

Why - and How - You Should Engage With Millennials

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The methods you use to deal with this generation of pet parents will drive client acquisition, retention and satisfaction in the coming years.



The role of animals in American homes is changing. No longer are they seen as security guards, rodent controllers and occasional companions. Today's pets are beloved family members, and they are in more homes than ever before.

A New Generation of Pet Parents

Millennials are a difficult demographic for most industries. Compared with previous generations, they are less likely to own homes and cars, get married or have children at a young age. We often hear young adults are waiting longer to start families, but that is not entirely accurate.

Pet ownership is one area where this generation is far ahead of their parents and grand- parents. However, they are more likely to think of themselves as pet parents rather than pet owners. Eight in 10 millennials consider the pet-owning experience important preparation for raising children.¹ They are practicing their parenting skills on pets, and health care is a serious issue.

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These people are not simply looking for a veterinarian – they are looking for a family doctor. When they come to your office, they are trusting you with their beloved, nonhuman children. If you earn their trust and develop good relationships, these clients can become your most loyal customers – but they have high expectations.

Think of Mom and Dad taking their child to the pediatrician. They have questions, concerns and opinions. They want discussion, answers, advice and guidance. In short, they expect to engage with the doctor.

Today's millennial pet parents have similar expectations of their veterinarians.

Shaped By the Internet

This generation is unique not only in pet ownership but also in most lifestyle choices and shopping habits. This is the first generation to grow up with the internet at their fingertips. Going online is second nature, a world of information is just a click away and social media relationships are as important as real-life ones.

PET OWNERSHIP AT A GLANCE⁶

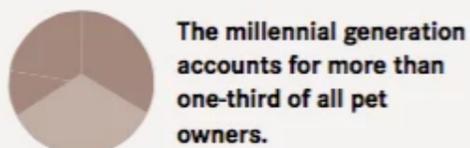
Nearly 7 in 10 American homes include at least one animal.



The number of pet-owning households is growing.



Americans spent over \$69 billion on their pets last year, an increase of about \$9 billion over the previous year.



Millennials own more than half of all nontraditional pets.



What does this mean for your practice? It means that client interaction doesn't always happen in your office. If you want to engage with millennials, you need to be where they are — online. Make sure your website is user-friendly and regularly updated. Incorporate online appointment requests, customer portals, digital forms and multiple contact options. Respond to emails as quickly as you do to phone calls.

Perhaps most important, your practice should have a strong presence on social media. This is one of the best ways to engage millennials (and internet-savvy pet owners of all ages). People use networks such as Facebook to talk about their experiences, both favorable and unfavorable, with businesses. They ask online friends for recommendations when looking for a new veterinarian. They also share details of their daily lives, with their furry friends being a favorite topic.

Pay attention to relevant trending topics. For example, last year a video of a cat frightened by a cucumber went viral. A slew of similar videos followed, along with articles explaining the behavior and warning about the stress that these stunts create in animals. At the time, veterinarians were inundated with questions about what actually frightens cats and why. Be ready to join in the conversation online and discuss these topics in your office.

The Millennial Mindset

Millennials are more finicky, frugal, conscientious, informed — and sometimes misinformed — than their parents and grandparents. They tend to research online before visiting a veterinarian, and they are likely to enter your office with very specific ideas about what is ailing their pet and how it should be treated. How can you connect with this unique and increasingly important generation?

- **Offer natural treatments.** Over half of pet owners in this age group will try natural and holistic remedies before turning to conventional veterinary treatment.² They appreciate the availability of herbal medicine, therapy as an alternative to surgery, nontoxic flea treatments and similar offerings.
- **Focus on preventive care.** In previous generations, “healthy” was a rather vague concept. While most baby boomers would define health as “lack of illness,” millennials have a broader definition,³ one that includes diet and exercise. They extend the same focus on wellness to their furry and feathered family members.
- **Choose food carefully.** Seven in 10 millennials prefer to feed their pet food with natural ingredients,² and most worry about contamination. Stay up-to-date on the latest trendy brands, because these clients expect you to be able to recommend the best one. If you board animals, be sure to provide (at least optionally) organic, human-grade, non-GMO, all-natural foods and treats. Bowls and toys should be free of BPA and other potential toxins. Also, be aware that this group tends to be environmentally conscious, so eco-friendly green practices are important.
- **Use multi-platform marketing.** The majority of millennial consumers use social media daily, access the internet from multiple devices and interact with brands online.⁴ They use the internet to research, so they appreciate educational content. In addition, they are more willing to share advertisements that seem authentic, but they dislike promotional materials that appear deceptive. Offer quality, sharable content that can be accessed on any size device screen.
- **Provide an interactive experience.** Engagement is about two-way communication. Millennial consumers are looking for active discussion; they will not be happy if you lecture them or passively listen. They appreciate openness and friendliness among your staff, and they expect replies when they comment on Facebook posts. About two-thirds of millennials would like more ways to share their opinions and interact with brands.⁵

Conclusion

If you aren't marketing to millennials and making an active effort to engage them, then you are missing one of the most important sectors of your market. These consumers are looking for good value, good quality and a high level of engagement. Most of all, they are looking for someone they can trust with their most precious family members.

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