

Are You Doing Enough to Retain Current Clients?

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Many veterinarians put all their effort into acquiring new clients but give little or no thought to client retention. Why is that a mistake? Studies show that it costs at least **five times more** to gain a new client than to keep an existing one.

A loyal client is a repeat client. This is especially important for veterinary practices. People are trusting you with the health and well-being of their furry or feathered children. If you successfully win their trust,

they want to continue using your service rather than take chances with an unknown veterinary practice. On the other hand, if their experiences with your office are less than stellar, they'll be eager to find a better option.

Communicate Compassion

Like any medical specialty, veterinarians need to make patient care a high priority. You face a unique challenge, however, because your “patients” cannot speak for themselves or make their own medical decisions. Maybe you invested in premium-quality kennels and a thermostat-controlled HVAC system to ensure the animals' comfort. Perhaps one of your technicians sat with a dog all night because it was in pain and frightened. Your clients — the human decision makers — don't know these things unless you tell them.

Your website and marketing materials shouldn't rely exclusively on vague terms such as “high-quality care” or “compassionate veterinary team.” Back up these statements about your methodology, policies and facilities. When you are speaking with clients, discuss the pet's well-being, ask questions about diet and exercise, listen when owners tell you stories about their pets and generally demonstrate caring compassion. When an animal stays overnight, reassure the owner by describing measures taken to keep the pet safe and happy.

Marketing to Current Clients

A successful marketing strategy is multifaceted. Some campaigns are targeted to acquire or convert leads, but some should be tailored to existing clients.

- **Mailing list:** The most effective platform for client retention is email. If you don't publish a newsletter, now is the time to start. If you already have one, make sure you are inviting every client to subscribe.
- **Social media:** Veterinarians have an edge when it comes to Facebook, Instagram and other social networks. Animal-related posts are consistently among the most popular social content, making it easier to gain a large, engaged audience. Connect with your clients by posting informative and fun content such as pet care tips and relevant humorous memes.
- **Push notifications:** About two-thirds of online minutes are spent on mobile devices. Of course, that means your website needs to be optimized for mobile search. However, you don't have to wait until clients look for you. An app with push notifications ensures that your message will be seen. Offer reminders for checkup appointments, follow-ups, vaccinations and promotions such as special discounts.

Customer Service Is King

Most pet owners put a very high priority on the quality of care their animals receive. However, they also want to be treated with respect, and they must work within tight schedules and budgets. Therefore, customer service, convenience and affordability of service should be high on your priority list.

To excel in customer service, you need to make every client feel like a VIP. Try to make your reception area comfortable and inviting, with ample room to separate animals. You want both clients and pets to feel welcome the minute they walk in the door.

Listen to your front office interactions with clients. Are they respectful, friendly and helpful? Do your client care representatives answer the phone in a professional manner? Do they treat the animals well and demonstrate compassion when talking to the owners? If the answer to any of these questions is no, then staff training in customer service is in order.

Lastly, review and revise your policies to be more client friendly. For example, you might consider extended hours, emergency service, flexible appointment scheduling, financing options or accepting pet insurance. Loyalty programs that offer incentives for returning clients are also quite effective. Most importantly, remember that most people today consider pets family members. Therefore, what they want in a veterinarian is a trusted "family doctor."

Naren Arulrajah is president and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, a complete internet marketing company that focuses on SEO, social media, marketing education and the online reputations of veterinarians/practice owners. With a team of 180+ full-time marketers, www.ekwa.com helps practice owners who know where they want to go, get there by dominating their market and growing their business significantly year after year. If you have questions about marketing your practice online, call 855-598-3320 to speak one-on-one with Naren.
