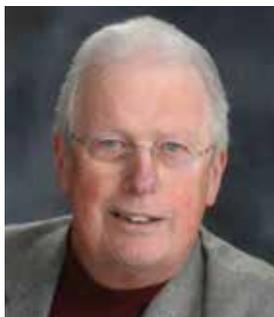


Under Review

How you can help veterinary practices properly respond to positive and negative feedback



By Patrick T. Malone

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In the last issue I wrote about some ways to make yourself stand out with your customers. Since then I have had numerous occasions to engage in discussions about online reviews of veterinary practices. I believe this is an area that you can create a sustainable competitive advantage to maintain your lead position or create an opportunity for yourself where you are not the primary source. Let me suggest a couple of ways you can approach this and then you can decide if any would work in your territory.

Before your next call, do a search for “Veterinary Hospitals in that City, State” on Google. I recommend Google because it is the most widely used search engine, but you can also try the same search on Yelp or other search engines. That client should appear along with a number of reviews.

From that point you have a number of options to start a conversation designed to help that hospital be more successful.

If there are no reviews, or the last review is more than 6 months old, there is a tremendous opportunity for you to talk to the decision-maker about the impact of social media, search engines, the Internet and encourage them to start asking their clients to post a review of their hospital. Today, most people use the Internet to search, and if that hospital doesn't show up or get positive reviews, they are probably being dismissed in the mind of that potential customer.

If there are positive reviews, they should be followed, within a week, by an acknowledgement from the hospital thanking that customer for their review. Something like, “Thank you for your kind words about Malone Veterinary Hospital. My staff and I attempt to do what's best for your pet and you and we are always encouraged when we meet and exceed our customer's expectation.”



If there are negative reviews, they should also receive a response within 48 hours.

Empathy, acknowledgment in a response

Let me demonstrate how I believe these negative reviews should be handled.

Example: *A practice owner, treating a cat with a chronic illness, recommended an abdominal ultrasound. The client took the cat to a clinic down the street, where they did the ultrasound. The cat ended up being euthanized; and the client posted a bad review for the original practice owner. The practice owner replied, pointing out that they recommended*

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their impact. So a better response might have included empathy and acknowledgement of the customer's point of view without agreeing with that point of view. The following example illustrates both empathy and an acknowledgement of the reviewer's point of view, without agreeing with the review:

"I was sorry to hear that (cat's name) was euthanized. These situations are difficult for everyone involved. I was pleased to hear that you followed our recommendation of an ultrasound. Finally, but most importantly, I apologize that our service did not meet your expectations as we strive to deliver the best medical care to all our patients and the best service for their owners."

The reality of today's business climate is that veterinary hospitals (or any business) are not going to satisfy the expectations of every customer. Bad reviews are part of doing business and are out of the practice owner's control. What can be controlled is how those few bad reviews are handled. This is where you, the distributor rep, can be most helpful and raise your image in the eyes of your current or prospective customers.



the ultrasound. The cat owner replied with another bad review, and got all her friends to post bad reviews.

Clearly the practice owner's response only inflamed the situation. It became one of those "If I can prove my point (we recommended an ultrasound) you will drop yours." The practice owner's response was very logical, but the reviewer was running on pure emotion.

It is important here to remember that the negative review is not going away and the real objective is to minimize

Now I realize that you have quota pressure and calls/day pressure and are probably thinking "with everything else I don't have time to be educating practice owners about online reviews." So don't try it with everyone. Pick 6-10 potentially good customers that are giving you a fraction of their business today and try it with them on your next visit. I believe you will find that they will see you in a different, more positive light. The most successful distributor reps I know focus first on making their customers successful. Their customers then make them successful distributor reps. Try it for yourself. ■