

Professional Ways to Promote Products

You won't feel like a salesperson with these techniques

By Wendy S. Myers

Practice owners often ask me, “How can I get my staff to recommend products without feeling like salespeople?” Remember, you’re selling high-quality products that pets need to maintain optimal wellness. You can promote products through passionate client education and pricing strategies.

Here’s how to professionally and convincingly present products:

Move products into exam rooms. Keep a small quantity of frequently recommended items in exam room cabinets or on display shelves. At Durango Animal Hospital in Las Vegas, Dr.



Mark Beerenstrauch has a passion for dentistry and discusses dental products during wellness exams. He recommended a drinking water additive to a client with two Australian Shepherds as part of their home-care regimen. Dr. Beerenstrauch explained how the product worked and its benefits. The client said, “Great. I’ll take one for each dog.” A technician then put prescription labels on each bottle.

Label every product that leaves your hospital—whether or not it’s a prescription item. Clients need to know which pet the item is for, how to use it, and where to repurchase it.

At another hospital, the practice owner hung wall-mounted shelves in exam rooms to display preventatives. When a doctor took a client’s cat to the treatment area to collect samples and returned to the exam room, he caught her stuffing the displayed boxes under a towel inside the cat’s carrier. The veterinarian smiled and said, “I’m glad you found the Heartgard and Frontline. I’ll just have the receptionist add those items to today’s services.” Embarrassed, the client paid for the products she was stealing. That’s why you should display empty boxes for expensive items such as preventatives. You want products in view but out of reach.

Instead, doctors and staff should recommend a specific product and retrieve it from an exam cabinet or the nearby pharmacy. Place the item on the exam table so the client can see and touch it. If she picks it up, you’re one step closer to closing the sale.

Bundle dental products with professional cleanings. When you build group codes in your veterinary software, include an OraVet professional application and a home-care product of your choice such as a toothbrush and toothpaste, drinking water additive, rinse, gel, or dental diet.

Clients who just invested several hundred dollars in a professional dental cleaning have already made a financial commitment to their pets' oral health. Including dental products in the professional service starts home-care habits and stretches the length of time between cleanings.

Provide parasite training twice a year. Experienced staff members talk about fleas, ticks, heartworms, and intestinal parasites all day long. Are they bored with the subject? New employees need to know which products you recommend and how they work. That's why you should schedule parasite training with a pharmaceutical representative twice a year. Following the training, quiz employees on the differences between products, rebates and free doses for pack purchases, and the frequency of product use.



Send e-mails about products. Confirm clients' e-mail addresses at check-in, explaining that you're going green and sending e-mails for pets' reminders and refills. Veterinary software companies and vendors such as Vetstreet's Pet Portals (www.petportals.com) and Butler Animal Health's home delivery solutions powered by VetSource (www.vetsource.com) offer online stores for your practice website and e-mail reminders.

You establish an account with a vendor, choose which products you want to feature on your website, set prices, and authorize all prescription requests that come from clients through your site. The vendor manages inventory and ships orders directly to clients. You get sales reports to see which items are best-sellers and who is buying online.

As a consultant, I recommend having the same prices online and in-clinic. A practice owner learned this lesson after a new client was outraged to learn she could have saved \$20 on medications purchased from the hospital's website rather than during her visit.

You can send broadcast e-mails to active clients or select those who previously purchased a product. E-mails can be personalized with clients' and pets' names. Here's a sample e-mail to promote a product: "Fall is here, but fleas and ticks are still around. We want to make sure Duke

as well as your family are protected against these harmful parasites. Stop by our hospital today to get Frontline Plus, or call us at 555-555-5555 so we can have your medication ready for pick up. If you want to order online and enjoy the convenience of home delivery, click here to connect to our hospital's online store."

Offer savings when clients buy in bulk. To compete with internet pharmacies, a hospital offered a 60-count NSAID bottle for a 10% discount. Dispensing a full bottle saved the practice the cost of a vial and technician time to count pills.

As a consultant, I suggest different markups for preventatives based on the quantity purchased. For example, a 12 pack has an 80% markup, a six pack is 100%, and a single dose is the highest at 120%. Greater savings motivates clients to buy year-round protection.

Here is a pricing example for Heartgard, 51-100 pound dose:

Dose size	Markup	Retail cost per dose	Total retail price	Savings compared to single dose
Single dose	120%	\$10.20	\$10.20	\$0.00
Six pack	100%	\$8.50	\$51.00	\$10.20
12 pack	80%	\$7.08	\$85.00	\$37.44

To show clients the savings on packs, create a similar chart (minus the markup column, of course!), laminate it, and keep it at the front desk. If Mrs. Jones asks for a single dose of Heartgard, the receptionist would reply, "I'm happy to get Max's medication for you. A single dose costs \$10.20 plus tax. If you'd like to spend less per dose, here are our savings for six and 12 packs." The receptionist shows the chart to the client so she can see the greater savings of packs compared to a single dose. This subtle sales approach will convert many single dose users to packs.

Calculate the cost per day for therapeutic diets. Clients assume a 20-pound bag of Hill's Prescription Diet w/d for dogs is expensive at \$38.99. But the bag will feed a 40-pound dog for 30 days for an average cost per day of \$1.30. That's cheaper than a 10-ounce can of Nature's Recipe Farm Stand Selects Lamb at \$2.49.

Switch pets to healthy treats. Sold in retail stores, a large Busy Bone Dental Chew costs \$3.99 and has 600 calories, which equals about 1 ½ cups of dry dog food. Compare this treat to a healthier alternative your hospital sells. A 5-ounce box of Purina Veterinary Diets Dental Chews retails for \$4.99 and has 56 calories each. That's less than \$0.72 per treat! Purina

Veterinary Diets Dental Chews also carry the Veterinary Oral Health Council seal of acceptance (www.vohc.org). Another healthy alternative is Purina Lite Snackers at 15 calories per biscuit, compared to a large Milk-Bone at 115 calories.

Clients expect you to recommend products that will help their pets experience optimal wellness. Suggest a brand that you sell and teach clients about the affordability of veterinary products.

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.