

Recharge Revenue During Seasonal Downturns

When business gets slow, rejuvenate your client service

By Wendy S. Myers



High anxiety could strike your practice as the seasonal downturn approaches. But cooler temperatures and a chilly economy doesn't mean less practice income. You could have a record-breaking winter thanks to client-service initiatives.

Gather staff members for a brainstorming session to plan your approach for slower months. Ask your team to discuss these questions:

- What daily tasks do we sometimes skip when it's busy that we could reactivate during slower months?
- What callbacks do we consistently make and which ones do we sometimes overlook?
- Which services should we add reminders for? Consider dentistry and medication monitoring for pets on long-term drugs.
- How would you describe a perfect veterinary visit from the client's perspective? How could we make those ideas happen in daily practice?
- What business growth ideas do we have for the New Year?
- What new services should we explore offering?

Write every idea on an easel pad. Pick the top two or three you will implement and assign teams to each project. Keep the brainstorming notes to pull out again when you're ready to try the next ideas. To get creative thoughts flowing, here's a collection of client-service ideas that will build your business:

1. Know clients' and pets' names.
2. Stand to greet clients when they walk in the front door.
3. Offer coffee, tea and bottled or dispensed water in your lobby. One of my favorite low-maintenance and non-messy coffee makers is Keurig single serve gourmet coffee and tea brewing system, available at Costco.
4. Shake new clients' hands.

5. Have leash hooks on reception counters.
6. Keep an umbrella stand by the front door filled with golf-sized umbrellas for rainy days.
7. Have a squeaky clean and well-supplied restroom.
8. Give new clients a tour before or after the appointment.
9. Put pets' photos in your veterinary software so the image prints on invoices, treatment plans and exam report cards.
10. Tell clients "Let me help you to the car with your food" rather than asking "Do you need any help out to the car?"
11. Place digital photo frames near client seating areas in the lobby and in exam rooms. Include images of dentistry, a hospital tour, boarding and more in this educational slideshow.



12. Give every new client a welcome kit or folder with information about your services and product samples.
13. Use proper vocabulary with clients, including welcoming phrases such as "Good morning," "I'll be happy to..." or "you're welcome" instead of "no problem."
14. Wear a nametag so clients know who you are and your role in the practice.
15. Call clients about pets' progress after being discharged from the hospital.
16. Give clients your business card.
17. Mail thank-you notes to clients who refer new patients.
18. Have magnets on the reception counter and in new client welcome kits.
19. Provide an exam report card so family members who were not present for the veterinary visit understand the doctor's recommendations.
20. Present the invoice to show value for the veterinary visit, reading services and products off the computer screen and then stating the total. "Wendy, today Ollie had a comprehensive physical exam, senior blood work and urinalysis, an intestinal parasite test, and vaccines to protect him from feline distemper and Rabies. Does Ollie need any preventatives, medication refills or food today?" (Client responds.) "Your total today is \$_____. Which payment method are you using today?"

21. Present the invoice in the exam room if the bill is \$750 or higher. Review services provided, home-care instructions and collect payment. In the privacy of an exam room, the client can openly ask questions without others overhearing the conversation. You also can address financial issues in private. Imagine a new client standing behind a client who is checking out and hearing the invoice is \$1,000—and she's next!

22. Ask every client at check-in whether she needs medication refills or food. Then you can have items ready at checkout once the exam is finished.

23. Provide a complimentary nail trim for patients receiving surgical or dental services and list the service on the invoice.

24. Take before-and-after dental photos.

25. Thank clients for their business during checkout. "Wendy, it was great to see you and Ollie today. Please call us if you have additional questions."

26. Offer extra walks or playtimes for holiday boarders for a few dollars per day.

27. Tie holiday bows on grooming pets.

When you consistently exceed clients' expectations and provide quality medical care, your practice will thrive no matter what the economy. Existing clients will buy more services and products when they're satisfied with the value your hospital provides as well as refer like-minded new 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.