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How to Extend Your Reach

Build a client education strategy that drives practice growth
and endures long after the appointment is over.

BY ANNE TOMSIC

I still remember bringing home my first dog at age 30. Like many first-time pet owners, my knowledge was limited — I knew he needed his vaccine series completed and some puppy training, but beyond that, I was navigating uncharted territory. A lot has changed in the 20-plus years since then. Despite having the internet in their pockets, pet owners keep saying the same thing after their cat or dog suffers an unfortunate medical issue: “If only I had known.” Whether through late-night website searches or emergency visits, the message is clear: Pet owners wish they’d known sooner about preventive care.

The takeaway for veterinary teams: You have the perfect opportunity to give pet owners exactly what they need before they need it. When you

do it well, research shows that clients will trust you more, stay with you long term, and help your practice grow as they visit more frequently for wellness checks. They’ll also tell other pet owners about their great experience.

Perspectives and Hidden Opportunities

What do pet owners think they already know about their cat or dog’s health care, and what do they want to learn more about from their veterinarian? Colorado State University Professor Dr. Lori Kogan’s research [bit.ly/4jF97lR] brings unexpected insights to those questions.

Pet owners reported feeling most confident about understanding their dog’s mental enrichment and quality-of-life needs, but they still

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wanted to learn more about these topics from their veterinarian. Of surveyed dog owners, 80% preferred getting preventive health information directly from their veterinarian over any other source.

The study data suggests that when pet owners receive preventive health care education, they are:

- More likely to schedule regular preventive care visits
- Better able to recognize early warning signs
- More confident in making health care decisions for their senior pets
- More trusting of their veterinarian
- More likely to feel that their veterinarian is empathetic
- More likely to trust and follow their veterinarian's recommendations

This overall satisfaction with preventive health care dissemination was also the highest predictor for increases in wellness visit frequency.

Additionally, one opportunity stands out: the growing need for senior pet education. With the ever-increasing number of senior pets in U.S. households, including this education protocol can make a meaningful difference.

A Team-Based Approach to Client Education

Every veterinarian I know has seen themselves as educators, but more client education is needed. However, educating clients shouldn't fall solely on the veterinarian. It's most effective when client education becomes a practice-wide commitment, with each team member playing a vital role.

A collaborative approach enhances the client experience and boosts staff satisfaction. Furthermore, shared responsibility for client education prevents burnout by distributing the teaching workload across the entire team, including client service representatives.

Implementing a Multimodal Client Education Approach

Veterinary practices should implement a multimodal approach to client education for several key reasons:

- **Multiple touchpoints facilitate information retention and implementation.** Research shows that people typically need to encounter information five to seven times before taking action or committing it to memory.
- **Learning preferences vary significantly among clients.** Some pet owners learn best through hands-on demonstrations. Others prefer written materials they can review at their own pace. Many clients also need to share information with family members who weren't present during the appointment. Diverse educational resources allow everyone to learn in their preferred format.

CLOSE THE GAPS

Dr. Lori Kogan's study, "Dog owners and Preventative Healthcare: Knowledge Level, Interest, and Impact on Perceptions of Veterinarians' Trustworthiness and Empathy" [bit.ly/4jF97IR],

revealed the information dog owners want to learn most from their veterinarian:

- How to assess quality of life
- Mental enrichment
- Breed disease predispositions
- Senior care

- **Generational and technological considerations impact information delivery.** While millennials represent the largest pet-owner demographic and often prefer digital communications, practices must maintain inclusive education strategies. This means offering printed and digital materials. Meet each client where they're most comfortable while encouraging adoption of technological solutions when appropriate.
- **Limited appointment times necessitate extended learning opportunities.** The traditional 15- to 30-minute visit rarely provides enough time to thoroughly cover all aspects of pet health care, especially for new pet owners or those with pets that have complex conditions.

A multimodal approach to client education can include detailed discharge notes, handouts, emails, social media posts, newsletters, postcards, and more. These often-automated communications extend the educational experience beyond the exam room and into the days, weeks, and months following the visit, strengthening client relationships while ensuring better health outcomes for pets.

