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DEA Investigations: The Medical Chart Is Key

CARLOS AQUINO, a compliance consultant for PharmaDiversion LLC in Media, Pennsylvania, educates veterinarians about how to safeguard themselves and their practices if they face a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) inspection and audit.

First, he says, thorough record keeping is vital.

“I always tell doctors the patient chart is their evidence and their defense. Veterinarians need to document the patient’s treatment plan, medical testing and evaluations to justify why they wrote the prescription,” he says. “It all comes back to the medical chart — it’s the best source of information.”

The DEA also will examine the security and storage of the controlled substances within the practice, as well as the due diligence policy of the clinic. “This includes when they’re administering, dispensing or even prescribing the controlled substances,” Aquino says.

Look Beyond Private Practice

“MOST NEW GRADUATES GO into private practice, but they should be aware of other potential opportunities,” says Gary Vroegindewry, DVM, MSS, DACVPM, director of One Health at Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, Tennessee. Veterinarians have a vast array of employment options, including nonprofit organizations, government agencies and environmental groups.

For veterinarians looking to hone their clinical skills, Dr. Vroegindewry recommends developing other proficiencies that are important to career advancement. “Communications, marketing, budgeting, team building, conflict management, training and education are all things other organizations are looking for,” he says.

His advice to veterinarians who doubt they possess these skills: “Look at what you do every day in practice. You train technicians or new veterinarians; you market by creating newsletters, talking at schools or maybe on the radio,” he says. “You have the ability to translate those skills into what others are looking for.”

Most important, according to Dr. Vroegindewry: “Learn your craft, do a good job, help others, be pleasant. These are the qualities people are looking for.”

The TEAM Model: Not Magic, But It Works

AFTER A CLINICAL ERROR is made, “the TEAM model helps to structure your thinking by providing specific steps to work through to help you figure out how to handle the client communication,” says Linda Fineman, DVM, DACVIM (Oncology), director of veterinary talent and knowledge strategy at Ethos Veterinary Health. “There’s nothing magical about the TEAM model,” she explains. “It utilizes core clinical communication skills and applies them in a specific order.”

The steps of the TEAM model are (T) disclosing the truth, (E) being empathetic, (A) taking ownership and apologizing, and (M) managing the problem through to the ultimate resolution.

“This may include making financial reparations or transferring the patient to another institution,” Dr. Fineman says.

“Certainly, it is about being there as an empathetic partner to go through the emotional repercussions of that error. I feel that empathy should go with everything we do as clinicians,” she adds.

Tools for Student Loan Debt Help

TONY BARTELS, DVM, MBA, consultant for the Veterinary Information Network (VIN), advises prospective veterinary students to use two tools to help with the immense student loan burden they may face after graduation.

• Designed for prospective students before they commit to a program, the cost of education map “will help you understand, based on where you live, the lowest cost options that might be available for a student loan,” Dr. Bartels says.

• Part of VIN’s student debt center, the loan repayment simulator helps veterinary students understand repayment costs based on several criteria, such as amount borrowed, interest rate, current income, relationship status and career path. The simulator also allows for variables, like an internship or a residency, and projects how marriage or children would impact the income-driven repayment plan, Dr. Bartels says.

Both tools are available at VINFoundation.org.

Simple Steps to a Happy Team

KEEPING TEAM MEMBERS HAPPY is not a secret science, says Sheila Grosdidier, SCP, consultant and partner at Veterinary Management Consultation Inc in Evergreen, Colorado. “You just need to ask your employees what is really important to them — How important is having work-life balance? Are you being compensated at an appropriate level? Do you know what you have to do to get a raise? What would make you satisfied? — and then make sure you accommodate their needs.” Ultimately, she says, if a prospective employee asks why he or she should work for this practice, the goal is for team members to “have a list a mile long about why this is an employer of choice.”

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Working as a Team to Get the Bill Paid

Adopting certain habits before, during and after patient visits can increase the likelihood that clients will pay for services at the time of the appointment.

By Brian Faulkner, BSc(Hons), BVM&S, CertGP(SAM), CertGP(BPS), MBA, MSc(Psych), MRCVS

I like to think of the space between the exam room door and the reception desk as a Bermuda Triangle of sorts. All too often, agreements about follow-up, expectations of payment and even the clients themselves “disappear without a trace” the moment the exam room empties. Clients might become distracted by a cute puppy in the waiting area or run into someone they know — or they might just want to leave the practice before someone asks them to pay.

The mnemonic EIEIO — as in the song “Old MacDonald Had a Farm” — can be used to summarize how to deal with the Bermuda Triangle problem:

- **E** — Estimate if appointment cost will exceed $100.
- **I** — Inform client if bill is more than $100.
- **E** — Escort client back to reception area (navigate Bermuda Triangle).
- **I** — Inform receptionist of key information (e.g., scheduling, follow-up).
- **O** — Obtain form for insurance claim.

**THE OLD MACDONALD METHOD**

**Estimate If Appointment Cost Will Exceed $100**

People are generally satisfied with veterinary bills if the fees meet their expectations. The best way to meet expectations is to set them in the first place. Many veterinarians avoid discussing money with clients because it makes them uncomfortable. I call this fear “econophobia.” Failing to give an accurate estimate is a failure to set expectations, thus risking client dissatisfaction, unpaid bills and damage to the practice’s reputation.

We have a rule in our practice: “If you billed it, you explain it.” This is partly to help everyone take responsibility for informing clients of costs and partly because receptionists should not have to resolve disputes about invoices they did not create.

I recommend giving an estimate for any appointment that will cost the client more than $100, which in many practices is most appointments. Having worked with hundreds of practices over the years, I’ve noticed that some make estimating cumbersome and complicated. I often see underestimated surgery fees and low charges for general anesthesia. I recommend using five grades of surgery to categorize estimates, assigning all standard procedures to one of the five categories.

**Inform Client If Bill Is More Than $100**

I call this the $100 rule: No client should arrive at reception, either after an appointment or to collect an inpatient, not knowing that his or her bill exceeds $100. The receptionist should not be the first person to give this news to a client.

I always price the exam before the client leaves the room. Often this is integral to dispensing medications and demonstrating how to administer them. Exam fees are added when the medications are selected. The $100 rule means that if a bill totals more than $100, the client knows that before leaving the room. (I chose $100 because it seems to be the amount that most clients will pay without commenting. The number may be higher or lower at your practice.) Failing to advise clients when the exam bill is higher than $100 may lead to exclamations of “How much?!” at reception, setting off a cascade of time-consuming, emotionally uncomfortable distractions, as well as the potential for an unpaid account or, worse, a lost client.

