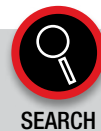


Promoting Excellence
in Animal Health Sales

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Catch us if you can

AAHA's first Practice of the Year stays a step ahead of the competition, and its distributor sales rep is part of the picture

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Summer Time Blues?

Snap Out of It!



I will admit, I'm addicted to both the financial and political news. It is something I gravitate toward each morning because it has a direct effect on the business climate, the animal health industry and my own business. Unfortunately, this has not been a summer full of good news. The unemployment rate remains high, the government is spending at record levels, our debt is at dangerous levels, new taxes are coming, the regulatory environment is stifling, the new financial reform bill will likely tighten credit even further, and businesses don't know what's coming next, which is killing the incentive for making investments. It is an uncertain economic climate.

So have I got you feeling blue yet? Well, snap out of it! Your customers are counting on you. Here are my suggestions for keeping positive, which center around helping your customers and improving your own business.

- Remember you are in the animal health industry, the one business that has grown at well above the GDP in good times and bad times. We are blessed to be in this business.
- Keep it positive with your customers and continue to bring them solutions that improve their businesses. Help them develop new revenue streams, contain costs and operate more efficiently. They'll love you for it.
- If they need it, give your customers a shoulder to cry on, but then lift them up. Visits are down? Tell them about strategies some of your other customers are using to bring in business.
- Commit to being a student of the business. Spend more time learning about the products you sell and your customer's needs, and a little less time reading the political and financial news. Personally, this has helped me a great deal.
- Stay balanced. The most effective salespeople are able to blend work, family, hobbies and vacation, which reduces the stress in their lives.

This has been a very good year for the animal health industry and it will continue. So do your best to ignore the news you cannot change today, and focus on the things that are more in your control, like your customer's success. If they win, you do too.

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Catch us if you can

AAHA's first Practice of the Year stays a step ahead of the competition, and its distributor sales rep is part of the picture

A sales rep's business mirrors that of his or her veterinary hospital customers. Just as the hospital must work hard to establish trust with its clients, so too must the sales rep work hard to establish trust with his or her customers. Both do that by demonstrating that they have their clients' or customers' best interests in mind, at all times. It's a scenario that has unfolded in Chelmsford, Mass., home of Countryside Veterinary Hospital, recently named the inaugural winner of the AAHA-Accredited Practice of the Year award by the American Animal Hospital Association.

"You have to be trustworthy and true to your clientele and the patients you're caring for," says Countryside



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Practice Manager Gayle Craig, CVPM. “The No. 1 thing is to put the patients’ best interests first. Anything we do – any new product we put in our retail area, any new service we’re thinking of offering – we always first ask, ‘Is this something that will promote the health and well-being of the pets in our community?’ That really is the whole key.”

“There are two big things I try to do as a sales rep,” adds Tim Quackenbush, territory manager for Butler Schein Animal Health, who has been calling on Countryside for about 15 years. “No. 1 is trust. There’s a lot of competition out there – other distributors, the Internet. Why should they buy from me? So I try to establish trust. Can they trust me with ideas? Can they trust me to steer them in the right direction, give them a fair price? And along with that is value. I try to be a consultant for my customers. I’m not just selling products. I’m selling services, value and trust. I’m here for the long run.”

Taking the next step

In 1985, Brian Holub, DVM, bought a small, one-doctor hospital in Chelmsford. A year or two later, he overhauled the building, adding a grooming parlor and boarding space. It was the first of several make-overs for the practice.

Several years later, as the hospital’s client base grew, Countryside embarked on

another project, adding offices and expanding the boarding area. Later in the ’90s, the hospital expanded its retail and grooming areas, and brought additional groomers on staff.

Then, in 2004, Craig traveled to Washington, D.C., in order to become certified in veterinary practice management through the



Tim Quackenbush

“I try to be a consultant for my customers. I’m not just selling products. I’m selling services, value and trust. I’m here for the long run.”

