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Why Veterinary Software Should Embrace Open APIs

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Imagine walking into your clinic and being told that the exam table you purchased can only work with the stethoscope, scale, X-ray machine, and surgical lights from the same manufacturer, and that you must buy these items or nothing will work with anything else. You'd probably find that at least a little absurd. And yet, that's the reality thousands of veterinary teams face every day with their software.

The veterinary practice information management system has become the operational backbone of modern clinics. It manages appointments, records, prescriptions, billing, inventory, and patient/client communications. What it often does not do is play well with others. Closed, proprietary ecosystems have become the norm in our industry, and it's stalling the future of veterinary medicine.

I'm in a unique position as a clinician and software company CEO, and I believe it's time for our industry to adopt open application programming interfaces (APIs) as the standard. Veterinary practice leaders, not their software vendor, should decide which tools they use to run their business.

What Is an Open API?

An API is essentially a secure, standardized door, or bridge, that allows different

software programs to communicate and share data. An "open" API can be thought of as a public front door at a library, published and accessible, enabling third-party developers to build integrations. A "closed" API, by contrast, restricts that access and is a door that no one can get access to, forcing veterinary practices to use only the tools the PIMS vendor approves of, often at higher cost and with less functionality and slower innovation.

Whether you have an open or closed API affects patient care, staff efficiency, and even practice economics.

Other Industries Got There First

Veterinary medicine is not the first industry to wrestle with this question, but the lessons from elsewhere are clear.

Consider the hospitality industry. Hotels and restaurants now have access to robust ecosystems of integrated tools — think point-of-sale systems, reservation platforms, inventory managers, and loyalty programs — all because open APIs created a marketplace of competition and innovation. As a result, they have better products at better prices, with operators free to choose what works best for their businesses.

Human healthcare offers a more instructive parallel. The leading electronic medical record systems have moved toward openness, and the benefits to patients and providers have been significant: interoperability between specialists, labs, pharmacies, and health systems. The dental industry, once similarly siloed, is now opening up rapidly, with much of that shift driven by the growth of artificial intelligence.

When industries open their APIs, businesses thrive, products improve, and customers benefit.



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WHY THE PUSHBACK?

- "Open APIs are good for industries in general because they challenge all products to be better and more competitive," said Adam Wysocki, founder of VetSoftwareHub.
- But if open APIs would be good for veterinary medicine, why aren't more vendors embracing them? Wysocki pointed to several commonly cited reasons:
- **Security:** Vendors argue that opening an API expands the attack surface and exposes sensitive practice and client data to breaches.
 - **System performance:** Vendors worry that third-party applications making heavy or poorly designed API calls will slow down the PIMS for everyone.
 - **Support burden:** When an integration breaks, the practice calls the PIMS vendor first, regardless of whose code failed. Vendors don't want to staff support for problems other companies create.
 - **Protecting practices from poorly built integrations:** Vendors claim that they vet integration partners to ensure quality and protect practices from bad software.

- "Those concerns are not imaginary, but they are solvable. Banking, human healthcare, and countless other software verticals provide secure APIs at scale every day," Wysocki argued. "Notably, those industries opened up largely because regulators required it. Veterinary medicine has no equivalent forcing function, so vendors face no consequences for keeping data locked down."
- According to Wysocki, the unstated reasons many vendors push back on open APIs are more revealing:
- **Retention:** If it's easy for customers to get their data out, it's easy for them to leave. "When migration looks painful or risky, practices stay put, even when they are unhappy. It's a classic competitive moat," Wysocki said.
 - **Competition:** "Some PIMS providers sell their own AI tools, such as scribes, and restrict integration with rival products," Wysocki continued. "These tools improve with usage and data, so allowing competitors to plug in means feeding the very products they are trying to beat."

The Cost of APIs Staying Closed

For years, many PIMS vendors have operated with closed APIs. They may offer integrations, but only with partners they've selected. Practices that want to use a specialized tool for, say, telemedicine, inventory optimization, client communication, or AI-assisted diagnostics may find that their PIMS doesn't integrate with it. Lack of integration leads to clunky workarounds, manual data entry, and duplicate records that create risk and inefficiency.

From an innovation standpoint, closed systems suppress the market. When a veterinary technology startup builds a useful product, its potential reach is artificially constrained by how many PIMS vendors will agree to integrate with it; a negotiation that often comes down to competitive dynamics rather than clinical merit.

The Veterinarian Should Have the Power to Choose

At the center of this issue is autonomy.

When industries open their APIs, businesses thrive, products improve, and customers benefit.

A practice owner who has found a client communication tool they love, a diagnostic imaging system that fits their workflow, or an AI scribe that saves their team hours every week should not be told by their PIMS vendor that they cannot use it, or that using it will require expensive custom development and months of waiting.

Open APIs would change that dynamic entirely. They would allow best-in-class tools to compete on merit and connect seamlessly, so veterinary professionals can build the practice environment that works best for their patients and their teams.

PIMS vendors shouldn't have to give up their products or their competitive advantages. The best PIMS will continue to win on the strength of their core functionality. However, the walls around the data should come down, and practices should be given secure, documented, accessible APIs that allow them to connect the tools they choose.

When practices have the freedom to build the software environment that fits their workflows, they are happier and practice better medicine. That's the outcome an open API policy produces, and it's the standard the entire industry should be reaching for. **TVB**

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