

## GETTING THE BASICS OF YOUR BRAND RIGHT

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Veterinary practices need help in building their brand to thrive in today's socially connected world. The landscape of brand loyalty is changing. Things like excellent quality of medicine are becoming more standard. As a profession, we have to evolve to engage our clients on new levels so we can stand out from Dr. Google and big box retailers. By focusing on what makes the veterinary practice special, we can ensure our position as a vital necessity in pet healthcare.

- How do you set yourself apart?
- What factors do clients consider when choosing a veterinarian?
- What factors cause clients to stay with a practice?

By identifying these factors, practices can develop strategies and methods to deliver the ultimate client experience which builds brand loyalty. It is important to strategically develop and market your hospital using different platforms such as website, social media, apps, printed materials, and emails. Cross platform marketing will help your clients understand why you are different/better and build brand loyalty at the same time. It is equally important to closely examine how your brand "feels" inside your veterinary hospital (from scrubs, to front desk, to attitudes and messaging).

When it comes to having a brand, size doesn't really matter. If your mission is to be as big as Apple or as small as a single doctor veterinary practice, your new business will need a brand for your upcoming customers to engage with. And in order to deliver the right message to your customers about who you are and why you are fantastic and they should buy what you are selling, you are going to need to communicate that to them.

Even though designing a name and logo is probably the first thing you think about when building a brand, it is only one step in the process to set yourself up for success.

### 1. Figure out who you are and who you want to be

Your brand is the personality of your practice and the service you provide. The crux of your brand is your "why". Why are you doing this? Why should people buy your product/service? Why do you think you can do it better than other products/services on the market? By answering these questions, you can start to par it down to your brand message. Start with trying to tell your friends and family why you are starting your own company. They will have lots of questions and that is a good place to start. Then write it down so you can go back to it as you start to build and grow to keep you rooted in your purpose and vision.

- Exercise Step 1: Imagine your best client is at a cocktail party describing your business. What words would you want them to say? Think of as many adjectives and verbs to describe what your brand.
- Exercise Step 2: In order to identify who you want to be, it helps to think about who you do NOT want to be. Write down a story where you had a bad experience with a brand.

When you are done, complete this sentence: When this experience happened, it made me feel \_\_\_\_\_ and what I wish would have happened is \_\_\_\_\_. Then I would have felt \_\_\_\_\_.

- Exercise Step 3: Choose 3 key words from Step 1 that resonate most with your brand values.
- Exercise Step 4: Review the following key marketing pieces and write down what they are communicating about your brand: website, client handouts, social media, postcards, scrubs, furniture, artwork, sound, and smell.
- Exercise Step 5: Gather feedback from staff members. Ask the question “What words come to mind when you think of our hospital?”
- Exercise Step 6: Be your own customer. Call your practice to make an appointment, park in your parking lot, wait in the lobby 15 minutes, then wait in the exam room another 10 minutes. When the exam is done, get checked out and drive away. Actually pay money and then get in your car and drive away. Chances are you will have a lot of areas you need to improve and that is totally normal. Write down which areas need improvement.

## 2. Define your target customer

This is your Luke Skywalker moment where defining and understanding the target will improve your chance of success as you prepare for your Death Star attack. You are going to need to be very clear on who your ideal customer will be. Just throwing your idea out into the world without being directed to a certain type of person will be a waste of energy, time and money. Who are you building this for? Who will buy it? Then, stay in your lane. You will be tempted to stray into the next lane as the wrong customers start to engage with your product. And yes, there are “wrong” customers that your services won’t satisfy. These are people that will be excited about your product/service and think they can retrofit it into their system. For example, if your practice is a high end boutique practice with state of the art equipment, your target customer isn’t someone looking for a “deal”. They will likely become disappointed if they engage with your brand and your effort will have been wasted. It is critical that stay in your lane and protect your brand from engaging with the wrong customer. Instead, find your tribe, delight them to build reference customers and brand evangelists in the market.

## 3. Get a logo and do a brand vision session

Now that you have some framework for your brand, it’s time to get a logo, name and tagline for your company. Logos are an important piece to communicate your vibe to your tribe. Think of it as your Batman signal to your potential customers. It doesn’t have to be literal or even make sense to others but it should make sense visually and artistically. Just look at the Starbucks logo with no coffee in the image. Even though this image has nothing to do with coffee, it now means coffee to the world. Of course Starbucks created that association by offering a consistent service/product that appealed to a target group of people that enjoy an upscale individualized coffee experience and their Batman signal is the green goddess. There are resources online to help you get your logo but this is a good time to invest some money and work with a professional to create a design, color scheme, and font catalog to complement your brand vision and target customer appeal.

## 4. Design a strategy

Much the same as you prepare for an orthopedic surgery, you will need to prepare a strategy for your new brand in order to reach your customers. Where do your customers hang out? How can you get them to notice you and your awesome new product or service? This might mean digital and print marketing or hosting local education events where potential customers gather. This all requires a plan of attack to avoid overspending and get the highest return on your investment to create an actionable high-yielding plan.

A common new strategy to engage clients with your brand is to have a mobile app. This used to be very expensive and difficult but now it is very affordable to have your own mobile app for your clients. With over 77% of Americans having a smartphone and spending an average of 4 to 6 hours per day of their device, this is a no-brainer place to be with your brand. The goal is to have your icon next to Facebook on your client's home screen. You will be in their back pocket every day! And, when it comes time to communicate with your clients, you will have a captive audience at your fingertips for delivering important messages about outbreaks, pet food recalls, reminders to give parasite prevention or even news about a flash promotion.

Another place to promote your new brand is on social media. Unlike dentists and lawyers, veterinarians have a potential Facebook post every 30 minutes as you roll through your daily appointments. And, if your client is a millennial, this is a must! Social media storytelling, meaning telling a short story with a photo in the post is a great way to promote your brand values. Imagine you just met a new client with an adorable puppy or senior dog, snap a picture and tell something about them to your Facebook followers. My favorite is:

What's your nickname?

What's your favorite activity?

What's the weirdest thing you like to do?

Get ready to start getting some likes and comments! Plus, it's just plain fun to learn a little bit about your patients and be reminded of why you do what you do.

#### 5. Be consistent and persistent

It will take time to build your brand but it is important to keep consistent with your messaging and not give up. It will require persistence and full court press before you start to see an inkling of impact. Most people need to see and hear messaging multiple times before they take action. When you listen to a radio ad, the call to action is said no less than three times in a row in a 20 second slot so repeated consistent messaging about your brand is key. Your commitment to your business will be tested the most here so be fierce and be resilient!

In the end, your brand is going to require ongoing management so you don't fall into the trap of becoming stale, boring or irrelevant to your clients. And don't get it twisted, if you aren't managing your brand it doesn't mean you don't have one, it just means someone else is defining it for you.