

TALK THE TALK

How to Win Over Gen Z Pet Owners

From two-way texting to transparent pricing, these solutions will help you earn the loyalty of younger clients.

BY AMANDA L. DONNELLY DVM, MBA

Have you considered what your future client base will look like? As part of any strategic planning process, it's essential to evaluate your target market and how client needs are evolving. One group that deserves focused attention is Gen Z. Born between roughly 1997 and 2012, they are the most racially diverse generation in U.S. history and an increasingly influential force. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Gen Z made up 18% of the workforce in 2024 and is projected to reach 30% by 2030. This means veterinary practices will not only serve more Gen Z clients but also work alongside them as team members.

Let's take a closer look at what we know about this rapidly growing segment of your client base.

Pet Ownership

The American Pet Products Association 2025 State of the Industry Report revealed the following insights about Gen Z's pet ownership:

- In 2024, Gen Z comprised 20% of U.S. households that owned a pet, a 43.5% increase from 2023.
- 70% of Gen Z pet owners have two or more pets.
- 58% of Gen Z dog owners and 38% of Gen Z cat owners are men, up 15.2% and 17.8% respectively since 2023.



Clearly, veterinary practices will increasingly see more Gen Z clients. Now, let's examine what this generation might be looking for from veterinary health care providers.

Digital Communication

As digital natives who have grown up with the internet, social media, and smartphones, Gen Zers expect convenience and accessibility from businesses. For veterinary practices, this makes progressive use of digital communication an essential part of client communication.

Texting should extend beyond reminders to include two-way communication. Gen Zers likely prefer texting to request medication refills, receive normal lab results, and get patient updates. Practices can further enhance convenience by offering online appointment scheduling along with digital forms for patient histories and consent signatures.

Artificial intelligence is another opportunity to streamline communication and improve efficiency when working with Gen Z clients. Tools that generate pet report cards and visit summaries directly from appointment notes can enhance the client experience while saving time for the team. Small touches, such as sharing a pet's photo or video when texting a patient update, can further elevate the client experience, strengthen engagement, and improve the veterinarian-client bond.

Social Media

Gen Z turns to the internet and social media for information and decision-making. According to the Pew Research Center, 66% of Gen Z report that their purchasing decisions are influenced by online influencers, particularly those perceived as authentic and relatable. Gen Z is also known to gravitate toward brands that support social causes important to them.

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Meeting younger clients where they are requires a thoughtful and consistent social media presence. Practices can build trust by highlighting authenticity, clearly communicating their values, and demonstrating a genuine commitment to the human-animal bond. Prioritize real, in-hospital photos over stock imagery. Position your team as trusted advisers by sharing educational content on pet health and well-being and linking to reputable resources such as YouTube videos and podcasts.

Spending

Surveys have shown that Gen Z spends less on pets annually than older generations, but they devote a greater share of their income to pet care. A 2024 Harris Poll found that 29% of Gen Z pet owners admitted they face debt because of expenses related to pet ownership. While the biggest share of that debt is due to veterinary bills, younger generations in particular spend a significant amount of money on pet food, supplements, toys, clothes, wearables, day-care, and training.

Personalized Recommendations

Many Gen Zers view their pets as children, according to survey data. Because Gen Z cares deeply about the well-being of their pets, veterinary professionals should ask questions to assess their lifestyle and determine what's most important to them.

- ▶ “Tell me about your relationship with Luna.”
- ▶ “How do you like to spend time with Bear?”
- ▶ “What’s most important to you for Scout’s medical care and well-being?”

It’s equally important to bring Gen Z clients into a conversation with shared decision-making. Ask open-ended questions to uncover their knowledge and feelings about their pet’s care.

BIRTHDAY BONUS

According to Forbes, Gen Z pet owners are the most likely to spoil their pets with birthday cakes, birthday presents, and clothing or costumes. Delight your younger clients by sending birthday greetings to their pets.



DR. AMANDA L. DONNELLY

The Talk the Talk columnist is a speaker, business consultant, and second-generation veterinarian. She combines her practice experience and business expertise to help veterinarians communicate better with their teams and clients. She is the author of “Leading and Managing Veterinary Teams: The Definitive Guide to Veterinary Practice Management.” Learn more at amandadonnellydvm.com.

- ▶ “Tell me about what parasite control products you’re giving Bear.”
- ▶ “How much have you read about osteoarthritis in dogs?”
- ▶ “What level of discomfort do you think Scout is experiencing?”

Gen Z doesn’t easily trust businesses and might view generic recommendations as a sales pitch. To avoid this, personalize treatment options and focus on the benefits of care.

Don’t say: “We recommend all dogs be on flea, tick, and heartworm preventive.”

Do say: “Since Bear spends time outside and goes on hikes with you, it’s important that we protect him against fleas, ticks, and heartworm disease. I recommend [product name] as the best preventive for his lifestyle. It has these benefits ...”

Don’t say: “We need to do radiographs.”

Do say: “My exam of Scout indicates he’s experiencing pain in his hips. I recommend we X-ray his hips and legs. An X-ray will show us whether he has osteoarthritis and, if so, its severity. It would help me tailor his treatment plan.”

To reinforce shared decision-making, follow your recommendation with a question such as, “What are your thoughts on having us do an X-ray to determine whether he has arthritis?” or “What do you think about these treatment options?”

Financial Conversations

In a 2025 Deloitte survey, 39% of Gen Zers listed the cost of living as their primary concern, and 48% said they don’t feel financially secure. GlobalPets reported that 18% of Gen Z pet owners live with their parents due to their financial situation.

Veterinary professionals should have candid, compassionate conversations about the cost of care with every pet owner, but it might be even more important for younger clients. Gen Z appreciates fee transparency, and many of them may need payment options to afford care.

Final Thoughts

While research and surveys reveal generational characteristics, avoid making assumptions or relying on stereotypes. Instead, focus on listening and shared decision-making when talking with Gen Z pet owners.

Don’t forget: Most practices already employ Gen Z team members. Ask about their service expectations, preferences, and desired communication styles. What you learn from them can help you to better connect with younger clients.

Catering to Gen Zers isn’t about labels; it’s about understanding their human-animal bond so you can help more pets get the care they deserve. **TVB**