Build Your Educational Toolbox

Imagine this common scenario: A cat presents with inappropriate elimination issues, but you've ruled out medical causes. What now? Will you provide your client with comprehensive resources that address the likelihood of potential stressors, enabling them to investigate and resolve their cat's litter box aversion at home?

While these conversations are challenging, especially after ruling out medical causes, having the right resources at your fingertips can transform a frustrating situation into an opportunity to support your clients. A well-prepared toolbox of resources makes

these discussions easier and shows clients you've anticipated their needs.

Here are tips to build your educational toolbox:

► **Appoint an education ambassador:**

Designate someone, like a veterinary technician or client service representative, as the focal point for your practice's education initiatives. This creates an internal champion and resource for the rest of the team. Your education ambassador will amass the practice's recommended resources in one place, ensure the distribution of materials across various channels, ensure that materials are updated regularly, and track how the materials resonate with clients.

► **Leverage trusted industry resources:**

You don't need to create everything yourself. Amplify your educational impact by leveraging high-quality resources from trusted industry partners. Make sure your materials are written in everyday language that resonates with pet owners and that they focus on what matters most to them, like the comfort and mental well-being of their pets.

► **Amass your practice's experiences and stories:**

Every practice holds a wealth of real-world experiences and compelling stories. A CSR's experience with a three-cat, one-dog household gives them the empathy and insights into successful litter box setup, feeding station arrangements, and creating peaceful spaces. A technician's experience with their 14-year-old dog's arthritis — including how at-home environmental changes and pain meds improved their quality of life — puts everything into context when discussing osteoarthritis-related topics with clients. Map out each staff member's unique experiences. When a client faces challenges, they can be paired with team members who've walked a similar path. These

STORY ARCHIVE

Client education is a regular focus of Today's Veterinary Business columnist Dr. Amanda L. Donnelly. Read articles from her Talk the Talk column at go.navc.com/talk-the-talk.



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ANNE TOMSIC is the co-founder of Preventive Vet. The company provides tools to extend the ability of veterinary teams to educate and support their clients.

authentic connections create powerful teaching moments.

► **Ensure a balance of "sales" and "altruistic" resources:**

Share valuable knowledge, like nail-trim desensitization or best practices for introducing a resident cat to a new pet, even if it doesn't lead directly to an appointment or product purchase. Rather than seeing every interaction as a path to a transaction, like education solely focused on parasiticides or vaccines, clients will begin to recognize their veterinary practice as a true partner in their pet's well-being. This earned trust leads to better compliance with medical recommendations.

► **Create an inclusive library:** If applicable, develop a collection of multilingual resources. You can even use AI to translate your existing materials, but be sure to verify its accuracy.

Measuring the Impact of Client Education Initiatives

Track the efficacy of your educational efforts by soliciting client feedback, assessing your team, and monitoring your practice's health. Some specific ideas include:

- Send post-visit surveys focusing on educational components of the visit.
- Monitor engagement with your practice's educational content on social media.
- Track comments and questions during follow-up communications.
- Measure utilization of your educational resources by tracking downloads, email open rates, and video views.
- Survey team members about their satisfaction with educational resources, communication methods, and team responsibilities.
- Record success stories and case outcomes.
- Measure growth in preventive care services, participation in wellness plans, and client retention rates.
- Track frequency of wellness visits.
- Monitor your practice's value over time.

Veterinary practices have an opportunity to strengthen their role as the central, trusted source of pet health education. Start with one small change that you can automate and build from there. Every step forward strengthens your bond with pet owners and helps their pets live longer, healthier lives.

When I think back to getting my first dog over 20 years ago, one memory stands out: my veterinarian teaching me about gastric dilation-volvulus prevention. I took to heart the practical tips about slow-feeding and managing water intake after exercise, and these became practices I still use with my barrel-chested dogs today. That kind of thoughtful education made a lasting impact. **TVB**