

Relationship Similarities

Creating sustainable competitive advantages for (and with) your clinics

Recently I attended a conference at which a presenter discussed financial challenges practices face with their current customers and their efforts to attract new ones. Much to my surprise, those challenges were eerily similar to the challenges I hear from distributor sales representatives when they discuss their relationships (or lack of) with clinics within their territories. Consider the following list:

- Why should I, the customer, buy from you, the clinic?
- The DVM is more expensive than ...
- If you believe you can't compete, you're probably right.
- Your choice of words will attract or repel clients.
- Pictures are much more powerful than words.

These five areas of concern between a DVM and their customers are the same that exist in the DVM/DSR relationship. The following are ideas to enhance your relationships with your clinics. Perhaps you can use the same strategies to help your clinics improve their relationships with their current and future customers.

Why should I buy from you?

"This is the latest combination vaccine from ABC Company. It protects against X, Y and Z, and I think it should be part of your protocol." And we wonder why the decision maker doesn't commit to buying a couple of trays. You have described the feature – what it is – "the latest combo vaccine from ABC." You have described its function or functional advantage – what it does or does

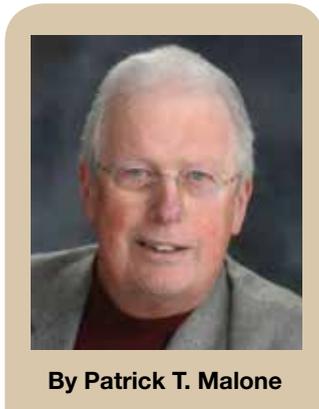
better – "it protects against X, Y and Z." But you neglected to describe the benefit – what the clinic will have!

Clinics and their customers make buying decisions based on what they will have – the benefit to them. Features and functions are only mentioned as a logical path to set up the benefit that you can and will deliver. So when the decision-

maker in a clinic asks why they should buy from you, you must list benefits that:

1. Are important to them
2. You can provide
3. They are not currently receiving
4. They would consider valuable

While you might be able to tell a clinic decision-maker why your other clients buy from you, you will need the answers to 1, 3 and 4 to fully answer the question of why they should buy from you.



By Patrick T. Malone

You and your inside counterpart can be the sustainable competitive advantage your company provides to your clinics.

The DVM is more expensive or all distributors are the same

This presents the classic perception versus reality dilemma, and no place does this exhibit itself more than in the area of flea and tick control products. Who is most expensive when it comes to FRONTLINE flea and tick control – Costco, 1-800-PetMed or the local vet? More than 90 percent of the respondents would say the local vet, and a recent survey of prices seems to confirm that – Costco's prices were at \$69.99, 1-800-Pet-Meds at \$76.98 and the local vet at \$80.00 for a package of six doses. However, a closer look revealed the price per dose was \$11.67, \$12.83 and \$10.00 respectively, because

the local vet passed along the two free doses from Merial. So the perception that local clinics are the most expensive does not always match the reality of being least expensive on a per-dose basis.

The same logic applies to the perception that all distributors are the same. The reality is they aren't the same as long as there are DSRs and ISRs involved. You and your inside counterpart can be the sustainable competitive advantage your company provides to your clinics. The first step to achieving that advantage is to start thinking of your role as advocacy. Advocates become trusted advisors and trusted advisors always get the bulk of the business.



Words make an impact

The words we choose to use can also have an impact on our success, or lack thereof. I cringe whenever I hear a professional use the words “I recommend.” To me that sounds like a suggestion that the receiver may or may not choose to implement. Is it any wonder that the compliance rate is so low when we only recommend a prescribed course of action? It's best if the professional indicates what I need to do, and if that isn't comfortable, then saying I like this course of action is a slightly toned down version that many find more comfortable.

In your own vocabulary working with clinics, words such as could, should,

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If you believe you can't complete, you're probably right

Just like most competitive activities, business success is driven more by what goes on “from your ears up.” Your success and your clinic's success is driven in a large measure by confidence. If your clinics believe they can maintain and grow their pharmacy business in the face of increasing competition, they are much more likely to be successful than if they adopt the “woe is me” attitude.

In the same vein, you are going to be much more successful with the products that you believe in as opposed to the products you just think might be a good idea. This is where a manufacturer's rep can be a big help. Consider those products that you are not fully confident in promoting. The next time you are with that manufacturer's rep, explain why you aren't fully confident and ask for their help in getting there. You may be surprised at the increases in your sales volume that can be achieved.

might, maybe are all much weaker than will. Remember, your customers are buying you first, then your product. So if you don't sound confident in your presentation of a product or service, your customer will have a hard time reaching enough confidence to commit and buy what you are selling.

Pictures

Heartworm compliance goes up when pictures demonstrate non-compliance consequences. Flea and tick control improves when graphic pictures of infestations demonstrate the consequences. Pictures stay with us long after the words and facts have gone.

So as your clinics advocate preventive care, these are just a few of the suggested strategies that could improve their relationships with their customers, as well as improve your relationship with those clinics. ■