**Escort Client Back to Reception Area**

The aims of escorting clients to reception — navigating the Bermuda Triangle — are twofold: to lead the client toward the payment area and to ensure that any follow-up appointments are booked. This is particularly important after recheck consultations, for which many clients assume there is no charge.

One way to avoid this misunderstanding is to walk the client to the receptionist and state whether and when the patient needs to be seen again. If no follow-up...
is needed, instead of allowing the client to leave the exam room alone and head for the exit, the veterinarian should casually but deliberately steer the client toward the front desk. If the receptionist is occupied on the telephone or with another client, when saying goodbye, add, “The receptionist will be with you in a moment.” Most clients realize this is code for “There is a bill to pay.”

Inform Receptionist of Key Information
Every business requires repeat customers to be sustainable. We can be proactive or reactive when it comes to follow-up business. The reactive mindset merely hopes that clients will return when their pets need veterinary services. By contrast, the more proactive mindset thinks, When will I see you again?

In an ideal world, every patient would be seen at least once a year for a wellness check and vaccinations. Therefore, when a patient is “signed off” after a short-term illness, it is advisable to check the vaccination status to make sure that the pet’s annual booster is scheduled. In fact, it is most useful to determine status before the appointment. If vaccinations are not up-to-date, the best time to bring this up is at the final recheck. The topic can be broached by saying “I look forward to seeing you again at Maggie’s annual checkup” and asking when that is. Clients are often more amenable to paying for a vaccination when they realize that this can be done in lieu of paying a final recheck fee.

Clients tend to be more compliant with follow-up and vaccinations if the veterinarian instigates the process. As frustrating as it is, clients tend to be less compliant when a receptionist or nurse asks about follow-up than when the veterinarian either books the recheck or, in front of the client, requests it at the front desk. This handoff not only gives the veterinarian a reason to navigate the Bermuda Triangle but also is a way to provide the receptionist with key information to ensure the payment and follow-up process happens effectively and efficiently.

The following phrase imparts a lot of useful information: “Sarah, can you please give Mrs. Smith Scooby’s tablets and book Scooby for a recheck with me in 10 days?” I now know that Sarah knows exactly who we are dealing with, so she doesn’t have to ask the client her name, possibly for the second time. I can also give my receptionist a heads-up on any areas of tension, such as payment concerns or the need for extra compassion if bad news was given during the visit. This can be done via tone of voice or gestures agreed upon beforehand.

Obtain Form for Insurance Claim
The final component of getting paid relates to insurance claims that will be paid directly to the practice. Sometimes clients are less motivated to submit paperwork if their cash flow isn’t affected (i.e., the direct insurance claim). It is important that the veterinarian liaise with the receptionist to explain the account’s plan; again, articulating this in front of both the client and the receptionist seems to make a difference.

THE BOTTOM LINE
There is no point in doing great work but not getting paid for it! Everyone working in a veterinary practice must take responsibility for the financial resolution of each appointment. Veterinarians cannot assume that receptionists will make sure bills are paid. And, while receptionists may give estimates for standard procedures and request payment afterward, they have no control over what actually happens during procedures and, therefore, the costs. Ultimately, working as a team to get bills paid improves client satisfaction, colleague morale and the practice’s bottom line. [VMD]

Dr. Faulkner divides his time between working in his own small animal practice in Suffolk, England, and coaching practice owners and managers. Through the Colourful Consultation, he helps veterinarians proactively pursue the four essential outcomes of veterinary practice: clinical resolution, client satisfaction, financial resolution and colleague satisfaction. For more information, visit colourfulconsultation.com.
Your Practice’s Growth Starts With You

Your personal development as a leader is tied directly to the evolution and prosperity of your business.

By Randy Hall

Growing a veterinary practice is not easy. It requires a fully engaged team focused on delivering excellent care, amazing service, and ever-increasing productivity and efficiency. Yet as a practice grows, so does the amount of complexity involved.

Running a practice with multiple doctors is not the same as running a one- or two-doctor practice. If you want to be able to grow your practice continually without it collapsing under the weight of complexity, it requires a fully engaged team focused on thinking and planning. If you want to learn more about leading a practice, you might make a point of reading a book on leadership each month or consistently searching online for new tools or ideas to spur growth. Exploring possibilities will help transform the idea of development into reality.

There’s no disputing the challenge of time, of course. You might not be able to devote time to development right now, but you have plenty of control over your time in the future. Perhaps you have no time today to ponder personal growth or the bigger picture, but you might find an hour next week or five hours next month or 40 hours next year — if you plan for it and seize the opportunity.

BUILD THE RIGHT HABITS

Signing up for a workshop, reading a book and browsing online are good places to start, but what else can help keep you on a developmental path? Try spending 10 minutes each morning thinking about the ideal culture for your practice, and consider one thing you can do that day to model it. Every morning, take a few minutes to jot down ideas for ways to help your staff better engage with their work. Go out for a walk at lunch each day and think about who did a great job that morning, then personally thank that person when you get back to the office. Leadership can start with tiny habits that form a solid foundation for continuing to develop and change your approach to the journey.

Organized growth is not easy, especially in the fast-paced, chaotic world of veterinary medicine. It requires learning and growing with the challenges. But often, that is where much of the satisfaction comes from. Making more of a difference with what matters most to you is a worthwhile endeavor, and you owe it to yourself to explore the possibilities and the rewards that come with it. 

Nothing moves from idea to action without focused thinking and planning. Nothing moves from idea to action without focused thinking and planning. Nothing moves from idea to action without focused thinking and planning.

Randy Hall is a leadership trainer and executive coach who works with organizations of all sizes to execute change effectively, develop leaders, engage employees and help businesses reach their full potential. To schedule Mr. Hall as a coach, trainer or consultant, or learn more about his services, visit 4thgearconsulting.com or call 704-380-0440.

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Most practice owners wouldn’t think of going too long without exploring new diagnostic and treatment advances, but all too often they fail to explore their personal growth as a leader, communicator, coach, change agent and business strategist. Your veterinary practice’s culture is tied directly to your personal development as its steward and shepherd.

WHAT IF?