Veterinary Hospital Managers Association. “They were offering a tour of a newly renovated, 24-hour veterinary hospital – Friendship Hospital in Washington,” she recalls. She was impressed by the place. She noted the technology, including flat-screen TVs in the waiting room for the clients, as well as the fact that the pharmacy was located directly behind the front desk, making it easy for clients to speak with the pharmacist on duty and get their medications. “Pharmacy can be a bottleneck if it’s not located close to the front desk,” she notes.

Full of ideas, she came back to Chelmsford and talked with Dr. Holub about how Countryside could take the next step in its development. At that point, the hospital was 10,500 square feet. By the time the next building project was over in March 2007, it measured 15,000 square feet.

‘Stunning’

“When you approach the place, visually, it’s stunning,” says Quackenbush, whose territory spans Greater Boston. “As you drive by, your assumption is, ‘They really

care about their practice.’” And when you go inside, that assumption is validated, he says.

Indeed, the waiting area is spacious, bright and beautiful. It’s equipped with a comfort station, with water, tea, coffee and snacks. Medical services are located to one side of the desk, and a large, well-outfitted retail area is on the other.

At the retail store, clients can pick up collars, leashes, bowls, food, dental supplies “and fun things you buy on a whim,” such as jackets and toys, says Craig. “It’s as beautiful a retail store as you’ll see anywhere,” adds Quackenbush. What’s more, Countryside invites clients to compare its prices with those of Internet-based companies. “They can compete,” says Quackenbush.

Always a step ahead

In many ways, Countryside manages to stay a step or two ahead of many of its competitors, notes Quackenbush. The hospital has been accredited by AAHA since 1991. “We have a vision to be among the highest tiered veterinary practices in the country,” says Holub. “We want to be a practice that others emulate.” Some examples:

- **Physical therapy suite.** Added in the most recent renovation, the physical therapy department is under the direction of long-time Countryside veterinarian Jackie Jacobs, DVM, CCRP, who attended classes at the University of Tennessee to become a certified canine rehabilitation practitioner. Today, the PT department includes an underwater treadmill, a Jog-A-Dog (land) treadmill, cold laser, neuromuscular electrostimulation, therapeutic ultrasound and more.
- **Full-service lab.** Countryside invested in lab equipment years ago, and today runs most tests, including pre-anesthetic blood



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screens, onsite. (Exceptions are histopathology and tests for which cultures must be grown.) The result: Clients get lab results quicker, and Countryside doctors can take appropriate action for their pets sooner.

- **Grooming parlor.** Grooming services are offered seven days a week, at any time the hospital is open (8 p.m. most evenings, Saturdays till 4 and Sundays till 2). The parlor includes a HydroSurge® bathing system and Clipper Vac® system to facilitate the removal of clipped hair. Day-long spa packages are available, as are toenail polishing and even hair-dyeing services. Countryside also offers a special “puppy grooming series” to acclimate puppies to the grooming parlor and procedure.
- **Pet fitness programs.** The Countryside Furry Fitness Weight Loss Club brings together dogs and their owners once a month to work on their pets’ weight loss programs. Meanwhile, the Countryside Fit & Fun Playgroup meets one to two times weekly for 90-minute sessions, and is aimed at dogs who need to burn off excess energy and perhaps lose some weight.

But the bottom line at Countryside is veterinary care. To that end, the hospital’s veterinarians offer laparoscopy, digital radiography, color Doppler, ultrasound and other advanced services.

People power

Countryside’s physical plant, technologies and even know-how are great, but there’s more to running a successful hospital than even those three things. “You can have best equipment and veterinarians, but if your support staff and veterinarians don’t have a good bedside manner, or if they don’t take time to know their clients, you’re in trouble,” says Craig.

“Clients come to see you because they want what’s best for their pet. But if the person offering that care is not friendly, kind and empathetic, or if [clients] feel you don’t actually know their pets, or that you’re fake or not genuine, they’ll go to somebody else.”

Countryside works hard to ensure that its staffers do indeed keep the best interests of clients and their pets in mind – and that they demonstrate it day after day. For example, all staff members in their first year of employment receive training on six core areas, including flea/tick products, basic lab tests, and the basics of anesthesia and surgery. With such knowledge, they can help answer clients’ questions wherever they arise.

