

# Encourage your practice to buy into the idea of making money

## Abstract

Retail within veterinary practices is becoming increasingly important as competition grows in the profession from other practices, pet superstores and online retailers. No practice can afford to stand still and must focus on developing strategies that will enable them to maintain a competitive edge. Veterinary nurses are increasingly being asked to fulfil other important functions within practice they are not typically trained to do. The most vital of these roles is developing pet product retail, and the aim of this article is to share some techniques to help encourage VNs to enter the world of retail.

**KEYWORDS:** veterinary retail, practice marketing, revenue, selling, competition

**RETAILING** is a part of practice life that can make us feel uncomfortable and, as VNs, we are not typically trained in marketing and sales techniques. A lack of background in marketing, combined with competition from pet superstores and retail outlets, can make it tempting for practices to avoid pushing sales. However, perfecting the art of retailing will not only increase revenue, but it can also strengthen the relationship between a client and the practice. Remember, if clients do not buy products from your practice, they will buy them from someone else – often on a repeat basis. This does not only affect revenue, but will also impact on your opportunities to conduct client education every time a client visits the practice.

Sales within practice will usually fall into three categories:

- recommended purchases – for example, a specific diet, which arise from a consultation;
- repeat purchases; and
- impulse buys.

To be successful in retail it is important to capitalise on opportunities to sell to clients by considering three key areas:

- creating an attractive practice environment;
- regularly reviewing the product range on offer; and
- training staff on selling techniques.

### Power to the nurse

On average, 50 per cent of veterinary business comes from non-professional fees so there is a massive opportunity to improve

## MULTI-FUNCTION DOG CHEWS FROM PURE DOG

CLIENTS waiting for appointments are a captive audience! This is a perfect opportunity to make visible products that are relevant to the physical and mental health of their dogs.

Offering Stagbars, the original, 100 per cent natural antler dog chews, as part of the overall veterinary experience, can work to defuse any stress by giving clients' dogs something pleasant to chew on while waiting. They also provide an excellent opportunity for staff to discuss oral health care as well as suggest behavioural solutions for the need to chew on appropriate items.

Stagbars are batch tested, as required by pet food regulations. Dogs can't bear down on them, they are suitable for puppies who are teething, they're great for dogs with sensitive tummies and they have hardly any fat.

- For trade prices and display information, please email [info@puredog.co.uk](mailto:info@puredog.co.uk) or telephone 0845 272 5992.



**Emma Gerrard** DipAVN(SA), DipHE, CVN, BSc(Hons), RVN, K-SQP, PHC, looks at how effective retailing should be second nature to practice VNs

Reviewed by Mark Overend BVMS, GPCert(Cardio), MRCVS



PHOTO: HAMPTON VETS

Left: advertising your practice's services via a TV screen in the waiting area may be an effective and eye-catching showcase. Above: displays should be rotated regularly and waiting-room posters and information updated frequently to catch a client's eye.

and grow profits (Fletcher, 2011). One of the easiest ways for VNs to increase turnover is to carry out nurse consultations, allowing vets to see other patients, which is more profitable to the practice. Nurses are key to preventive health care and, therefore, increasing retail profits from nurse clinics, such as puppy and kitten checks, second vaccinations, puppy and kitten parties, weight watchers, nutrition clinics, dental checks and parasite advice. VNs are vital in building new client relationships and they can secure an immediate sale, which may bring financial and marketing benefits and means animals are seen more often.

### Reasons to sell

Retailing is important for many reasons, including:

- it is professional to provide a complete service;
- your patients get the best care;
- your clients get the best service;
- veterinary practices are businesses;
- you can offer quality products not easily found elsewhere; and
- you can provide professional advice about products.

### Retail techniques

The key to any retailing is effective marketing to stimulate an action on the part of the client and to create awareness in his or her mind. Furthermore, it is vital to understand what your clients need and then ensure their needs are met. There are some specific strategic planning ideas that can be put into place to help stimulate retail sales.

### Location

Each practice will have a certain area set aside for retail, but regardless of how much space there is, it is important to make the display area visible to clients as they move through different parts of the practice. The most effective "location"

retailing technique is point-of-purchase displays, which are located where the client must pause – usually near the reception desk.

These displays serve as a visual stimulus to remind the client of something they need and can stimulate impulse buys. This is often because the client is less likely to be distracted or preoccupied as he or she is no longer focused primarily on the reason for their visit to the practice. Point-of-purchase locations allow members of staff to discuss the use of the product and its selection should be determined according to a monthly theme – for example, fireworks.

### Touch and feel

Clients like to handle and look closely at retail items in order to read the packaging and check the cost before they make a judgement on its perceived value. Products will not sell well if the client has to ask for it, are unable to get a better look at it, have to search for its price or see there is limited stock.