What if you knew how to lead big changes in your practice quickly and effectively? What if you could systematically coach an underperforming team member so that he or she becomes more engaged and productive? What if you could recruit and train so those who join your practice raise the bar, improve the culture and continually provide better service and care? What if you knew how to structure your business to accommodate growth and organize teams so they collaborate and communicate more effectively?

Many practice owners believe these are the tasks of a manager or administrator, and they certainly can be. However, practice managers are immersed in compensation, inventory, scheduling, accounting, equipment maintenance and other day-to-day aspects of running a business, so they might not be attuned to opportunities for leadership development. That area belongs to you.

PRIORITIZE AND SCHEDULE YOUR DEVELOPMENT

First, make the choice and commitment to develop. You must believe the journey will be good for you and make a positive difference. And it will be, if you decide to make it happen and apply the effort its importance requires.

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Tapping the Talents of Millennials

We zero in on what this much-discussed generation has to offer in the veterinary practice.

By Carolyn C. Shadle, PhD, and John L. Meyer, PhD

When Anna Palin was hired as receptionist at Capital Veterinary Clinic (not a real clinic), she was misunderstood, perhaps because the older staff recognized that she had abilities different from their own. Her colleagues noticed, for instance, that Palin could answer very difficult questions without looking up from her computer. She was a millennial, and she was used to finding information quickly from a quick Google search, which set her apart from some of her older coworkers. But there’s much more to millennials than just being technologically savvy.
WHAT IS A MILLENNIAL, ANYWAY?
Dates vary, but millennials usually are defined as those born between 1982 and 2008 -- coming of age around the millennial year. They are sometimes referred to as Generation Y or Generation Me. According to Jean M. Twenge, PhD, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University who has conducted copious research on generational characteristics, generational differences between millennials and their predecessors are centered around their worldview, with millennials focusing more on the self and less on social rules -- thus the term Generation Me.¹

WHAT MAKES MILLENNIALS DIFFERENT?
To understand the millennial worldview, one must appreciate the events that have contributed to it. Joan Nieman, owner of Essential Elements, a business consulting firm for pet care professionals, points out that every generation is impacted by events surrounding its formative years. The millennial generation experienced the 9/11 attacks, the war on terror, corporate malfeasance (think Enron, Goldman Sachs and BP Deepwater Horizon), the Great Recession, and scandals involving the Roman Catholic Church and heroes like Tiger Woods.

Before we use a broad brush to describe, label and categorize any age group, however, we should be cautioned about the danger of hasty generalizations. Individually, millennials may have been affected differently by these same events.

That said, some commonalities are worth noting. Although some see a dark side to millennials, observing seemingly negative characteristics, others view those same characteristics, among others, as offering a bright positive to the workplace equation.

On the Dark Side
Those critical of millennials are likely to make the following types of comments.

Millenials don’t want to work hard. Referring to high school seniors in the 2000s, Dr. Twenge reported, “Nearly 40 percent of millennials said they didn’t want to work that hard (an opinion embraced by only 25 percent of boomers), and fewer than half agreed that they would definitely be willing to work overtime to do a good job.”²

Millenials want to stay home and play video games all day instead of working. Erik Hurst, a macroeconomist and millennial expert at the University of Chicago, has looked at the research and raises this question: “Are young men playing video games because they are not working, or are they not working because they are playing video games?”³ Hurst thinks the latter may be the case – why work when you can live at home and play video games?

Millenials are slackers who lack focus. Bruce Tulgan, founder of the management training consultancy RainmakerThinking, said, “This will be the most high-maintenance workforce in history.”⁴ He concurs with those who say that if millennials are not supervised constantly, they become distracted and skip off the job. For her part, Nieman said she believes managing today’s workforce presents a new set of challenges. “To some of us, millennials are an alien species – we don’t understand how to deal with their ‘slacker’ attitude,” she said. “This generation grew up with lots of parental hand-holding and adult over-supervision. They are not accustomed to doing things entirely on their own.”⁵

Millenials prematurely expect promotions and want rewards for every little thing. A Harris Interactive survey for CareerBuilder indicated that 60 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds surveyed believe they should be promoted within two to three years.⁶ Ron Alsop, the author of “The Trophy Kids Grow Up: How the Millennial Generation Is Shaking Up the Workplace,” explained it this way: “The millennials were brought up with an ‘everyone's a winner’ mentality. Their parents were told to boost their children’s self-esteem. Hence, their offspring seek acceptance and continual ‘pats on the back.’”⁷

Millenials feel entitled. The term “entitled” is often ascribed to millennials – entitled to move up quickly in their job, even “entitled” to the job itself. As one young graduate wrote, “You are not even guaranteed a job after going to college! And once we graduate we are in debt up to our ears! What do you mean I’m not guaranteed a job?”⁸

Millenials constantly criticize and question authority. Having lived through numerous high-profile scandals and betrayals, like that of Bernard Madoff, many millennials are unlikely to take advice from an authority figure without question. Julie Reck, DVM, owner of Veterinary Medical Center of Fort Mill in South Carolina, and member of the Veterinarian’s Money Digest® Editorial Advisory Board, has noticed that her millennial teammates are inclined to challenge a change in policy and require the reason to be clearly articulated. Unlike earlier generations of children who were taught to be “seen but not heard,” members of the millennial generation were taught to speak their minds.

Millenials are unreliable. Human resources specialist Frances (Frankie) Williams discovered a problem at her New Jersey practice during the summertime when many millennials called in sick to join their friends at the beach. “They want a life,” she said, so she had to institute a summer bonus plan to ensure coverage all season.

Millenials don’t listen. Millennials are likely to be too busy to converse with coworkers, because they are checking their smartphones an estimated 43 times a day, according to Christine Shupe, executive director of the Veterinary Hospital Managers Association.⁹ Management consultant Simon Sinek agrees that some millennials are so addicted to their smartphones that they can’t fully participate in meetings, leading to phones being forbidden in some workplaces.

Millenials don’t dress professionally. Most millennials (60 percent) don’t believe that how they dress is indicative of performance. This group is not concerned with social rules. They are likely to show up wearing flip-flops, with nose rings and visible tattoos. Millennials might find it difficult to conform to required standards of dress, such as a hospital uniform.

On the Bright Side
Some deny these criticisms, and others see some of these characteristics as positive rather than negative attributes. Those who praise millennials and paint a cheerier picture of this young generation are likely to say the following.