Instead of employing “kennel attendants,” Countryside employs “animal care specialists.” In addition to walking, feeding and cleaning up after pets in the kennel, these specialists are

trained to administer fluids, restrain pets for ultrasound procedures, administer certain vaccines and take X-rays, “all within the law and under the watchful eye of veterinarians,” says Craig.

“Your front desk is make-or-break for your hospital.”

– Gayle Craig, CVPM

Staff members at the front desk aren’t called receptionists, they’re called “client relations specialists.” That’s because they do much more than answer the phone, transfer calls and make appointments, says Craig. “They are trained to be excellent customer service specialists,” she says. “They keep an eye on patients in the waiting room, act as an advocate for the client and patient, and keep things moving. They’re much more educated and they do so many more things than the term ‘receptionist’ implies.

“Your front desk is make-or-break for your hospital. You can have the best technicians from a medical standpoint, but if the person at the front desk couldn’t care less about the client or the pet, that client won’t come back. So you need people who are good at relating to clients and pets in order to build a bond and connection.”

Distributor’s role

Quackenbush doesn’t take credit for Countryside’s success and forward-thinking attitude. But he likes to think he plays a role in it. “I try to do consultative selling,” he says. “I try to be the eyes and ears about what’s going on in the industry, so I can give them feedback...about what other veterinarians are doing. They do ask questions, and they value my input. And I learn from them in terms of all the technology they have in place. I always use Countryside as a reference. I tell my other customers, ‘If you want information, go to Countryside.’

“My business really mirrors their business,” he continues. “They have to establish trust with their clients. If a client walks in their door, the question is, ‘Why do they keep coming back?’” The same holds true for his customers: Why do hospitals continue to conduct business with him? The answer is simple: Trust. ■



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Customer care actions that grow sales



By John Graham

It's easy for just about anyone in business – including companies, salespeople and marketers – to fall into a “pattern” when dealing with customers. We all develop shortcuts to help simplify our daily routines. With more to do and less time to do it a smoother routine is appealing. While such an approach may help us get through the day, it can also be dangerous, particularly when the competition is waiting for even the slightest opening that may get them through the door.

Customers don't want to be taken for granted or receive attention only when we want to sell them something. They respond positively to the signals that say, “We really appreciate having you as a customer.”

Here are valuable customer care actions that will help to enhance customer satisfaction and that will build sales:

Contact customers when it's not necessary. Apple consultant Craig Batt of MacShaman checks with clients a week or so after doing a job. Not only does he ask for feedback on what he did, but he passes along helpful information that's not directly related to his work. It sends the message that he not only appreciates the work, but the relationship as well.

Let them know how much you like working with them. Why take a chance or why assume that they do know? Letting them know in writing why you like working with them puts it squarely on the record. And it usually winds up in a frame hanging on the wall in the customer's office. If you don't tell them, how will they know?

Ask them what you could do to make working with you easier. Even when you have a good working relationship with a customer, there still may be something that bothers them. While it may not be a relationship breaker, it can still be a burr under the saddle. It's always good to uncover the issue and get rid of it.

Tell their story to others. Word-of-mouth has power, perhaps more than ever. So, when it's appropriate and you have the opportunity, speak up about your clients. “I know that company and they're good people. They've always treated me fairly.” Such words carry weight.

Pass along leads. A good lead may be the greatest gift you can give anyone. A customer will appreciate it far more than tickets to a game or a round of golf. Although a lead is free, it has tremendous value for the recipient. It also shows that you care.



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Do something a little extra. Bill Donahue, the owner of Crown Supply, an electrical and fire alarm wholesaler in Providence, R.I., always thanks his customers for doing business with him. Then, he realized that it's the people in the field who call and actually place the orders. It's their loyalty that makes the difference. Donahue knows they can call other supply houses. He sends a personal thank you to them several times a year, along with a gift card.

Make suggestions for improving their operation. Your knowledge base is unique and your experience can complement that of your customers. Your helpful suggestions give meaning to being a partner.

Pass along helpful information. Customers will view you as a resource if you pass along useful information. Whether it's an article or an idea, it lets them know that you are thinking of them.

