

New Client Acquisition and Marketing Bash Halow, CVPM, LVT

Acquiring new clients is vital to your business and its value. Here are some things you can try that will introduce more people to your business.

How Many New Clients Should I Be Seeing Per Month?

Our industry measures new clients in two ways: 1) the number of new clients per DVM per month and 2) the number of new client invoices as a percent of total invoices. As a rule of thumb, I would say that if you are seeing 15 new clients per DVM per month or if 5% of your invoices are from new clients, you are running with the pack, but as one practice consultant once said, “Why strive to be average?!”

Referral Programs

Clients should know about your referral program before they refer a client, not after. Post any referral program you have on the bottom of your invoice, on your website, and on your in-house marketing material. Try sending clients that refer a gift such as a bouquet of flowers from a local florist. The gift will make a far bigger impression than a credit on the client’s account and will give visibility to another local business.

Write Original Content

During the lecture, we’ll discuss how you can get this done in the limited time you have. Broaden your mind when it comes to topics worthy of writing about. Clients tend to have tepid reactions to clinical articles on topics like heartworm disease, the value of flea protection, and so forth. Instead write stories that are of interest to pet owners living in your community. Here is a list of topics that our company has written that have garnered the most interest from online communities. See if they spark your imagination.

- Dr. Gateman contracted Lyme disease. Read his story.
- I Found A Nest of Baby Rabbits While Mowing The Lawn. This is What I Did.
- Why Does My Dog Eat Grass?
- My Pet Is Wetting the Bed. What Should I Do Now?
- I’m Afraid There’s Something Wrong With My Older Dog, But I’m Afraid Of Finding Out.
- Red-tailed Hawk Population Is Soaring In New York City
- Kill Rates At Our Local Shelter Are Down by 90%!

Target An Audience On Facebook

Use Facebook to target a specific audience within a certain distance of your business and ‘boost’ your online content to that audience. Review those that have reacted to your article and invite them to ‘like’ your practice. This will increase the number of followers you have on this platform and the reach of future messages.

Move Closer to Your Online Audience

Social media is by far the best way to grab the attention of potential clients and to keep existing ones engaged and loyal to your brand, but you have to use social media as a socializing tool, not a marketing tool. Draw Facebook fans into a dialogue about your posts. A post about the best way to pill a cat might invite readers to share their pet pilling tips or troubles. Be sure to participate in the discussion thread as a voice of support and experience. Try not to be so clinical when talking online. Think of the forum as a business casual affair.

Think New Client.

New clients are not going to type your company's URL into their browser and look for a telephone number; they are going to start with a generic search (something like vets near me, or veterinarian, town, state, zip) or type in whatever pet service or question that they have (Where can I get shots for my dog? Why is my cat sneezing so much? What to do if my dog is wetting the bed?) Your job is to build content that shows you have the solution to what clients are looking for; get that content in front of clients; and then give the client a clear action step to follow when he or she arrives at your site. In many ways, your website should be like the perfect receptionist. It should greet the client professionally and pleasantly; be knowledgeable about whatever concern the client has; and then encourage the client to make an appointment. Don't think of your site and the information you have on it as a pancake batter spreading out in a pan; think of it as a pipeline that traffics clients down a specific path, to a specific outcome like a coupon for a first time exam discount, a phone call, an email, or commentary on your latest blog post.

Mobile-friendly Sites

At some point, probably all of the attendees at this lecture will do a search on a particular topic using their smart phone. If that search results in a page that is not optimized for the phone or looks bad on a phone, the attendee will move on to the next search result. It's imperative that your site looks good and loads correctly on a phone. Approximately 50% of all your potential new clients will view your site on their phone.

Track Your Success

Get your IT person or your website developer to help you understand your website's analytics. You should regularly look at the number of hits you are getting on your site, what pages are being most often viewed, what content is generating the most interest, and whether or not people are using your call to action pages like your 'contact us' page or your query forms. Additional valuable information is your 'bounce rate', a gauge of how compelling your content and your site are to your audience. Veterinary sites typically have a higher bounce rates than retail sites because the people coming to the site generally find what they are looking for relatively quickly and move on.

Google Ads

The reported average cost of client acquisition using Google is around 70 dollars per phone call, but it's my hunch that veterinary practices are spending much more than that because marketing teams are inexperienced with this industry and because tracking efforts are spotty. In my opinion, it takes an exceptionally skilled and dedicated marketing team to make the investment in Google ads work. At this time, we are not investing in Google ads. We are relying instead on building original content and then promoting it on Facebook. We are however leaning heavily on Google Analytics to explore the success of our site and for insight into our audience as we continue to look for ways to effectively advertise on Google.

Test Your Website

It wouldn't hurt to have your IT or website person do an SEO test on your site to look for ways that it can be improved in the eyes of search engines, but take results from the test with a grain of salt. Most of these online tests are built by companies that are interested in selling website services, so they benefit from finding even the tiniest of concerns. Lean on an experienced website developer to sift through the meaning of your site's score.

Build Authority

Google is interested in offering their clients the best answers to their questions. Google believes that websites that get a lot of traffic and hold the attention of visitors (low bounce rate) are sites that must have the best content or are an 'authority' on the topic. Remember that building authority with Google, that is to say 'proving to Google that you are an authority in veterinary medicine', is the long-term purpose of all the content you write. Each time you write a post, build it with the intent of engaging the reader, getting them to explore other links on your site, and getting them to share the content, call you, reach out to you by email, or comment on the content.