Millenials are hard workers. Erin Epperly, DVM, a millennial and associate veterinarian at Peak View Animal Hospital in Fowler, Colorado, said, “We do have a strong work ethic. We can work hard on the job and play hard when we’re not.”¹¹

Millenials understand the importance of work-life balance. Millennials who say they “want a life” can teach everyone the importance of balance. More than previous generations, they value time for family, education and other pursuits. While this may mean less willingness to work overtime, the health and well-being they maintain as balanced employees are a plus for the practice.

Millenials want to work, but employers need to understand what motivates them. The office staffing and workforce solutions company Kelly Services recently conducted a survey of more than 100,000 millennials and found that this generation is less interested in the size of their paycheck and more interested in personal fulfillment in a supportive and encouraging work environment.³

Millenials are willing to work independently, even facing risks. A survey by Bentley University in Waltham, Massachusetts found that 67 percent of young people want to start their own business. Bentley management professor Fred Tuffile, PhD, told Forbes, “Millenials are realizing that starting a company, even if it crashes and burns, teaches them more in two years than sitting in a cubicle for 20 years ... While they know their chances of creating another Facebook are low, they do think it’s fairly easy to create a cool startup.”¹²
**Millennials are all for teamwork.** More than earlier generations, most millennials have worked in study teams as they pursued their education. This comfort with and openness to teamwork is often in contrast to senior doctors, who may think “It’s all about me,” and can be a great asset in building cooperation and collaboration in the practice.

**Millennials have high expectations.** The flip side of the entitlement accusation is that millennials are a generation with soaring expectations. They were raised to believe they can be anything they want to be. More than the generation that followed them, millennials are likely to believe they can earn college and graduate degrees. According to Dr. Twenge, “They arrive at their job interviews believing they already know everything.” Some call this optimistic and confident.

**Millennials are passionate about bettering the world.** Wendy Hauser, DVM, vice president of veterinary relations for Crum + Forster Pet Insurance Group and also on the Veterinarian’s Money Digest board, said one of the things she loves about this generation is their passion for improving the world and their commitment to service. She references a book fair organized by millennials at a Colorado veterinary hospital in which the money raised was used to house abused women’s pets that were not allowed at the local women’s shelter.

**Millennials are not afraid to challenge the rationale of decisions and protocols if the logic and reasoning are not sound.** Millennials often question authority because they were taught to speak their minds. Given their experiences, Nieman wrote, “It’s no surprise that millennials approach the workplace differently. Millennials may not always appear to be respectful that keeps a practice moving forward with integrity. Millennials can be depended on to seek the soundness of policies and protocols. “They are realistic and won’t turn a blind eye,” Nieman wrote. “Their realism and honesty can be an asset.”

**Millennials communicate – they just do it differently.** Millennials may not always appear to be listening, but they are multitaskers who can show amazing understanding and often communicate in nontraditional ways, especially using technology. Their lack of direct eye contact and near-constant attention to their technology does not mean they aren’t participating. A tablet or smartphone that may be distracting to some may not be a hindrance to others.

**Millennials are comfortable with technology.** This generation’s comfort with technology is a major asset to be tapped by veterinary practices. Amanda Donnelly, DVM, MBA, owner of Florida-based ALD Veterinary Consulting, points out that it is often because millennials embrace technology that practices have moved toward texting to send appointment reminders, prescription refill notices, and postsurgical updates and photos.

**Millennials set new standards.** Millennials’ often nontraditional appearance sets new standards for the present and future. Remember the baby boomers’ long hair and bell bottoms? Older workers can identify with efforts to set trends for the future and learn not to disqualify a prospective employee for showing up in flip-flops.

**LEVERAGING THE TALENTS OF MILLENNIALS**

By considering all aspects of the millennial workforce’s habits and desires, older workers can approach this generation with greater understanding, and practice owners and managers can build inclusive, strong veterinary teams. When interviewing prospective millennial employees, be prepared for questions like these:

- How diverse is your practice?
- What impact are you making?
- Do you have a sense of community?
- Are you flexible?
- Will I be able to grow and learn?
- Will you encourage me to build my network?
- Do you have an open and understanding workplace?

To tap the talents of millennials, consider the following points:

**Don’t be turned off by initial appearances.** Hold your judgment, and look past the flip-flops and nose rings. Appearance is no longer considered a valid measure of employability.

**Be as respectful of millennials as you would of any new applicant or team member.** That means remembering some of this generation’s needs, such as the need to appreciate the rationale behind policies and protocols. Millennials will not accept being told “Do it because I said so.” Respect their need to understand the bigger picture.

**Recognize millennials’ commitment to service.** Appreciate their need to have purpose in their life and work, and tie that to the services your practice offers. Providing quality pet health care should be understood as the primary purpose, of course, but millennials may be looking for more, such as quality client experiences, consideration for clients unable to pay for unforeseen pet expenses, and support for local humane societies or other forms of community outreach.

**Alter your management and supervision systems.** Provide mentoring and direction appropriate to the needs of millennials who appear to lack focus.

**Offer regular, positive feedback.** Like other employees, millennials need to know how they are doing and what advancement requires. Don’t wait for the traditional annual review — give frequent feedback for accomplishments, both large and small.

**Consider more opportunities for promotions.** Millennials expect to move ahead rapidly in their job and will appreciate your vision of a path for their future. “Instead of a big leap every two years, consider four smaller leaps every six months,” Dr. Twenge suggested.

**Evaluate the work schedules.** When possible, offer flexibility, vacation time and a variety of work experiences. Millennials value balancing work with other aspects of their life and will appreciate a practice that recognizes that.

**Tap millennials’ knowledge of technology.** Turn to your millennials to move your record-keeping to electronic medical records. Let them lead the way in adopting software to help clients make appointments online or order prescriptions. Those comfortable with computer apps can help you evaluate services that enable your clients to provide feedback and reviews through Yelp or other online services.

**Provide opportunities to enhance communication skills.** Millennials may lack confidence when engaging with others face-to-face. Lunchtime workshops can help everyone enhance their interpersonal skills. Local, regional and national veterinary conferences also provide great opportunities for learning.

**Encourage collaboration.** Having experienced work-study teams in school, millennials usually welcome opportunities to work with and learn from their teammates.

**LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

Whether you acknowledge the dark side or bright side of millennials—or maybe a little of both—this generation is a major part of the future veterinary profession. Appreciate them and help them contribute to the success of your business and the profession as a whole.

References available at VMDtoday.com.

