

# Expand Your Practice Base With Client Endorsements

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*Effective recommendations from clients can be an important factor in growing your practice.*



Regardless of whether your practice is in a rural, urban or suburban area, attracting new clients is crucial to building a rock-solid practice reputation and increasing revenue.

Happy customers are your best ambassadors. If you have their stamp of approval, getting the word out about your practice becomes easy. However, very few practice owners and practice managers know how to leverage the power of client endorsements.

Winning the love of your customers is not a matter of getting lucky with a few odd clients. You need to do a lot of things to get noticed in front of the right people. More importantly, you need to be consistent with your marketing and brand-building efforts. Here's how.

## **Don't Wait. Ask.**

Word-of-mouth advertising still is the number one way to win new clients, but your biggest challenge is that your patients can't talk about how good you are. Their owners can, though, and they will. So the question is: Are they talking about you in a way that will serve your business goals?

Don't wait for a random referral, review, or testimonial to come your way. If your clients like what you're doing, your goal should be to ensure that the movement of these practice endorsements works like a well-oiled machine.

Remember these two cardinal rules when asking clients for referrals, reviews, and testimonials. First, understand that you are not asking them for a favor. In the digital space, everyone has an opinion and most of your clients would be delighted to share their experience with the masses. Second, testimonials should not be general or vague comments. Instead, ask the client to talk specifics about their time at your practice. People want to read about real experiences that highlight a pertinent issue and the solution that addressed the issue.

## **Testimonials**

Testimonials inherently offer an element of trust and can move potential clients to engage with your practice. Be sure to ask for a testimonial at the right moment, using mood momentum when the client is very satisfied with your service. Provide multiple platforms for clients to give testimonials, such as during visits to your office, to your website, via email and over social sites. Testimonials should include the name, location, social handles and photos (if possible) of the client and pet.

Following are the hallmarks of influential testimonials:

- They are specific, outlining why the client came to you, the solution offered, the outcome and benefits and how satisfied the client was.
- They are authentic and written in the natural language of the client.

- They deliver a sense of credibility, leaving no doubt that the person behind the comments is real. Online reviews and ratings of your practice can influence the decisions of potential clients, who are more likely to click on your ad or search result if it is accompanied by a five-star review. Reviews can also provide information that sets you apart from your competitors, such as unique benefits or services you offer. Here are three important practices for leveraging reviews of your practice:
- Feature the best reviews from existing clients on your website.
- Make it easy for clients to leave you reviews by featuring links to social sites prominently on your website.
- Manage your reviews, and address any potentially damaging issue (see **Best Practices for Managing Online Reviews**).

### Five Tips for Managing Online Reviews

- *Make sure you continually monitor your online practice listings* to ensure they are accurate.
- *Work on acquiring positive reviews* on Google, Yelp, and YouTube, and try to get more LinkedIn recommendations.
- *Respond to good, bad and neutral reviews promptly*; this shows that you care about how your brand is perceived and are willing to take necessary steps to improve your image.
- *Never ignore negative reviews*; respond to them and try to offer issue resolutions quickly and efficiently.
- *Never shy away from offering an apology*; a short and sincere apology is the best way to handle criticism.

### Referrals

According to the global market research firm Nielsen, 84 percent of consumers consider their friends and family to be trusted resources. So, any recommendations that come from these sources will be considered trustworthy.

Excellent client service is the most effective strategy for encouraging referrals, and there are a number of tactics you can employ. Ensure that all client touch points are optimized for delivering stellar experiences. Make your clients feel valued at each stage of interaction. If the client likes something, do more of it in a better way. If something is not working out, look at ways you can address the issue and improve.

Engage with clients on social media to build your reputation and brand trust. Tune in to conversations and be part of the talk. Provide solutions and advice to establish yourself as a subject matter expert. Encourage client engagement and interaction with your brand as a way of establishing trust.

Price incentives can only take you so far, so provide existing clients with exclusive experiences. Go the extra mile in creating relationships so they feel privileged and encouraged to share information about your practice. A privileged membership program, such as one that automatically qualifies a client to a membership level if they spend a certain dollar amount or bring in a set number of referrals, is an excellent example of creating “exclusive” experiences.



Offering supplementary services at discount prices is another great way to attract referrals. Consider introducing pet grooming services or pet training courses at a discounted price. You could also offer specific routine pet health care services/treatments for a smaller fee to clients who bring in referrals. Here are some tips for managing a referral program:

- Make it easy for clients to join. Prominently display your membership or referral program button or tab on your website, include it in your newsletters and talk about it on social media.
- Make sure your program offers simple rules and straightforward benefits.
- Ensure that your site is HTTPS enabled and follows all security protocols.

- Reconnect with previous referrers and explore ways to re-engage them in your referral program.

### **The Bottom Line**

Client endorsements in the form of testimonials, reviews and referrals can drive your veterinary brand reputation. How clients perceive your practice – and what they say about it – are crucial to maintaining your existing client pool and attracting new clients.

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