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Better Management is Better Medicine®

Technology In Your Practice -2010

Technology. Funny how this word can conjure up so many mixed emotions. Fear: “Technology changes every year, and sometimes more often than that. How can I possibly keep up with it?” Excitement: “The new gadget that came out this week will increase convenience and productivity!” Annoyance: “Technology just shortens attention spans. We’re better off without it.” While all of these opinions have a grain of truth in them, let’s not jump to conclusions without giving due consideration to all the facts. Websites, e-mail, and social media sites (to name just a few forms of technology readily available to your practice) may be able to do you, your clients, and your patients a world of good, and cost your practice next to nothing.

Does your practice have a website? In *Benchmarks 2009: A Study of Well-Managed Practices®* 90% of respondents indicated they have a practice website. See Figure 1 for the capabilities those practices have on their websites. Websites have been around for a while and aren’t going away. What are the benefits? First and foremost, the vast majority of your clients are no longer going to the phone book to find local veterinarians – they’re heading to Google, Bing, and Yahoo. To keep in step with client demand, consider creating a basic website, adding features as you’re able. There are various companies that offer basic to advanced website design, including Vetstreet, evetsites.net, and Beyond Indigo. Another benefit of having a website is your ability to inform and teach potential clients about your practice at any time of the day or night, during or after business hours. Don’t worry that a website will cause you to lose the personal touch – your website can, and should, be an extension of your practice philosophy. If that’s true, potential clients will be drawn to your practice before they even experience your caring culture.

Clients “surfing the internet” expect a website providing them with the information they want and/or need to know. They may call your practice for more information, but they may not. Your website should provide enough information on your services and culture to get potential new clients in the door. Must have’s on your website include a “home” page about the practice in general, a services page providing an overview of the various services and procedures your practice offers, a page on doctors and maybe staff too, and a page providing directions so potential clients know where you’re located. And make sure your contact information is readily available. Many websites have an email address and a phone number at the top or bottom of every page.

Does your practice use e-mail? If not, why not? It’s faster, easier, less expensive, and more convenient than picking up the phone, getting a voicemail message, or sending out mailings. That’s not to say you should eliminate phone calls and mailed correspondence, just add e-mails to your toolkit as well. Provide an email sign-up sheet, or ask for email addresses on your new client forms, and be sure to specify the type of emails clients can expect to receive from the practice (for example, recall notices, reminders for visits and necessary services, etc.). Assure clients that their e-mail



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addresses are confidential and won't be shared with other companies or used for marketing purposes.

E-mail, in addition to helping you keep in touch with clients on an ongoing basis, can also be useful when sending out reminders for annual or semi-annual exams. In *Benchmarks 2008: A Study of Well-Managed Practices*, when asked if they sent reminders via e-mail, only 31% of respondents indicated that they did. This represents a huge opportunity. Not only is the turn-around time for sending and responding to e-mail much faster than with written reminders, e-mail also saves your practice money when it comes to the cost of postage.

Electronic communication is not limited to e-mail any longer. Social media has rapidly emerged in the past several years as a way of creating an online community based on an idea, situation, or organization in common. It's also a great way for you to get your name out into cyberspace and into potential clients' minds. We're talking about free advertising here, since there's no cost to setting up profiles on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, or other sites! However, if you create a page on a social media site, you'll need to be proactive about keeping posts current. As Facebook, Twitter, and the host of other social media sites are *social*, you'll need to update the information you post regularly to show you're an active part of the social media community. It's a good idea to set one or two people familiar with social media in charge of your practice's site. You'll want to set up your site as a business (as opposed to an individual), and post information related to the daily operations of the practice. Just be sure to keep confidentiality a priority.

Make sure fans and followers of your page(s) don't feel like you're trying to sell them something. The goal of your social media site is to personalize your practice, and to make it feel less like the stereotypical cold, distant corporation. Your social media site is available for client interaction, for you to listen to your fans and followers, for directing fans and followers to your website, and for generally increasing your exposure to the public. According to Ed Murray of *Beyond Indigo*, options for postings can range from photos and quotes, to tips on pet care and coupons. See Figure 2 for more posting ideas.

The term "technology" can trigger anxiety, enthusiasm, or skepticism. Perhaps all three. Don't let the unknown stop you from taking advantage of the benefits you can reap. *Benchmarks 2011: A Study of Well-Managed Practices* will further pursue the benefits of technology, so stay tuned for more tips and insights. In the meantime, start with creating a website to direct more clients to your practice, increase the number of patients you help, and boost your bottom line. Move on to e-mail to save time and money, and to increase the effectiveness of your client communication and reminders. Finally, ease into Facebook, Twitter, or another social media site to build up your practice community, and invite new clients to experience your care and service. What are you waiting for? Technology beckons!



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Figure 1 – Website Capabilities

Can clients use your practice's website for the following purposes?
Here's what Well-Managed Practices said:

Client education	99%
E-mail communication with the doctors or staff	82%
Fill prescriptions	52%
Order food	49%
Schedule appointments	34%
Access patient information	33%
View pets when boarding	6%

Source: *Benchmarks 2009: A Study of Well-Managed Practices®*

Figure 2 – Social Media Postings

Consider the following ideas when posting to your Facebook, Twitter, or other social media page:

- Photos of clients, patients, the practice, or staff members (provided privacy isn't violated)
- History of your clinic
- Staff member biographies
- Welcome notes to new fans/followers
- Interesting cases (again, keeping confidentiality rules)
- Tips on pet healthcare, grooming, etc.
- Trends in veterinary medicine
- Interesting or helpful stories or websites
- Neat or funny videos
- Testimonials and quotes
- Specials, coupons, or promotions
- Events you're organizing or participating in

Source: *Benchmarks 2010: A Study of Well-Managed Practices* and Ed Murray of Beyond Indigo

To obtain additional information:

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