Dr. Shadle earned her doctorate in interpersonal and organizational communication at the State University of New York at Buffalo. Dr. Meyer earned his doctorate in communication studies and speech arts at the University of Minnesota. They write and train through Interpersonal Communication Service, Inc. (VeterinarianCommunication.com). They have trained veterinary professionals at numerous national and international conferences.
Stay and Exit Interviews

Sitting down and talking with current and exiting staff could be the key to ensuring employee retention.

By Louise S. Dunn

So much effort goes into making a veterinary practice attractive to potential employees – entire websites and companies are devoted to perfecting the process – but employee retention is just as important, if not more so. Creating a positive environment that makes employees want to come to work each day should be a key goal for all business owners. If you have had a number of employees resign recently or wonder if your practice could do more to ensure happy employees, you will find help in this four-part series.

Part one (December 2017) covered the importance of maintaining job descriptions and performing regular skills gap assessments. Part two (January 2018) delved into the financial aspects of attracting and maintaining a talented pool of employees, including wages, benefit packages and reward programs. Veterinary practices that want to attract quality candidates cannot risk falling behind in any of these areas.

How can you be sure that you know exactly what your current and future employees want or expect? It starts – and ends – with an interview.

Some people might assume that work-related interviews refer only to those with job candidates. Admittedly, the job interview is vital to identifying candidates who will fit into the culture at your practice, and myriad books and websites are dedicated to this topic. But what about the people who already work at your practice? Can you clearly distinguish between those who are in it for the long haul and those who might be looking for employment elsewhere? Listening to whispers among staff and trusting your intuition are not enough to safeguard your practice.

How, then, can you figure out which team members might be unhappy or why they’re considering leaving? The simple answer is to conduct interviews but with a twist: the stay interview and the exit interview.

THE STAY INTERVIEW
Stay interviews help reveal why employees choose to work at your practice. Open-ended questions uncover why an employee wants to stay – what makes your veterinary hospital a great workplace – and how you can retain this and other employees. This type of interview can provide valuable information about issues brewing below the surface that need immediate attention. Additionally, the employee’s feedback can be folded into marketing initiatives. For example, use the positive attributes of your practice to promote your next job opening.

Some examples of questions to ask in a stay interview:
- What do you look forward to when you come to work each day?
- What do you like most about working here?
- What would make your job more satisfying or the best job you’ve ever had?
- What frustrates you about your current duties?
- What might tempt you to leave?

Stay interviews may be more beneficial than employee satisfaction surveys because they are conducted face-to-face using two-way communication. Some caveats: You must build trust, have open communication and demonstrate effective listening skills. One of the problems that may arise from a stay interview is discussing changes that need to be made but failing to take action. Employees may think that they haven’t been heard and, as a result, no longer trust the process.

Prepare yourself or the manager who conducts the stay interviews for handling difficult questions from the employees about getting a raise, taking on roles for which they lack the skills or making scheduling changes. Although none of those topics should be considered off-limits, the person conducting the interview must be prepared to discuss budget and scheduling constraints, strategic plans for compensation and benefits, and training opportunities for advancing employees.

THE EXIT INTERVIEW
So, despite your best efforts to maintain employee satisfaction, you have been handed a letter of resignation. Don’t dismiss this soon-to-be ex-employee’s ability to add value to your business. Take the opportunity to discover what factored into his or her decision to leave by conducting an exit interview.

A simple Google search will provide you with numerous articles about and examples of exit interview questions (see Resources). Even if the employee is being terminated, asking a few open-ended questions about the practice and permitting the employee to vent can provide pertinent information for practice improvement.
When you sit down together, follow these pointers to ensure a comfortable environment for both you and the exiting employee:

• Conduct the interview in a private office to avoid distraction.
• Prevent telephone, intercom, cellphone and employee interruptions.
• Allow enough time so as not to be hurried.
• Arrange to sit in a nonconfrontational manner. Opt for circular or side-by-side seating rather than across a table from each another.
• Have a neutral third party conduct the interview — someone other than the exiting employee’s direct supervisor — if possible.
• Schedule the interview for the final week of employment to ease fears of leaked discussions, gossip or harassment.
• Take notes for a written record, and keep the conversation comfortable to encourage sharing of ideas and criticism. The interviewer should refrain from becoming defensive or critical.

Your goal is to gather information that could improve the veterinary practice moving forward. Conclude the exit interview by expressing gratitude for the employee’s honesty and service. The procedure is doomed if you just go through the motions to appear “interested” or “legal.”

To make an exit interview valuable, take these steps:

• Prepare yourself (as you do for hiring interviews).
• Explain that you value the employee’s opinions and plan to use (or pass on) the information to improve the practice.
• Ask questions that get to the root of why the person is leaving.

• Ask the employee what measures, if any, were taken to resolve the issues, and listen for obstructions or suggest actions that could have been taken – the employee might accept some responsibility for the situation.

Finally, take the time to discuss the results with the appropriate people within the practice. Use the interview responses as an opportunity to develop action steps to improve the business. If you merely type up the interview and file it away, there will be no benefits.

WHAT’S IN IT FOR YOU?

Given the high cost of turnover, it behooves a veterinary practice to review both stay and exit interview information and take action where needed. Stay interviews offer the opportunity to identify and solve problems before an employee resigns. Exit interviews should be viewed as a proactive means to address complaints, improve the practice and prevent litigation.

In the end, when you receive a letter of resignation and want to tell the employee not to let the door hit them on the way out, imagine that door swinging back and hitting you for failing to improve your business through stay and exit interviews.

Ms. Dunn is an award-winning speaker, writer and consultant who brings over 40 years of in-the-trenches experience and business education to veterinary management. She is founder and CEO of Snowgoose Veterinary Management Consulting, which helps veterinarians develop strategic plans that consistently produce results.

RESOURCES

Plenty of resources offer more detail on both exit and stay interviews. Here are just a few.

Exit Interviews

“Example exit interview questions,” Exit Interviews website (exitinterviews.com.au/example-exit-interview-questions.htm)

“Perform exit interviews: how to conduct an exit interview with an employee who is leaving,” The Balance website (thebalance.com/perform-exit-interviews-1919341)

“The importance of exit interviews and the best questions employers should ask,” Dominion Systems website (dominionsystems.com/blog/the-importance-of-exit-interviews-and-the-best-questions-employers-should-ask)

Stay Interviews


“What is a stay interview with employees in the workplace?” The Balance website. (thebalance.com/what-is-a-stay-interview-1917998)

For more insight and advice on how to shut the revolving door in your practice, check out the other articles in this series:

• Salary and Benefits: VMDToday.com/link/11
• Job Descriptions and Skills Gaps: VMDtoday.com/link/12
Mastering the Art of Customer Service

When it comes to treating clients right, veterinary practices might want to follow the lead of these successful businesses.