Lend a hand. Every customer has a crisis or some time when they need help. Ed Testa of Champion Capital, an equipment leasing company, spends a lot of time at trade shows, but not where you might expect. You won't find him at a Champion Capital booth. He'll be busy working a client's booth. "They're always short handed," he says, "and they appreciate the extra help." He also writes a lot of business that way.

Utilize the power of recognition. Whether it's recommending a customer for an award or suggesting them for a news story, you can play a role in helping to bring them well-deserved recognition.

Be candid when asked for your opinion. It's a pivotal moment when a customer asks your opinion. Will you be a wimp or will you be candid? Candor creates respect, even though someone might not agree with you.

Show your loyalty. After doing a good job for a customer, that's when one of their competitors wants to give you their business. You may be flattered, but think twice before compromising your loyalty.

Don't cut corners. When a customer has been around for awhile, there's a tendency to put them in overdrive. Doing what's necessary, but also coasting. If the customer doesn't figure it out first, a competitor won't be far behind to move right in.

Come to a customer's defense when you hear criticism. There may be times when "silence is golden," but not when someone's criticizing a customer. That's when it's the right time to make known your experience.

When something hasn't gone well, let them know what you would like to do about it. Yes, things go wrong, no

matter how hard we try. When this happens, jump on it quickly and tell the customer what you're going to do to solve it.

Respond reliably. A recent survey of buyers found that getting back to them is a top priority. A highly successful life insurance salesperson serving wealthy clients credits part of his success to returning every telephone call and answering every email the day they are received.

Leverage the power of "free." Insurance agent Mark Rosenthal has a free offer for a helpful tool he prepared. It's called "Organizing Your Personal Affairs" and it's about getting important information together. Others make reports, survey results and articles available without charge. But remember, free means free, no strings attached.

Take the initiative. Step up to the plate and act before you're asked. Initiative shows you have ideas and are capable of undertaking new and challenging tasks. Showing initiative may be the best way to be viewed as outstanding.

Keep your word. If you say you're going to do it, do it. If for some reason you can't, then explain why and do it quickly. It's easy to get a bad rep – and it's difficult to get rid of it.

Show respect. Getting too friendly with some customers can undermine the customer-salesperson relationship. There should always be some distance as a way of showing respect.

Individually, each of these customer care actions has value, but when taken together their impact can be enormous, even transformative. ■

Take the initiative. Step up to the plate and act before you're asked.

John R. Graham is president of Graham Communications, a marketing services and sales consulting firm. He writes for a variety of business publications and speaks on business, marketing and sales issues. Contact: 40 Oval Road, Quincy, MA 02170; (617) 328-0069; jgraham@grahamcomm.com; Blog: grahamcomm.com/wordpress. Website: grahamcomm.com.



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New Product **Spotlight**



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Wahl Animal Division introduced the latest addition to its professional pet grooming products, the new Bravura Cord/Cordless Clipper in red, green, silver, and purple colors. The Bravura Clipper features “turbo-speed” control and will provide you with a level of brilliance as a corded or cordless clipper, with 80 minutes or more of battery operation. The Bravura is powerful and quiet and comes with an adjustable blade set. The detachable blade is precision ground high carbon steel with a satin chrome, corrosion-inhibitive finish and fully adjusts to five cutting positions from #9, # 10, # 15, # 30, to # 40 – all without changing the blade. The Bravura combines the cutting performance of the Arco SE and features “turbo-speed” control, allowing you to achieve the results that professionals demand.

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www.cryosurgeryinc.com

Midmark introduces exam/prep table

Midmark Corporation announced the addition of a new exam/prep table to its broad range of veterinary exam, treatment and dental equipment solutions. The table features a sturdy 18 gauge steel metal inner construction and is available in a variety of woodgrain and solid patterns that integrate with Midmark's casework. It has a baked



on epoxy finish that will continue to look great well after laminates have chipped off traditional wood framed cabinetry. Like all of Midmark's tables, it is made of environmentally friendly materials that can help veterinary practices keep employees and patients safe while qualifying for LEED® credits.

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