

Training Your Team to Sell Products

Staff members take center stage when recommending products to clients. Use these scripts and role-playing exercises to ensure their success.

By Wendy S. Myers



At The Cat Clinic in Lenexa, Kan., Dr. Irene Shoemaker has trained her staff to recognize early aggressive behaviors in cats. After asking behavior questions and conducting a thorough physical exam, she suggests appropriate medical treatments and behavior products. Every product she carries is prescribed for a specific medical or behavioral problem. “A long time ago, I learned that it didn’t make sense to sell products if they weren’t part of my medical services,” Dr. Shoemaker says.

Professional and retail product sales can improve your hospital’s financial health. According to the 1999 Economic Report on Veterinarians and Veterinary Practices by the AVMA Center for Information Management, professional and retail product sales account for 27 percent of gross income in small animal practices—more than professional services (20 percent), vaccinations/deworming (16 percent), surgeries (13 percent), laboratory/diagnostics (9 percent), hospitalization (3 percent), radiology (3 percent), and dentistry (2 percent).

Such a significant revenue source deserves your attention. With effective training, staff members can describe, recommend, and demonstrate products. Because your employees are caring, informed pet owners, clients want to know what products they use on their own pets. The dialogue isn’t about selling a toy, tube of toothpaste, or pet food—it’s about selling a tool to help clients improve their pets’ health. Describing first-hand experiences and demonstrating authority lets staff members educate clients.

To help your team be effective communicators, role-play common scenarios such as:


- A client with an outdoor cat isn’t protecting her pet from heartworm infection.
- When you schedule a puppy’s neuter, the client questions the cost of a pre-anesthetic blood test.
- A client with a 6-year-old cat has never had her pet’s teeth cleaned and you see signs of advanced periodontal disease.
- A client uses an over-the-counter flea product from a grocery store.

Create scripts for your top-selling products to train new staff members and help seasoned employees brush up their skills. Try these scripts for your bestsellers. Listen for key phrases such as testimonials, demonstrations, and efficacy.


1. Flea preventives

"I use FRONTLINE® to protect my dog from fleas and ticks. This product is guaranteed to kill both fleas and ticks. Protecting your pet is important because ticks can transmit Lyme disease and other illnesses. Let me show you how easy it is to apply."


2. Heartworm preventives

 *"HEARTGARD® Plus treats and controls heartworms and five other intestinal parasites. It's easy to administer because dogs love the real-beef chewable. I give my dog HEARTGARD Plus year-round and buy the convenient 12-dose pack."*

3. Therapeutic pet foods

 *"Because Maggie is 10 pounds overweight, she may experience discomfort, reduced energy levels, and even a shorter life. Just as in people, weight gain is often caused by excessive calorie and fat intake combined with a lack of exercise. Obesity can lead to serious conditions such as heart disease, arthritis, and diabetes. To help Maggie drop extra pounds, I recommend feeding her Hill's Prescription Diet® r/d. This therapeutic pet food helps manage weight problems in dogs. I will give you a daily feeding guide and you should walk Maggie twice a day for 30 minutes each session. Maggie will enjoy spending more time with you and this food will help her convert fat to energy, feel full after eating due to increased fiber, and give her a shiny coat and healthy skin. We can send Maggie home with a 10- or 20-pound bag of Hill's Prescription Diet r/d. Which do you prefer today?"*

4. Behavior products

 *"You can prevent Duke from jumping on you and pulling the leash during walks with a behavior product called a Gentle Leader® Headcollar. The headcollar features two soft nylon straps. The collar portion fits high at the top of the neck, and the nose loop fits loosely across the base of the muzzle. Gentle Leader gives you control with humane restraint because pressure is applied at the back of the neck instead of the front of the throat. Let me show you how it works."*

We'll walk Duke around the reception area and in the parking lot so you can see how you can control his behavior in a gentle way."

5. Home dental care

"Now that we've reviewed the discharge instructions for your dental prophylaxis, let's talk about a home-care program with regular brushing, proper nutrition, and healthy treats. Tooth brushing



requires some training, just like 'sit' or 'stay.' First, choose a convenient time when you and your pet are relaxed. For the first few days, hold your pet and gently stroke the outside of the cheek with your finger for 1 to 2 minutes. After a few days, place a small amount of C.E.T. toothpaste on your finger and let your pet taste it. Then place a small amount of toothpaste on a fingerbrush and

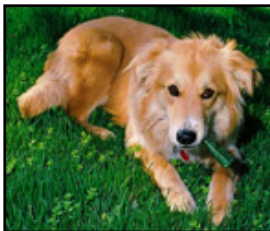
gently brush one tooth in a circular motion. Gradually increase the number of teeth until you're brushing 30 seconds per side. Your pet will have fresher breath and less tartar buildup."

"You can give your dog a dental chew such as Greenies,[®] a treat in the shape of a toothbrush-bone that reduces tartar and freshens breath. The ingredients in Greenies help reduce odors, control tartar and plaque, strengthen gums, and diminish oral bacteria. You can give your dog one Greenie per day as a treat."

"I feed my cat this dental diet. After just a few weeks, I noticed fresher breath and cleaner teeth. I know it will work for your cat, too. Let me explain how it cleans teeth and how you can switch your cat to a dental diet..."

6. Therapeutic shampoos

"Just like your skin, your puppy's skin can become dry and irritated. ETIDERM™ Shampoo contains 10 percent ethyl lactate, a gentle anti-bacterial ingredient with a moisturizer. Unlike ordinary shampoos, this one won't dry or irritate your puppy's sensitive skin. Would you prefer the 8-ounce or 16-ounce size today?"



With practice, you and your staff can turn role-playing and scripts into heartfelt conversations with tailored recommendations that help clients select the right products for their pets. Remember, every client is tuned into WIFM—What's In It For Me? Focus on the benefits of your veterinary-recommended products and explain the advantages for their

pets. Using phrases such as “Your dog will be free of fleas within 24 hours and you’ll both get a good night’s sleep tonight” will result in more sales and happier clients.

About the Author:



Wendy S. Myers owns Communication Solutions for Veterinarians in Denver. Her consulting firm helps teams improve compliance, client service and practice management. Communication Solutions for Veterinarians has provided mystery phone shopper training to more than 2,600 receptionists nationwide. Wendy is a partner in Animal Hospital Specialty Center, a 13-doctor AAHA-accredited referral practice offering internal medicine, surgery, neurology, oncology, specialty dentistry, and emergency care in Highlands Ranch, Colorado. She is the author of four books and five videos. Subscribe to Communication Solutions for Veterinarians' e-newsletter on our website at: www.csvets.com. E-mail Wendy at: wmyers@csvets.com.