By Kerry Lengyel

Excellent customer service can lead to real success for a veterinary practice. Terrible customer service can spell disaster. Everyone wants to be treated with respect and kindness, and the experience your customers perceive in their dealings with your practice is vital to their loyalty, particularly in this age of social media.

At the 2017 International Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care Symposium in Nashville, Robin Brogdon, MA, president of Blueprints Veterinary Marketing Group and Veterinarian’s Money Digest® Editorial Advisory Board member, discussed how veterinarians can apply models from businesses that have built their reputation on superb customer service.

One thing all the top companies have in common is a culture of trust, where employees trust the people they work with and take pride in what they do every day. “Essentially, you need to ask yourself what you can do to increase the level of communication and openness between management and employees in your practice,” Brogdon said. Often, that key ingredient is affording your team members the autonomy to make decisions on their own that affect how clients regard the practice.

Improving management-employee relationships fosters a culture of trust that ultimately generates three key results: increased productivity, employee retention and ease of recruiting. To begin to focus on establishing this trusting relationship, Brogdon advises asking yourself these key questions:

- How can we encourage pride in a job well done?
- How can we foster employee camaraderie?

“It’s really about you finding your way that speaks to who you are and provides your client with an experience that is extraordinary,” Brogdon said. Veterinary practice owners and managers can learn a lot from The Ritz-Carlton and other businesses. A key takeaway from all these companies is that company culture is built from the top down. Leadership must live the values that are assigned to the company, and the same holds true for veterinary practices.

When it comes to treating clients right, veterinary practices might want to follow the lead of these successful businesses.

The Takeaway

Check the patient’s record to find out why the animal came in to your clinic – don’t ask the pet owner. Use client and pet names and provide your own name, describe your role and how you will help, and then mention the doctor’s name. Help the client feel like his or her situation is the only one that matters. Make sure both pet owner and patient are comfortable before you leave them alone in an exam room.

WHAT THEY DO WELL... MAKE IT PERSONAL

The Ritz-Carlton chain of luxury hotels and residences operate under a singular motto: “We are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen.” Employees do not regard their guests as customers or clients, but rather as individuals – always greeting them by name. Every employee who works for the company attends a 15-minute meeting before every shift. At these meetings, managers first applaud one employee’s noteworthy act of service and then describe in detail the guest(s) in one room or meeting. The staff is instructed to go above and beyond in anticipating and fulfilling each guest’s needs.

Apply It!

Personalizing a pet owner’s visit to your clinic is easy and free. It simply takes a bit of mindfulness to communicate in a personalized, rather than a task-oriented, manner. Consider the technician who comes to the waiting room to escort a patient to the exam room. It often goes like this: The technician comes out of the back and calls out “Sparky” while holding the door open with a foot. Mrs. Smith and Sparky come toward the technician, who then says, “Come this way,” puts them in an exam room and shuts the door, leaving the two alone with no information about what will happen to them next.

Now imagine this same scenario taking place at The Ritz-Carlton: The technician emerges from the back room, walks through the lobby and calls for Mrs. Smith and Sparky. She extends her arm to shake Mrs. Smith’s hand and says, “Hi Sparky! I’m sorry your tummy isn’t feeling well today. Let’s see what we can do for you.”

As she gestures for the Smiths to follow her, Betty explains what is going to happen: “Mrs. Smith, I will be getting you and Sparky settled in an exam room. Then I’ll ask you a few questions about Sparky’s situation. Once we’re caught up, I’ll get Dr. Owens, who will perform an examination. Do you have any questions before we get started?”

The Ritz-Carlton: The hotel, the company, the brand, the culture and the guest experience were built from the top down. Leadership must live the values that are assigned to the company, and the same holds true for veterinary practices. By Kerry Lengyel
**L.L.Bean**

**WHAT THEY DO WELL...**

**ENGAGE**

In addition to having a live person answer every call to the company’s customer service line, this well-known seller of outdoor apparel and camping gear is extremely active on social media. For its 100th anniversary, the company asked customers to share their outdoor moments on social media, and for every photo received, they pledged to donate $1 to the National Parks Service. Over 1 million people responded, so the company donated $1 million.

**Apply It!**

Pet owners want to partner with a practice that cares about the welfare of its clients, patients and community as much as or more than the practice itself. To build a large, devoted following, show your interest in your clients’ lives and to your community at large.

• Leverage the power of social media to engage in conversations with your followers. Have themed photo contests, post a photo of a bizarre X-ray and ask for submissions on what the animal swallowed, share a touching story about how a client said goodbye to his or her pet and ask for more stories, or run a naming contest for the new hospital cat. Ask your clients to engage, and respond to their posts so they know you are listening.

• Proudly display your support for community organizations in the lobby of your practice with photos of your participation. Include animal and human groups, such as shelters and local youth sports teams.

• Have a (locked) suggestion box in your waiting room or exam rooms. Publish the suggestions you’ve implemented on Facebook if and when appropriate.

• Invite local schools to tour your facility. Take photos of each student posing in scrubs. Invite the media to tour with you. Ask the students to write a note back to you about what they learned.

**The Takeaway**

*Get out there. Engage. Participate. Ask your clients for feedback. Show the community that your practice is interested, listening and cares.*

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**Southwest**

**WHAT THEY DO WELL...**

**STAY TRUE TO THEIR**

**CORE VALUES**

This major U.S. airline flat-out refuses to hire anyone who is not friendly. The company took this value of friendliness to a whole new level when one passenger posted a picture of his ruined luggage after a flight. Southwest replaced the luggage and apologized publicly on its social media channels for all to see.

**Apply It!**

When a mistake is made, the fastest and most efficient way to turn a negative situation into something positive (or, at least, less negative) is to acknowledge it. Own up, be accountable and take the opportunity to correct the error. And, when possible and appropriate, have a sense of humor about it. For example:

• If the appointment desk failed to keep a client’s appointment timely or simply failed to put it on the books and the client has a reminder card in her hand, send a bouquet of forget-me-nots.

• If Fido’s favorite Miss Piggy toy was lost, then deliver a new Miss Piggy (or something close) and a pet store gift card to your client’s home. Include a group “we’re sorry” photo with your card.

