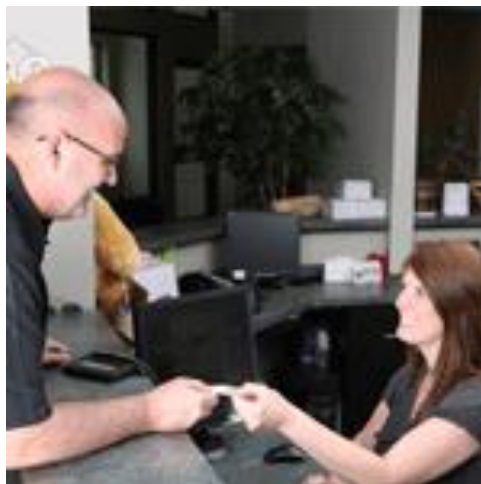




# **Essential Skills for Veterinary Receptionists Mini Series**

## **Session 1: Practice Marketing and Client Engagement - Why it Matters**

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This webinar is the first of three in a series on Understanding practice marketing and client engagement:

1. Understanding the role of marketing and why customer engagement really matters
2. Understanding your role in delivering the practice marketing
3. Measuring the customer experience and marketing activity

## **1. Understanding the role of marketing and why customer engagement really matters**

We have discussed the Veterinary Business Model previously - you'll remember that it begins with the phone ringing, and fundamentally the point of your practice's marketing is to make the phone ring:

1. Make the phone ring
2. Convert the caller into a paying client
3. Convert the consultation into further treatment and care
4. Charge correctly and fairly for all work done
5. Get recommended (which in turn makes the phone ring...)

Effective and active marketing is crucial because:

- In the last fifteen years, the number of veterinary sites in the UK has more than doubled - potential clients have much more choice.
- Owners are much more informed, thanks to the internet. The average customer consults an average of 10.4 sources before making a choice or a decision.

It's no longer the case that you can simply sit and wait for clients to come to you - you need to demonstrate why they should come to you ahead of everyone else.

### **Targeting effectively**

The first step in any marketing activity is to ensure that you understand who your customers are, and what they want from you, so that you can tailor your service accordingly. Onswitch and Mintel research paints a picture of the 'average' owner:

- A third of UK pet owners are aged 25-34 years
- A quarter of owners use more than one practice
- Convenience is a key factor in initial choice, along with recommendation
- Three quarters of owners live within five miles of their practice
- Owners are not with you for life - they may move house or lose their animal, but they are also equally likely to follow a favourite vet who moves to another practice, try out a new practice in the town or switch practices on the recommendation of their friends and family.
- Cost is relatively unimportant - fewer than 10% of owners make their decisions primarily on price.
- Owners look online and ask advice from friends, family or other animal care professionals (groomers, farriers, pet shops, feed merchants, rescue centres etc.)
- Owners make choices based on value for money - when your service is excellent it justifies the cost

However, on top of these market generalisations, it's important to understand the owners in your area, with a 10-15 minute drive of your building (in the case of small animal practices, horse owners are often happy to travel further for the right service). If there is a large road, river or mountain between you and them, they are unlikely to traverse it. If there are others in the area already providing a great service, they will need a very good reason to switch practices.

Owners are driven primarily by convenience when first choosing a practice (less so for horse owners who tend to choose a practice based on recommended expertise), so your target market is actually situated in a relatively small geographical area. However, their decision to stay comes down to their experience of the practice, therefore excellent marketing and client communication really conveys a positive sense of what the practice feels like.

### **Delivering the right message**

Deciding what type of practice you are (budget, long appointments, all-inclusive plans) is crucial before you talk to the type of clients who want the things you offer - are you a Waitrose or an Aldi? Because there is no point telling people what you do, and how you do it brilliantly, if the local community has no need for your services. So consider, and address, the following:

- What do local owners need?
- Where are the gaps in the market?
- What do they currently get?
- What can you do to add value?

### **Delivering the right message in the most effective way**

There are a number of different routes you can use to get your messages across:

- Online. Search Engine Optimisation is key - making sure your practice is listed near the top of the first page of results. Paying for Google Ads is less effective than writing your site in a way that Google's complex algorithms favour (72% of clicks are on the organic search results, not the featured ad listings)
- Facebook - social media is key. Daily updates, interesting / cute / humorous content, client interaction and rapid replies to posts all keep visitors coming back and sharing your posts. Facebook is a fun, effective and free tool in your marketing kitbag
- High impact, consistent signage
- Local press features, adverts and advertorials
- Bandanas / bag for life / pens etc. all keep your practice name at the front of your clients' minds, and visible to potential clients
- Fresh branding - modern, clean logos tell owners that your practice is forward-thinking and friendly, not stuck in the 70s

Ultimately owners have lots of choice when it comes to picking a practice - your client communications and marketing should clearly demonstrate what makes you special. It's not just about the kit you have, it's about how you deliver a customer experience that's far superior to anything they could get elsewhere. Because recommendation from delighted clients is the ultimate marketing tool - you can help encourage it with Friend-Get-Friend schemes and Facebook shares, but you can't buy it. It's highly effective, and the ultimate objective of any and all marketing activity.

Next time we'll move on from the theory and look at the role *you* play in marketing your practice.