

Let's get clinical

Veterinary clinics provide a great way to enhance your practice and attract new customers, writes Louise Brennan, Veterinary Business Manager at Royal Canin



As competition continues to increase within a constantly changing veterinary market, vets and nurses cannot afford to simply rely on clients finding and coming to them, or remaining loyal to their practice for the duration of their pet's lives. This environment is leading veterinary professionals to seek out new and innovative solutions that will make their practice stand out, and encourage clients to use their services, products and expertise on an ongoing basis.

While there is work involved in setting up a nurses clinic – be it a weight loss clinic, puppy clinic, senior pet club or specialist service offering – the benefits can be huge for a practice, helping to boost profits and awareness of the services on offer. This could really help differentiate your practice from the competition.

Running clinics should significantly contribute to generating new business, by helping to build close relationships and bonds with both new and existing clients. With the right planning, marketing, promotion and continued assessment, a viable return on the time invested should be assured. The inclusion of clinics within a practice helps to provide a more integrated approach, where pets can benefit from multiple services in the same place, such as gaining the medical care they need, while also taking part in sociable activities such as puppy clinics. As this encourages owners to use the services on offer, it also ensures that pets benefit from an end-to-end health service, which can enhance their overall welfare.

PLANNING FOR A CLINIC

Prior to starting a clinic, it's important to create a thorough plan of how it will run in order to ensure financial success and manage the expectations of attendees.

Practices should consider the wider timetable and environment of clinics. They should be run at a quiet time at the practice, to avoid too much stress for the animals. This is particularly important when dealing with puppies and kittens.

Another key consideration is cost. Should you charge a fee or not? This is an individual decision for each practice, but it's necessary to place value on your time and accept that costs will be incurred by running the clinic. The objective of a clinic is to encourage repeat custom from new attendees and to enhance the practice-client bond. This should ultimately outweigh any initial set up costs. An enrolment fee can be considered to encourage attendance and combat any fears about a low turnout. If positioned smartly, an enrolment fee can be returned to the client on attendance at the consultation.

Finding a suitable host is also of critical importance. For

I BUSINESS

example, a vet nurse hosting a puppy clinic should have a good knowledge of how to safely introduce unknown puppies to each other and be able to clearly communicate with owners. In addition, they should possess knowledge in including parasite control, vaccinations, nutrition, neutering, dental care, insurance, microchipping, and grooming in order to effectively cross sell other services offered by the practice.

An experienced vet nurse would ideally fit the bill, but clinics also provide a great environment to learn new and practical skills for an enthusiastic student or newly-qualified nurse. In addition, specialised clinics (such as diabetic or skin care clinics) can provide experienced staff with useful opportunities to pursue specific areas of interest, ensuring high levels of staff satisfaction, continual professional development and gold standard customer care.

PROMOTING YOUR BUSINESS

Marketing is an essential aspect to factor in when launching a clinic. Promotional materials in reception and personalised invitations, will raise awareness among existing clients. Offering a new service to existing clients is an easy step to launch the clinic, while at the same time it can help encourage an old client to revisit the practice. Consider following the model of our human medical counter parts to reach new clients. A veterinary surgeon's referral during a consultation is very powerful and similar to that

of a GP referring a patient to a diabetic or nurse's clinic. The strength of making a referral appointment cannot be underestimated, so ensure veterinary surgeons always have referral appointment cards to hand in each consult room. The ever increasing use of online and social media should also form part of a clinic's promotional approach, this will inform new clients of the practice's areas of expertise and services available. Once the clinic is up and running, consider approaching a local newspaper with success stories and examples of the expertise available at the practice.

Internal marketing is important too and planned clinics should be communicated to the entire practice team. In general, it will predominantly be the veterinary surgeons and receptionists who are most involved in promoting and recruiting clients, and to have the best result they must be familiar with the details, purpose and processes involved in the clinics. Staff meetings can be a good way to communicate these details.

RETURN ON YOUR INVESTMENT

Setting up a clinic requires an investment of time from each member of the practice team and possibly a monetary input, depending on the type of clinic. To ensure a return on this investment, set out a list of areas where the practice expects to see an increase. For example, following a series of weight loss consultations, potential sales should be seen in cat and dog play toys to encourage exercise, interactive feeding tools, and selected diets recommended.

Be realistic about the number of consultations that can be scheduled in a given week and what is an expected result for practice sales. It is important to monitor all saleable items that are directly related to the advice of the clinic so results can be assessed and feedback used to adjust the clinic focus if necessary.

Remember the sale of a food diet alone will result in a new customer returning to the practice between eight and 12 times a year. This very effectively bonds the client to the practice and will lead to the sale of other over the counter items, such as flea and worm treatments, toys and veterinary clinical advice.

In summary, while there is certainly a time commitment involved in setting up and running a clinic, there are multiple benefits to the practice. By promoting staff expertise and areas of specialities, clinics can ensure the welfare of animals seen, encourage repeat visits by owners and improve the overall financial outlook of the clinic itself.



**Veterinary Ireland
Financial
Services Ltd.**

'Financial Solutions for a Better Tomorrow'

**A dedicated, professional advisory service for
members of Veterinary Ireland**

**Full Financial Reviews | Savings & Investments
Income Protection | Retirement Planning
Life Assurance | Business Protection | Health Insurance
Practice & Home Insurance | Motor & Travel Insurance**

**For more information please call
01 4577 987
or email
finance@vetireland.ie**