a client to be a part of the decision making process in their pet's care and educating them so that they can. It is providing yourself, your staff and your clients with different levels of resources to

have a better understanding of veterinary medicine in the 21st century. It is letting teaching and education 'sell' solutions to problems and the meeting of needs and most of all, peace of mind that a pet's best care and best interest are at the center of all activities at your practice.

### **Success Through Marketing**

In order to improve results in your practice, you've got to reach out to your clients in an effective, direct way. What follows is a bare-bone direct marketing system that will make sure you always stay in contact with your clients. This system sets as its goals to contact clients between 24 to 30 times a year in various ways- letters, postcards, emails, offers, specials, phone calls, etc. Here it is:

1. Day 1- client comes in.
2. Day 3- client gets a call to check on the pet.
3. Day 14- client comes for recheck, if necessary, or gets a card thanking her for the visit and offering her a free tooth brushing session next time she comes in.
4. Day 28- client gets a letter about the special of the month: dental exam or dental care, weight control, senior pet care, fecal exam, HWT+ HW preventative, wellness exam, eye exam (including eye pressure), blood pressure exam and ECG, nutrition evaluation and vaccination. You have many programs to choose from. Every such campaign should have a pre-written strategy so the staff doesn't have to do more than follow the planned schedule and launch the appropriate client education program. The practice of course has to gear up for the monthly campaigns so when clients call, they are going to talk with an educated staff member who can tell them more about why and what of the special campaign.
5. Day 42- client gets the postcard with a reminder of the special of the month and that time is running out.
6. Once a month the clients get a newsletter from your practice with interesting stories, important facts, information about the staff, trivia, etc. That's 12 contacts a year.

7. Once a month clients whose e-mail address you have, get an email from you focusing on a condition, important developments in veterinary medicine, additional services you offer, specials going on in your practice (to bolster the marketing materials).
8. Top clients get a call from a team member who is an effective communicator to inquire how they are doing and to tell them about the special focus and offers of the month. If the top 20% clients get just two educational calls a year, that's going to dramatically improve results in your practice as a good portion of them will make an appointment to come in for the recommended services.

How is that so? Studies have shown that the vast majority of pet owners want what is best for their pets and they want their veterinarian to tell them clearly what they need to do to ensure their pets live longer and healthier lives. Basically, they are saying:

“Tell me what I need to do and I will do it. If you don't, how am I supposed to know?”

So tell them again and again and again!!!