

SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE

They Can't Buy Your Story

Big players are reshaping veterinary medicine. Here's why your independent practice — and your marketing — may have the upper hand.

BY CAITLIN DEWILDE, DVM



If you've been paying attention to industry news, you've noticed some significant shifts. We've seen major acquisitions, with large, non-clinical corporations entering the veterinary space with ambitious technology platforms, membership models, 24/7 accessibility, and promises of seamless, end-to-end pet care. It's enough to make any independent practice owner feel a little uneasy.

I get it. These moves are big, well-funded, and designed to feel inevitable. And some of what these players are building is genuinely impressive. In fact, I've often called many of the features they offer — tech-forward clinic experiences, virtual care, frictionless booking, and app-based communication — “good things” in this very column.

As someone who has spent years pushing veterinary practices to modernize their marketing and client experiences, I can't exactly argue with the vision. When their promises of an experience sound so good, it's hard not to perceive this pressure as a threat to practice as we know it. Or, at the very least, a threat to those operating small, locally owned independent practices. But here's what I keep coming back to: They can't buy your story.

The Threat Is Real, but So Is Your Advantage

Let's be honest about what large corporate and tech-backed veterinary platforms do well:

- ▶ They invest heavily in infrastructure.
- ▶ They have user-experience designers, app developers, and national marketing budgets.
- ▶ They can roll out a client portal, an automated reminder system, or a membership loyalty program across dozens of locations around the country simultaneously.

That's a real competitive edge. And independent practices that ignore these trends do so at their own peril.

But here's the thing about rolling out anything across 50, 100, or 500 locations across the country: It has to work everywhere, which usually means it's optimized for nowhere in particular. A national platform can't tailor its messaging to the quirky dog-obsessed community in your zip code. It can't know that your clients skew older and prefer a phone call over an app notification. It can't replicate the fact that Dr. Martinez has treated half the Labs in your county for the past 15 years.

You can. And that's not a small thing.

Borrow the Best Ideas on Your Own Terms

The smartest response to this moment isn't to ignore what the big players are doing. Instead, it's to steal their best ideas and implement them in ways that actually fit your practice.

Frictionless booking? You don't need a proprietary app to offer online scheduling. There are affordable tools that integrate with most practice management systems and can be set up quickly. 24/7 communication? A chatbot or, better yet, a real person after-hours answering service costs a fraction of what you'd imagine and dramatically improves client perception.

Membership model? Several independent practices have successfully launched their own wellness plans or membership offerings that drive loyalty without a corporate middleman.

The difference — and this is the important part — is that you get to decide which of these tools makes sense for your clients, your team, and your community. Get to. Not have to. You're not handed a mandate from a national operations team. You can pilot something, hate it, and try something else. You can choose the reminder cadence that your clients actually respond to, not the one that tested best in a focus group in another city. That flexibility is a genuine competitive advantage. Use it.

Your Best Marketing Asset Can't Be Scaled

Now let's talk about what no acquisition can replicate: authenticity.

The research on this is consistent and overwhelming. Most consumers, especially pet owners, trust real people over polished brands. They respond to genuine stories over produced content. They choose providers that they feel like



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they know. And in veterinary medicine, where the relationship between a client, their pet, and their veterinarian is deeply personal, this effect is amplified.

That photo of your team celebrating a dog's last chemotherapy treatment? No corporate content calendar produces that. The video of your veterinarian explaining a diagnosis with patience, humor, and genuine care? You can't manufacture that. The reel of your staff in the local school colors on game day, celebrating with a pet in a matching jersey? No national platform can scale that.

The impact of knowing and celebrating what matters to your clients and your community cannot be underestimated. This is the heart of what I've always believed about veterinary marketing: The best content isn't produced. It's captured. The personalities of your team members. The expertise of your doctors. The recoveries and milestones of your patients. The running joke you have with a client who's been coming in for 20 years. These are your marketing assets, and they are irreplaceable.

The Bottom Line

Big changes are coming to veterinary medicine. Some of them will be good for the profession, pet owners, and patients. Some will make independent practice ownership harder. Both can be true.

But the practices that will thrive aren't those that ignore what's happening or panic about it. They're the ones that borrow what works, stay true to what makes them different, and remember that the most powerful marketing tool they have is the one thing that can't be acquired, scaled, or automated: their story. **TVB**

HOW TO TELL YOUR STORY

If all this has you thinking about your marketing strategy, good. Focus here:

- ▶ **Audit your client experience for friction:** Put on your pet owner hat, and walk through the full interaction cycle. Research the practice, read the reviews, check out the website, and make the appointment. Repeat for the actual visit, the follow-up, the ongoing pharmacy needs, etc. Where do clients get stuck? Is it the booking? Reaching someone after hours? Understanding invoices? Pick one pain point, and fix it this quarter. You don't need to overhaul everything. Just close the gaps that matter most to your clients.
- ▶ **Get serious about your digital presence:** An optimized Google Business Profile, a website with current photos and accurate hours, and consistent — not necessarily frequent — social media activity are table stakes now. These aren't optional extras; they're the first impression for every new client who finds you online.
- ▶ **Show your people:** Put your doctors, techs, and receptionists on camera. Share your team's stories. Post the real moments — the before-and-after, the grateful client, the staff member who drove 40 minutes to return a lost cat. Not every day, not with a production crew. Just authentically, consistently, and often enough that people feel like they know you and what to expect before they ever call.
- ▶ **Lean into your community:** Sponsor the local 5K. Partner with the rescue down the street. Show up at the farmers market. Order lunch from the local restaurant. Be a neighbor, not just a business. This kind of presence builds trust that no amount of national advertising spend can replicate in your zip code.