

5 TECH ESSENTIALS EVERY CLINIC SHOULD CONSIDER

Is your practice up to date with the newest and most modern technology? Good news: You don't need the latest and greatest to see real improvements in your daily workflow.

BY JESS TRIMBLE, DVM

We spend so much time talking about the newer and faster innovations that are coming tomorrow that we forget about the practical applications of technology that were readily available yesterday. Here are five categories of technology that you should be considering when evaluating your practice's next step in adopting innovation.

1 Remote Connections to Pet Owners

We all see that communication preferences have drifted toward more asynchronous methods such as chat, email, text and video clips. Telehealth platforms, practice management systems with integrated communication, online pharmacies and clinic apps with virtual assistants and online scheduling can quiet the phones and save time. Telehealth can allow practices to provide

new services, like nutrition counseling, new puppy training or palliative care. It can also provide a way to move nonurgent, complex communication — for example, discussing a new chronic diagnosis and long-term plan — to a place more comfortable for the pet and owner while also reopening an exam room. Don't forget about automated communication, rewards and marketing. Reminders, check-ins, promotions, local health alerts and coupons to your online store can go a long way toward building relationships.

2 Remote Connections to Pets

Jump on Google and search for "pet smart devices." You'll see collars, harnesses, litter boxes and cameras that can track a pet's vital signs and movements and give you more data than you know what to do with. Why not use it?

Create a service to periodically evaluate smart device data or use it as part of a subscription treatment plan. Every cat that has cystitis, CKD or hyperthyroidism or is over 10 should be encouraged to get a smart litter box for symptom monitoring. For patients with heart disease, explain the potential benefits of a smart collar that tracks sleeping respiratory rates to the pet owner. Add in point-of-care diagnostics such as remote glucose monitors and at-home diagnostics and there is a world of information available that can be obtained outside of the clinic. These tools, when used in a partnership with veterinary professionals, can be great for anxious pets that don't fare well in the clinic and help get the client involved and take ownership of their pet's health.

3 Remote Connections to Team Members

The way we work is changing. Our employees need more flexibility, and it's getting harder to find great help. Cloud-based practice management and communication platforms make it easy for team members to stay on top of clinic needs from home. Remote team members can handle anything that doesn't require physical presence — and there is always a list of tasks. This is difficult for practices that don't use cloud-based systems or don't use transparent communication systems. But once you make the switch, you can streamline workflows, alleviate stress on your team and drive growth.

4 Hospital Team Support

New tech isn't all about providing medical care. It's also about helping your team operate smoothly and deliver exceptional care while enjoying their work. Communication platforms can facilitate collaboration as well as increase transparency and efficiency. Project management tools can help organize role duties, daily tasks, patient needs and hospital initiatives. Many of these platforms also offer workflow tools, automatically checking in patients, gathering histories and sending forms to be signed before the client even sees your front desk. Inventory tracking, pill-counting apps, digital formularies, AI-supported medical records and AI-supported

diagnostics can save your team hours of time. Choose tools heavy in automation options to allow for maximum time saving. On the administrative side, business intelligence tools can provide data-driven insights into the performance of your clinic and team. While there are some veterinary-specific options for communication, business intelligence and project management that you can purchase, many free platforms are available that can make a big difference in your daily functions.

5 Hospital Patient Support

How can we improve the experience of our patients while in our care? Consider a virtual-first approach for your patients to get as much done as possible in the comfort of their home. The client can reach out via telehealth first for triage (both human and reliable AI models are available). If the pet needs to come in, then the owner checks in to the clinic and provides history via an app or text so the patient can wait in their car rather than the waiting room, or take a walk until the room is ready. Microchip scanners built into door frames means we don't have to swing a scary device over them, and body wall thermometers, infrared vital signs monitoring devices, video cameras and smart collars can all give us critical information about a pet's condition without the need to be in the same room. Video otoscopes and digital stethoscopes can be handled by pet owners with minimal guidance, allowing you to hear chest sounds or see down the ear canal of animals that won't tolerate touch from anyone but their owner.

Introducing available technologies into our practice can improve care, enhance customer experience, increase the happiness of our teams and strengthen business operations. By choosing technologies thoughtfully, we can help our practices be more sustainable in a rapidly changing and increasingly competitive world.



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Dr. Trimble is passionate about helping veterinary clinics implement new technologies. She speaks and consults on clinical application of tech and served on the task force for the 2021 AAHA/AVMA Telehealth Guidelines for Small-Animal Practice.