

## Keeping Flea Control in Your Practice

Strategies to compete with online and discount retailers

By Wendy S. Myers



When Menards ran a newspaper coupon for Frontline, receptionists at a suburban Chicago hospital worried that clients would buy flea control at the discount retailer rather than their hospital. One week later during a hospital consultation in Portland, I overheard a client tell a staff member that he buys his dog's medication online because it's cheaper. With today's economy, clients may seek the best price for preventatives or skip necessary doses. Here's how you can protect your hospital's preventative sales:

**Leverage free doses and rebates.** Manufacturers offer veterinary exclusive perks. At the Chicago practice where staff fretted about the \$10 Menards coupon, clients get one dose free when buying a six pack of Frontline. After subtracting the \$17 value of the free dose, the hospital's price was cheaper than the discount retailer's. Unlike Menards' employees, the hospital's staff is well trained in parasite prevention and can recommend a specific product that best meets each pet's needs.

**Offer preventative refills upon check-in.** Whether a client is buying food or checking in for a veterinary appointment, ask each, "What preventative refills can I get for you today?" Saying "what" subtly indicates the client needs a refill and is stronger than "Do you need any Frontline today?" which is a yes-or-no answer.

**Give clients a financial incentive to buy a 12-month supply.** Vary your markup on single, six-, and 12-pack doses. For example, a single dose might have a 125% markup because you have to break original packaging, print a prescription label, provide a product insert, and perform the same transaction 12 times throughout the year. This higher markup pays for additional staff labor. A six pack markup could be 100%, while a 12 pack is 75%. Clients save the most when buying a 12-month supply. Rewarding year-round compliance is best for pets and best for your business.



**Look for preventative compliance when preparing charts.** Many receptionists pull medical records today for tomorrow's appointments. Paperless practices may use a check-in report that summarizes reminder status. Look in the medical record or on the computer for the date of last preventative purchase, products sold, and number of doses

sold. For example, a patient had vaccines and diagnostic testing a year ago and is here today for wellness services. When reviewing the record, you see that the client purchased a six pack of preventatives last year, indicating she's been out for the past six months. Revisit the importance of year-round protection, explain the need for annual heartworm and intestinal parasite testing, and sell the client a 12 pack of preventatives today. Also watch for clients who may share a box of preventatives between two or more pets. You'll need to figure out how many doses each pet received and try to dispense individual preventatives in the future.

**Promote broad spectrum products.** Preventatives such as Sentinel, Advantage Multi, and Revolution control more than fleas. Depending on the brand, the added protection from heartworms, intestinal parasites, ear mites, and other parasites could save clients money compared to using multiple products.

**Offer your own online store.** According to the 2008 PetMed Express annual report, 69% of sales are non-prescription flea and tick products. If clients want the convenience of online ordering and home delivery, add an online store to your website. Vendors such as Pet Portals, NLS, Butler Animal Health, and Vetcentric can integrate online shopping into your website and ship orders to your clients. You set prices and approve all prescriptions.

Your online store also can feature special order foods, compounded medications, or preventatives you don't commonly stock in the hospital. Vendors who operate your online store can e-mail clients on the day of the month to give preventatives and remind them to repurchase on your behalf. These compliance builders significantly improve revenue. While vendors keep a small percentage of each sale, it's better than losing the entire transaction to an internet pharmacy.

When striving to keep flea control in your practice, remember to promote the benefits of buying from you. A strong doctor-client-patient relationship will help clients trust your recommendations, so they'll be less likely to browse internet pharmacies or retail shelves.

### **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](http://www.csvets.com). E-mail Wendy at: [wmyers@csvets.com](mailto:wmyers@csvets.com).