The “Magic Formula” for Practice Revenue Generation: Tips for the Whole Practice Team

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Peer Reviewed

Increase the Number of Client Visits
- Consider the extended pet family. Ask about other pets in the family during every visit. Not only is this information an important part of a patient’s environmental history, but it also helps the owners recognize the needs of those pets not present today. Encourage follow-up and offer to schedule an appointment.
- Build referrals. Establish strategies to extend genuine gratitude to clients who refer their friends to your practice. Consider thank you cards (preferably handwritten and signed by the attending veterinarian), clinic "logo" gifts, and gift certificates to local restaurants or community events. Use your computer to track thank you gifts for each client, so the same expressions of gratitude are not repeated.

Incorporate Efficiency Systems
- Prepare wellness care take-home packets/kits in advance. Collections of educational materials and product samples can be assembled and stored by category for pediatric and senior patients, patients receiving dental care, and patients with other common needs. Of course, you will want to personalize each packet with a photograph of the pet taken during the current visit!
- Computer-assisted protocols. Rely on your computer system to announce the arrival and check-in of a scheduled client/pet to waiting staff members in the treatment area of the hospital, eliminating unnecessary client waiting time. Clients’ expectations for prompt service will be surpassed, and your team will be able to see more patients per hour.

Follow up with Clients
- Schedule follow-up visits at the time of checkout whenever possible. Advise clients that you can always change the appointment time later if it proves to be inconvenient for them. Mention that you will be calling the following day to check on the pet and ask if there is a preferred time or contact method.

Promote Your Practice
- Plan your online presence. Websites, blogs, pet portals, Facebook, e-newsletters, and email correspondence are all effective marketing avenues. Regular updates and monitoring are critical to keeping your electronic outreach current and fresh. Divide client lists into subcategories to target different groups.

Increase Revenue per Average Client Transaction
Eliminate Missed Charges
- Cross-check medical records with invoices. Assign the task of random selection of 20 medical charts each week for review of charges and comparison with actual invoices.
- Assign responsibility for invoicing in specific areas of hospital service. The veterinarian may not be the best person for the job. Work together to be sure charges are complete and accurate. You might consider incorporating a system in which 2 staff members work together to finalize charges for a patient visit or hospitalized patient ready for discharge.
- Enter charges as you go for hospitalized patients. Compare the invoice with the fee estimate and review the final invoice for accuracy before presenting it to the owner.
Ensure an Appropriate Product Mix
- Maintain an inventory of products that support your service offerings. For example, a selection of pet toothpaste, dental hygiene supplies, and dental preventive diets arranged in attractive “point of purchase” or exam room displays will reinforce your recommendation for home dental care. Your clients trust your advice and therefore the products you offer. Client education and convenience complete the package. Owners will come back for more!

Use a Well-designed Fee Structure
- Use tools such as AAHA’s Veterinary Fee Reference to evaluate your fees in comparison with those of other practices in your geographic area and within your specialty. Monitor and adjust your fees at regular intervals in accordance with changes in expenses and local economic climate.

Offer Comprehensive Treatment Plan/Fee Estimates
- Let your computer do the work. Create estimate groups for commonly performed services such as spay/neuter.
- Prepare estimates in advance whenever possible. Anticipate that clients will ask. Your final negotiated health care plan will not be complete until the estimate is discussed and approved by your client. Estimates are also a great opportunity for client education.
- Avoid giving estimates over the phone. We can’t know everything about the health of our patients until they are examined. We provide individualized care tailored to the needs of each patient.
- Be sure to update clients regarding unanticipated charges during the course of their pet’s care. You need their consent and guidance. Don’t risk the loss of trust due to surprise charges. You may not get it back!

Build Client Trust in Your Healthcare Recommendations
- Establish a system to document special client circumstances, concerns, and needs in the patient record. This will provide a client “history” that will be useful when a different staff member assists the client on his or her next visit. The client will be assured that you communicate with each other and details don’t get lost.

Increase BOTH Client Visit Numbers and Average Client Transaction
Build Strong Practice Teams
- Commit to continuing education and training for veteran and new team members alike. All staff members should be familiar with components of both core and advanced health care services and products, and be able to answer clients’ most commonly asked questions.
- Plan team celebrations that promote camaraderie. Have some fun!

Educate Clients
- Offer monthly client education seminars and demonstrations pertaining to pet wellness, preventive care, common illnesses, or public health concerns. Rotate the opportunity for presentation among interested staff members. Consider topics such as Puppy’s (Kitten’s) First 4 Months, Making the Senior Years Golden, and Troubleshooting the Most Common Pet Behavior Problems for Dogs (Cats). Some clients may also enjoy learning more about your ICU, the details of general anesthesia, or about common illnesses such as diabetes mellitus.
- Ask, “Have I answered all your questions today?” At the conclusion of their visit or conversation, be sure clients are content with the information you have provided. Always offer to answer any additional questions they may think of later: “Feel free to call us any time with your concerns.”
Enhance Client Communication

- Consider each client as an individual with unique needs and expectations for their pet’s care. Commit to taking the time to really listen as clients answer the questions you ask. Then use this information in the development of a health care plan.
- Michael Paul, DVM, says it well. Know what clients want:
  - To have a real relationship with their veterinarians
  - To be treated with respect
  - To be included in medical decisions
  - To be greeted and introduced by name

Partner with Clients in Shared Decision Making (“Compliance”)

- In your mind, combine your beliefs about the best medicine for patients with what you learn about the clients’ needs and expectations for their pets’ care. Propose the ideal plan. Be ready to answer questions and provide a treatment plan/fee estimate. Be prepared to consider Plan B (or C or D) as an alternative should the owner steer away from the ideal. Don’t be disappointed if you don’t gain full acceptance. The client will respect you for your understanding and flexibility, will tell all their friends, and will be back. Return business feeds the formula!

Offer an Optimal Service Mix

- Survey your clients. Determine which of your existing services clients “need to have,” find “nice to have,” and “would like to have.” You might pick up on some missed opportunities.
- Consider adding the following services:
  - Acupuncture
  - Ultrasound
  - Advanced dentistry
  - Hospice care (expanded end-of-life care services)
- Consider refining the following service offerings:
  - Weight management
  - Pain management
  - Behavior medicine, counseling, and wellness
  - Exotic pet medicine
  - Prepaid wellness plans
  - Endocrine disease monitoring
  - Preanesthetic testing and patient evaluation

Practice Best Medicine

- Set standards of care in all areas of veterinary service. Practice owners may provide a framework and solicit contributions from team members to personalize these standards for the practice. With contribution comes ownership and accountability.
- Develop strategies to monitor compliance with these standards. This does not mean only noticing performance that does not comply. Use successful compliance efforts as a way to mark desired performance and progress toward revenue goals.

Build a Practice Culture of Trust and Integrity

- Charge fairly for services and products.
- Make promises and keep them.
- Invest in the growth of team members.
- Get to know each other and your clients; people can only trust people they know.