



Cost-Effective Strategies to Win New Clients

With three in four residences housing at least one pet, prospective new clients are well within your grasp.

By Naren Arulrajah

How many residences are located within driving distance of your veterinary practice? The fact is that you're surrounded by potential clients. Your practice's growth is limited only by your ability to entice those people, with their furry companions, through your door. Here are five great ways to bring them in – and bring them back.



Naren Arulrajah

STRATEGY #1: ENGAGE IN SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Pet owners love to talk about their pets and share animal-related content on social media. Because every share is like a free advertisement, the marketing potential for your practice is almost limitless.

According to Pew Research, social network participation has increased tenfold in the past decade. With 69 percent of American adults active on at least one network, social media marketing is beneficial to any business. With 65 percent of pet owners posting about their animals at least twice a week, social media is a virtual gold mine for veterinarians.

Mars Petcare conducted an extensive survey last year that revealed some interesting information about the social media habits of pet owners:

- One in three pet owners posts as much about their pets as they do about their human family members.
- One in 10 owners posts more often about pets than about people.
- One in six creates a social media profile for their pet.

Not only is your target market on social media, they are eager to engage. Pets get more attention than their owners, according to half of the Mars survey respondents. Apparently the owners don't mind, because 55 percent said that reactions to their pet-related content are more important than reactions to their personal posts.

STRATEGY #2: SHOWCASE YOUR COMPASSIONATE SIDE

Caring and commitment are the driving forces for many veterinarians. Those qualities can also be your best selling points when marketing your veterinary practice. A study published in the *Australian Veterinary Journal* found that more than 60 percent of pet owners ranked compassion for animals as a major quality when choosing a veterinarian. Likewise, the American Veterinary Medical Association states that many people consider commitment and friendliness to be the most important factors in making their choice.

Every time your clients visit your office, they see evidence of your passion for helping animals. How can you showcase that passion to prospective clients? One of the best ways is

to engage in charitable giving or community involvement – and get the word out.

Examples include volunteering your time to a program for feral cat management, sponsoring a fundraiser for the local animal shelter or even simply promoting a local animal-related charitable organization. You may already be doing these things simply because you care. If so, it's time to brag a little.

- Post announcements and photos on social media showcasing your contributions.
- If you participate in, organize or sponsor an event, send out a press release.
- If you sponsor an event or organization, be sure your sponsorship includes media acknowledgement.

STRATEGY #3: LET YOUR CLIENTS BE YOUR BRAND AMBASSADORS

If you don't have a referral program in place, your client base is an untapped resource with tremendous potential to grow your veterinary practice. Word of mouth has always been one of the best ways to attract new clients. People tend to trust the advice of friends and family, especially those speaking from experience, more than any form of advertisement. The problem is, current clients might not mention your services to other people.

Here are some surefire ways to increase referrals:

- Implement an ongoing program offering incentives, such as a discounted appointment for every new client referred.



Your marketing strategy should include enhancing your online presence and promoting your practice.

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- Run periodic promotions offering referral incentives for a limited time.
- Post a sign or other notice in your office asking for referrals and detailing any rewards you are offering.
- Offer double incentives, with discounts for both the referring party and the new client's first appointment.
- Provide business cards or promotional materials that clients can distribute when they recommend your practice to someone. Be sure your phone number and website are displayed prominently.
- If you have a client feedback form, add questions about how likely they are to refer you and why. This information can help fine-tune your program.

STRATEGY #4: PROVIDE CLIENTS WITH SOME FINANCIAL FLEXIBILITY

Cost is one of the top reasons people fail to take their pets to a veterinarian. And while lowering your fees may not be practical, you can make it easier for clients to pay for your services.

In many cases the problem is not the client's unwillingness to spend money on veterinary care. Rather, it is the lack of available funds at any given time. An informal survey by VetBilling.com indicated that two-thirds of pet owners would take their animals to the veterinarian more often if a payment plan were available. There are many ways to help clients reduce their out-of-pocket expenses or divide large expenses into more manageable payments over a period of time:

- Offer an in-house credit or financing plan.
- Create a preventive care program offering a limited number of specific services for a predetermined annual fee.
- Work with third-party financiers such as CareCredit.
- Recommend pet insurance to clients.
- Offer discounts or installment payment plans for bundled services, such as a series of immunizations for new puppies and kittens.

STRATEGY #5: MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR WEBSITE

For today's veterinary practice, a website is nearly as necessary as a physical office. You are already paying for hosting and taking time to keep your website updated; why not put your site to work for you?

A decade ago, you were ahead of the game if you had a one-page website that included a brief advertisement and an email address. Today, you are behind the times if your website isn't an effective marketing tool for you and a valuable source of information for your clients. An effective practice website includes:

- Contact forms, payment policies, and other information for client convenience

- Information about pet health and about your services
- Educational or promotional videos, or both – many people will watch videos but not read text
- Links to all your social media profiles and subscription options for your newsletter

You want to establish familiarity and credibility by including information such as your biography, credentials, awards and the practice history. If your office staff is answering the same questions over and over, consider adding an FAQ page to your site.

Design is important, so make your site aesthetically pleasing and user friendly. And don't forget search engine optimization (SEO) so that prospective clients will find you.

CONCLUSION

Enhancing your online presence and public relations are keys to getting your message out. Quality service, affordability, and convenience will enable you to convert leads into new clients and new clients into repeat clients. When you optimize both your office and your marketing, you unleash the true potential of your veterinary practice. [VMD](#)

Naren Arulrajah is president and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, a full-service Internet marketing company that focuses on SEO, social media, marketing education, and the online reputations of veterinarians/practice owners. If you have questions about marketing your practice online, call 855-598-3320 to speak one-on-one with Naren.