• If there is a social media post about how awful your lobby smelled, then post a response of your lobby smelled, share a touching story about how a client said goodbye to his or her pet and ask for more stories, or run a naming contest for the new hospital cat. Ask your clients to engage, and respond to their posts so they know you are listening.

**The Takeaway**

*Own it, quickly and professionally, and know that doing so doesn’t have to mean boring or stuffy. To err is human. Be proud that your practice’s core values include accountability.*
Managing Your Practice

The Seven Deadly Sins of Selling

Like it or not, veterinarians are in the business of selling. Avoid these pitfalls to ensure happy clients and a successful practice.

By Phil Zeltzman, DVM, DACVS, CVJ, Fear Free Certified

Selling is a dirty word in veterinary medicine. I am not talking about selling leashes or squeaky toys or dewormers. I am talking about selling ourselves and our practices and our services. The fact is, selling is an art as much as a science. Although there are countless situations in which clients can—and will—find something to complain about, famed lawyer and sports agent Mark McCormack described seven common selling snafus to avoid.¹

**SIN #1: OVERPROMISING AND UNDERDELIVERING ON SERVICE**
If you don’t deliver excellent service, customers will have reasons to be unhappy. I once had a client whose dog was referred to me for a partial maxillectomy because of an acanthomatous epulis. My physical exam also revealed a large lipoma on the dorsum. All of a sudden, it didn’t matter to this client that her dog had cancer or that her veterinarian had been skilled enough to notice the very caudal maxillary epulis. All that mattered was that her veterinarian had missed the lipoma.

The service we provide should meet the client’s criteria for excellence. There is no easy way to tell if you’ve succeeded, but you’ll certainly know when you haven’t.

**SIN #2: OVERPROMISING AND UNDERDELIVERING ON PRICE**
If we tell a client that repairing a fracture will cost $1,500 but present a bill for $2,000, even a logical explanation may lead to client dissatisfaction. They want you to stick around and hold their hand, “They want you to deliver excellent service, customers will have reasons to be unhappy.”

**SIN #3: OVERPROMISING AND UNDERDELIVERING ON TIME**
Some clients don’t care that you have five surgeries, 16 consultations and 27 voicemails waiting for you. All they know is that Kiki was supposed to have surgery at 9 a.m. and that you said you would call with an update at 10 a.m. Forget that promise, and some clients will never forgive you.

**SIN #4: BELIEVING TWO OUT OF THREE IS OK**
Thinking that delivering two out of three in terms of service, price and time is good enough is McCormack’s fourth deadly sin. In a service industry like veterinary medicine, we need to deliver on all three, every time. We need to provide the right product or service at the right price and at the right time.

**SIN #5: SELLING AND WALKING**
Have you ever been sold a product by a skilled salesperson who never returned your calls when you needed help or had questions? You probably have noticed that some sales reps never return calls because “they had a crazy day,” while others excel in responding to customers.

Clients don’t like to be ignored either. Whether they forget every word you said to them, found 10 tablets when the label on the pill vial said there should be 14 or forgot when the next bandage change should be, clients will call you and will want answers . . . now.

When clients pay for a product or service, they also buy into a relationship with you and your clinic. “They want you to stick around and hold their hand,” McCormack said. This concept is extremely important after a pet has undergone surgery. Most clients love callbacks. They need to know that you care about Fluffy and whether she is comfortable after her lump removal.

**SIN #6: IGNORING THE DETAILS**

You might think you’re doing the best job in the world, but that may not be enough if you skimp on the details. And, unfortunately, you may have no idea what details the client considers important. “What’s minor to you may be major to the customer,” McCormack said.

For example, consider Cujo’s recent splenectomy. The receptionists were great on admission and discharge; the doctor was reassuring and skilled, both in the operating room and when Cujo’s heart rhythm went wonky the day after surgery. The nurses were helpful and accommodating during daily visits. Everybody did a great job, yet Mrs. Jones is livid because “somebody” forgot to trim Cujo’s nails, which can be done only under heavy sedation or anesthesia.

The problem may not be your fault. If you ordered a medication or a bag of prescription pet food that is not delivered on time, some clients will not understand that the delivery schedule isn’t under your control. “Customers with short memories are customers with short fuses,” McCormack said.

**SIN #7: NOT UNDERSTANDING WHY A CLIENT IS ANGRY**

It is important to know when and why a client is angry. That means being sufficiently close to the client to realize there is a problem. “You can be doing the best job in the world, but if there is something missing, or if the client is unhappy, then your opinion about your performance is worthless,” McCormack said. Sadly, the only way you may find out about their unhappiness is through a nasty online review.

**REFERENCE**


Dr. Zeltzman is a board-certified veterinary surgeon and serial entrepreneur. His traveling surgery practice takes him all over eastern Pennsylvania and western New Jersey. You can visit his website at DrPhilZeltzman.com and follow him at facebook.com/DrZeltzman.
Putting Meal Delivery Services to the Test

Does not having to shop for and cook your dinner really save time and money?

By Kim Campbell Thornton

When you get home from a busy day at the hospital, probably the last thing you want to think about is what to make for dinner. Or maybe you rummage through your pantry and refrigerator, only to find that you don’t have what you need to prepare the meal you want. Fast foods such as burgers, burritos and pizza might be convenient in a pinch but are typically high in salt, fat and preservatives.

Meal delivery services are making those dinnertime dilemmas a thing of the past, but do they really save time and money? We tested four nationwide services and talked with veterinarians who have tried some of them. Here’s what you need to know.

**TYPES OF MEALS**

Whether you want meals with organic ingredients or paleo, vegetarian, gluten-free or kid-friendly options, there’s a delivery service that’s right for you. Most offer two-person and family plans, with two or three – or more – meals delivered weekly. Typically, all you need in your kitchen are oil, salt and pepper, plus basic cookware.

**Blue Apron**

Blue Apron has the fewest meal options at six per week. The company makes an effort to use natural and sustainable proteins. Examples of meals include salmon and udon noodle stir-fry, smoked trout and asparagus salad, and skillet vegetable chili with cornmeal and cheddar biscuits.

**Home Chef**

Home Chef offers a choice of 10 different meals each week, including breakfast options and one premium meal, such as lamb chops with basmati rice, creamy feta sauce and cucumber salad. One week’s menu included steak burritos, chicken Milanesa, grilled pork chops, and French onion risotto with Swiss cheese. Recipe cards are easy to follow and can be saved in a binder that comes with the first order. Meals are easily scheduled or canceled.