Prepare Your Practice for New Arrivals

As a group, pull back and reassess your new client experience. New clients that walk in your door will be taking their first whiff of your air, their first look at your lobby, their first listen to how they are greeted and talked to, and their first time sitting in your chairs. Challenge stale paradigms like 'puppy packs'. Few people are interested in a sleepy lecture about the necessity of annual stool samples or what the letters in a DAPPV vaccine stand for. Pick one or two things you would like the new client to know about your business (ways to finance veterinary care might be helpful) and then spend the rest of the time gushing over the pet and genuinely making the client feel welcome. Move all the other information you want the client to know online, then after the client leaves the practice, send out a thank you email that includes links to the content you want them to view. Remember that all of our email boxes are bursting at the seams, so it is wise to

spend some time thinking about what this email says and what it looks like so that it sticks out.

Conclusion

In the very near future, if you are not visible online, you can kiss the prospect of new clients goodbye. Private practices are already behind the 8 ball when it comes to the capital required to hire online marketers and to run more formal, successful online marketing campaigns. Play to your strength as a local business and move into the social forums of your neighborhood. There you will stand out not just as a vet, but as a fellow citizen and friend.

Hire and Hire

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If your practice manages to make it into the future it will be because you've found a way to clone your passion for helping clients and patients in your team members. Finding, hiring, training and retaining great employees are a core component of an outstanding company. In this lecture we'll explore ways to find, hire and build a remarkable healthcare team.

The Value of a Mission Statement and Job Descriptions

In essence your decision to go out on your own and start your own practice was a statement: 'I have something unique to offer. I have chosen to provide oversight to the care your pet receives because I want to ensure you quality. The outcome of your pet's health is so important to me, I want to take full responsibility for every part of the service you receive at this hospital.'

You had a vision of yourself in the future as part of something great. Make sure that you can distinctly articulate the quest you are asking team members to sign up for when they take a job at your practice. Great people want to be part of something great and want to work with others like them. The Mission is the first few words in an ongoing dialogue of the amazing things your team can and will accomplish working for you and with one another.

Job Descriptions Aren't Lists

You don't just want veterinary stuff done; you want it done in a particular way. Explore how you would like work undertaken in the job description. Taking time to think about what you want done, who will do it, how much time he or she needs to do it, what your return on investment will be for such labor, and so forth means that you write better ads, attract better people, screen better, ask better questions in the interview, and provide succinct direction. Job descriptions can frequently save you thousands of dollars in payroll. Can you guess why?

Start with Respect

I make this point with our client care team members in mind. Why is it that this most difficult job is given to those for whom we have the least regard and for whom we provide the least training? Many practice owners will participate in hiring the hospital's technician, but the client care reps, well, 'the senior front desk person handles them'. At some practices, doctors won't even bother learning the names of the folks that work the desk. Their passive dismissal of the group as a whole is what typically fuels our industry-wide front-versus-back war. We silently bless prejudice against a group that has done nothing to win our disfavor except show up to work, receive little to no training for what they do, and quake beneath an intense day of multitasking and demanding clients.

The same is true for other classes of folks that work for us: our assistants and kennel team members. Not appreciating the effort that others invest in our practice isn't so much rude as it is foolish. The difference between an appreciated versus non-appreciated staff member is discretionary effort, that extra bit of work that 'turned-on' employees provide while on the clock. It can generate tens of thousands of dollars of sales and savings annually.

Where to Look

I recently arrived at a Chipotle counter to face three young people in their late teens. Each was bright eyed, well groomed, well spoken, efficient, cheery, trained and probably minimum waged. Absent were cell phones, piercings, tattoos and apathy. Where were such gems found? Look on the Chipotle website under the 'careers' tab and you'll see. There you'll find a link to a YouTube video celebrating the day-to-day life of a young person that works at Chipotle. There you'll see young people who are part of a greater good, who have a purpose, who are confident about what they do, who enjoy one another's company.

Savvy companies understand the best place to find talented young people is *online*. Realize your job ads as YouTube videos, social media posts, and optimized blog pages. If you are not netting a whopper of a candidate to work at your business, it isn't because all fish are small, rather that you're throwing your line into the wrong part of the stream.

Write a Great Ad

Write an ad that describes the importance and value of the job that you are trying to fill. Let the prospective candidate know that you appreciate their interest in applying for the position and that you are eager to meet them. Most people want to do something cool and be singled out as good at it. Tee up that scenario with a well-written ad. When candidates send in their resume, thank them and show them how glad you are to meet someone who may soon be an extremely valuable and respected member of your team. Remember that even the candidates that don't get the job may discuss your business with others. Be mindful that this is both a job search and an exercise in public relations.

Screen Effectively

In the lecture, I'll share with you some online tools that will help you efficiently and effectively communicate to appealing candidates. These tools 'up the ante' for the more ambitious candidates and help you separate the merely good from great.

There's No Getting Around Your Responsibility to Train

If your practice is like many others, training isn't training; it's sitting next to someone who's been there longer and watching. It's pick it up as you go. It's follow along as best you can.