

OVMA Great Ideas 2019

HEAR WHAT YOUR CLIENTS REALLY WANT, AND HELP THE TEAM DELIVER IT

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People buy from people. This means that if anyone on your team makes clients feel undervalued, ignored or patronised then those customers won't come back. They'll also tell their friends. An excellent customer experience isn't a 'nice to have', it's essential if you want to attract and retain clients. Every other business sector understands the commercial significance of the customer experience, but the vet world has been slow to fully appreciate its power and importance. This session will share the findings of research and case studies from UK practices to illustrate and quantify the potential business opportunity for your practice when you truly embrace the need for an excellent customer experience.

Every single piece of research done with pet and horse owners, smallholders and farmers alike confirms that the most important factor when choosing a veterinary care provider is convenience. They want to be able to get to and contact the practice quickly. They want the phone answering when they call, and they want to receive advice tailored to their needs and those of their animals. They want to book appointments online, access test results quickly and speak to an expert quickly when needed. It sounds obvious, but so many practices overlook the basic principles and important tiny details that have such a vital impact on the customer experience.

First contact resolution

With 90% of initial client contact taking place on the phone, this is one crucial area where people and processes need to be optimised. The Onswitch Index programme calls over a thousand practices across Europe, Scandinavia and Australia every month. The evidence shows that many practices are still not grasping the vital importance of providing potential clients with the service they seek over the phone - yet these are people who have researched local practices and chosen you to call. They need veterinary care and they've chosen you to ask - why wouldn't you do everything you can to secure their business?

In this session we'll look at real data from practices that have used both the Onswitch Index reporting programme and the 5 Steps call handling model to measure and improve the quality and consistency of their telephone customer care:

1. Give a great greeting
2. Use the name of the owner as well as her pet / horse
3. Create an emotional connection
4. Provide additional information - leaflets or website
5. Offer an appointment

Demonstrating genuine care and building rapport with potential clients at this early stage of the customer journey is essential if you are to turn an enquiry into a loyal lifelong client. Owners

have plenty of choice when it comes to picking a veterinary practice and research finds that they are much more likely to choose those that are interested in the pet and really want to help.

Finessing face-to-face contact

The veterinary business model dictates that small animal practices should aim to convert 40% of calls into paid consults, but even once the owner is in the building her continued custom is not guaranteed. New and established clients alike will notice all the little things about your team; processes and building that you might miss, so it's important to pay attention to the detail when it comes to delivering an excellent customer experience. Areas to consider include:

- Is the practice exterior clean and tidy? Is parking available and well signed?
- Do notices and signs look fresh and recent, or dog-eared and faded?
- Are your out of hours contact details and opening hours clearly displayed on your website and on the door?
- Are posters and leaflets well organised and neatly displayed, or is there an overwhelming amount of information on show?
- Do cats and dogs have separate areas to wait, with high shelves and blankets available for nervous cats?
- Do the reception team welcome all visitors with a smile, even when they are on the phone? Positive body language and eye contact are so important when building rapport
- Does the practice feel calm and welcoming, or is there an air of mild chaos? (Loud TV, clutter, shabby paintwork and no uniforms)
- Is there a photo board showing all members of the team? Does everyone have a name badge? Are clinicians' names displayed on the consult room doors?

Each of these things, and many more important details, plays a role in shaping the client's impression of your practice. Taken individually they may be so small as to be thought insignificant, but together they *are* your practice - a business that hasn't provided toilet paper or dry towels for customers might just as easily be overlooking other details in the operating theatre.

Listening and hearing

Of course the customer experience isn't just about housekeeping; it is shaped by a wide range of senses and emotions. We'll also consider the importance of communication, sharing tips for active listening and handling difficult situations, such as KLARDOC:

Keep calm	
Listen	Put assumptions aside and really hear what the client is telling you
Acknowledge	Repeat what you have just heard, for clarity
Refine and Define	Summarise the key facts, aside from the emotion
Overcome	Present possible solutions and alternatives
Close	Thank the client and detail the timings of any further action

Almost always, a 'difficult' conversation stems from the fact that your client is frustrated, confused, worried or distracted. Understanding her state of mind and looking at the situation from her perspective will usually help inform a solution, and it always helps to use calming, reassuring language:

- Don't use technical language or practice jargon

- Keep your body language open and professional
- Speak at the same pace as her
- Repeat key words and phrases back to her
- Use open questions to ascertain what the problem is
- Ask politely for clarification of the issue, don't assume