**Sun Basket**

Sun Basket is a good meal delivery choice for families who prefer organic ingredients or more exotic or ethnic options. Among the dozen options for one week: yakitori chicken meatballs with roasted cauliflower and carrots, curried tofu and summer squash with carrot ribbons, steak with paprika butter and pan-charred vegetables, and two breakfasts – peach smoothie bowls and whole-grain pancakes with strawberries. The website is easy to navigate – unless you’re trying to skip a week.

**Hello Fresh**

Hello Fresh has eight weekly options, such as Monterey Jack burgers; crispy Cajun catfish; orecchiette with sausage, broccoli and pesto; spiced chicken thighs with basmati rice and sugar snap peas; and one breakfast choice. Subscribers can choose among egg-free, nut-free, gluten-free and spicy dishes. Premium meals are also available.

**PROS AND CONS**

The main advantage of these deliveries is the savings in time spent planning and shopping for meals. The kits also encourage cooks caught in a rut to try new things and use ingredients they don’t normally have in the pantry. Other benefits include portion control and calorie-counted meals. For busy veterinarians, however, they don’t necessarily save time in the kitchen.

Recipe cards are generally easy to follow, with prep and cook times listed. Home Chef recipes note the difficulty and spice level of each meal. The amount of chopping and number of steps required vary by recipe, and may take longer for inexperienced cooks. Meal preparation goes fastest if two people work together.

The meals also generate packaging waste, although companies use recyclable materials. Home Chef’s plastic containers with screw caps can be reused. Blue Apron has the least amount of packaging, but that’s because everything arrives jumbled together in a box and must be sorted. It’s easy to put the wrong items together.

Jessica Wilcock, DVM, who practices at Evergreen Veterinary Hospital in Kirkland, Washington, had one experience. The meals didn’t get her out of the kitchen faster, but they did reduce planning and trips to the grocery store.

They can cut costs, too. “I think we’ve saved money by eating out and getting takeout less,” Dr. Wilcock said. “Also, I waste less money on getting, for instance, an entire bottle of capers when I only need a tablespoon. So there are some grocery savings also.”

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Dr. Wilcock recommends meal kits regularly to coworkers and clients, but noted that it’s important to research the types of recipes each company provides, cost per week and number of people served before making a choice. “It may take trying a few services to find the one that fits you best,” she said.
How to create a winning social media plan

Follow these simple steps to let your brand shine online.

By Naren Arulrajah

In the span of a decade, technology has quite literally changed the way we live our lives and do business. Today, 8 in 10 Americans use social media, and they are there for more than just socializing. It has become one of the most important marketing channels for veterinarians.

SET GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The first step in creating a winning social media plan is defining your marketing goals. Without clear goals, it can be difficult to decide which networks to use and how to use them. More importantly, you won’t have a clear benchmark to determine the success of a campaign and ultimately calculate your return on investment.

When setting social media goals, look to your overall marketing plan and brand identity for guidance. Many veterinarians think of social media purely in terms of client acquisition, but it is also a great way to communicate with current clients – which is key to retention. Plus, a strong social media presence is essential for brand awareness.

Once you have decided what you want to accomplish, define specific, measurable objectives. These may include:

- **Audience engagement**: This is more important than even your number of followers.
- **Reach**: Only a small percentage of those who “like” your page actually see your posts.
- **Email subscribers**: Cross-platform marketing is a great way to build a loyal audience. Networks such as Facebook allow the option of adding a subscription button, and you can promote your newsletter anywhere with a link to sign up.
- **Website traffic**: Include your URL in your profile, and use targeted posts to drive people to your practice's blog or website.
- **New leads**: The most direct benefit of social media is potential clients who read your posts and decide to call your office.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT NETWORKS

Given the large number of social media networks, you could spend all day posting and still not keep up. Don’t worry – you don’t need to use all of them. In fact, it would be a mistake to try. Instead, choose a few that best meet your needs, and work on creating a strong presence on these platforms.

If you maintain only one social profile, make it Facebook. It is the most popular network by a wide margin. Additionally, Facebook is business friendly, with customizable pages and a variety of advertising options.

With over 300 million users, Twitter is no lightweight in the social sphere. However, its performance has been lagging for some time, while several other networks are skyrocketing in popularity, making it optional.

Although it began as a niche network targeted to do-it-yourself project planning, Pinterest has become a social media powerhouse. This network is worth considering, especially if your practice sells retail items.

Proving that video dominates today’s internet, YouTube is the second most popular social media network in the world. As any internet user will tell you, animal videos consistently rank among the most popular content, making this platform especially well suited to veterinary medicine.

Not just for selfies, Instagram is another popular place to share animal cuteness and pet health care information. If you have a regular supply of original photos, infographics and other quality visual content, you should be on Instagram.

The first step in creating a winning social media plan is defining your marketing goals.

**Check Technical Specifications**

The amount of text allowed in a post varies by network, and optimal image size varies because each website or app displays differently. If you want to post the same graphic to different networks, you will need to create several versions with slightly different dimensions.

**Follow the Rules**

If you plan to use paid advertisements, work with social influencers, run contests or partner with another business for co-promotion, the rules can become complicated and technical. Always review and abide by the terms to keep your account in good standing.

**Create a Calendar**

Without a schedule, it can be easy to lose track of what you posted where and when. You don’t want to leave an account inactive, and you don’t want to spam your audience. Choose a frequency, which may vary from a few posts per day to a few per month, based on the site and your audience. Whatever you choose, consistency is important.

Your calendar will also help maintain a balance among various types of content, such as infographics, humorous postings and links to your blog.

**PRODUCE ENGAGING CONTENT**

This is the final – and most important – part of your plan. A good strategy includes a variety of content types, such as videos, links, informational content and promotions. The best content is interesting, surprising, shareable and engaging.

Avoid overly formal, dull, dry posts. Your brand should have a distinct personality and unique voice. Be careful of any potentially offensive or controversial topics, but don’t be afraid to include humor, use a conversational tone and add your own personal commentary. If multiple people help maintain the account, have the poster include his or her name. This will avoid confusion and help people get to know your team.

**BEFORE YOU POST**

**Complete Your Profile**

Don’t just fill in a few fields and move on. The more information you can provide, the better. Answer all questions, craft a well-written biography or “about us” section, and use quality pictures for your profile and cover photo.

Mr. 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 him.
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