### Branding

Stocking multiple lines of retail products can crowd a practice's market by taking up space and increasing carrying costs. The most effective products that should be stocked are those exclusive to veterinary practice and that complement the services offered. They should be items other retailers generally do not or cannot sell – for example, prescription diets, shampoos and parasite prevention products.

### Competition

If there is a supermarket, pet or farm store close to the practice, it is worth visiting it regularly to see what products are on offer. Different stock lines should be selected so your practice always offers something different and new to your clients.

"The most effective 'location' retailing technique is point-of-purchase displays located where the client must pause – usually near the reception desk."



### Know your products

One of the criteria clients use to choose a product is the knowledge of the person selling it to them. Training and knowledge is essential because members of staff will be responsible for recommending and discussing the products on display. Many companies will offer free staff training on their products, with the added bonus of lunch.

This will help to improve the confidence of staff when offering recommendations by ensuring their knowledge on the products is up to date. Clients will often acknowledge staff recommendations, especially when vets and VNs use the product(s) on their own pets. So let clients know if a product has worked for you and your pet and share your experiences; this is the best form of endorsement.

### Catchy displays

The appearance of your display unit creates an important visual perception that will prompt clients to take a closer look at the products displayed. It must be well organised, relevant, inviting and well lit.

When developing the display units the following should be considered:

- Inclined or graduated shelving (where the back shelves are higher than the front ones) works better than flat shelving where products are at the same level and one behind the other. Smaller products should be in front and towards the top, with larger products behind and towards the bottom of the display. If products come in multiple sizes, the larger should be displayed to the right.
- Place the best-selling, highest-margin products at eye level. A study by Proctor and Gamble in the 1980s found sales were increased by 200 per cent when products were placed at eye level.
- Products should be grouped by their purpose or functionality. For example, all shampoos and skin agents should go together. Labelling each functional area can lead the client to the right product quickly.
- If there are items in the retail area that have been there for some time, start to update the stock and rotate the items on a monthly basis.
- Ensure the supporting literature from the manufacturer is next to the product. The literature can support the retail process in two ways: if a client purchases an item, it will educate him or her and verify the added value. If a client is thinking about purchasing a product, it may help to inform and will serve as a prompt for a future purchase.
- Notices informing clients of additional items available on request are also useful. For example: "Larger bags of food are available, please enquire at reception" and "If you cannot find what you are looking for, please enquire at reception".

### Promotions

Retailing is an excellent way to promote your practice through customised price stickers, stamps and loyalty cards. By displaying and emphasising seasonal products, the retail area can be a vehicle to promote seasonal themes and activities within the practice.

Selling also provides the opportunity for staff members to interact further with clients, allowing general enquiries about a pet's health, or to initiate reminders for preventive health care treatments, overdue visits, to advertise practice services and schedule further appointments, for example.

### Team effort

The most important sales aid for a veterinary practice is the team. Whether they are maintaining the attractiveness of the displays, ensuring stock is topped up or playing a more active role in promoting a product to a client, the involvement and support of everybody in the practice is vital.

Internet issues Gone are the days where clients will go to their local veterinary practice for advice on products as well as services. They are increasingly price checking and using the internet to purchase drugs and pet accessories, which is something we are all guilty of following the change in the economic climate. Clients will also often consult the internet on the needs of a pet before they even speak to a veterinary professional. This makes it even more important to market the service and products being offered by your practice.



Emma qualified in 2005 from Myerscough College, Preston, and has since gained a series of further VN qualifications. She works at Cain Veterinary Centre, a mixed practice in Powys, and her interests include feline behaviour, orthopaedics, surgical nursing and marketing.

EMMA GERRARD

### Conclusions

Effective retailing is much more than just throwing a few bags of food or pet toys in a corner of the practice. It should be approached from the perspective that it allows an extension to the range of services the practice offers or would like to offer. With this in mind, retailing is likely to develop a profitable revenue stream. Retailing will give you the opportunity to outshine competitors and provide a service that makes clients want to come back time and time again. To be successful in mastering the art of retail, leadership and support from your employers is invaluable. Veterinary retailing is preventive, curative and fun and it helps to build ongoing customer relationships. Retail allows more contact with clients and it should show that the practice is actively taking an interest in them and their pets; thus bonding them to your practice to keep them returning. Embracing retailing in your practice will enable you to provide a holistic service to your clients.

### References

- Gerrard E (2012). Maximising retail and sales opportunities in your practice, *VN Times* 12(4): 10-11.
- Fletcher J (2011). Smart Kits.
- Tait J (2002). The art of retailing in veterinary practice, *Canadian Veterinary Journal* 43(4): 303-305.
- Watkins R (2008). An introduction to retail and sales skills for VNs, *VN Times* 8 (4): 10-11.



Retail stands should be neat and tidy and well lit. The number of products they showcase should not be overwhelming to clients or it will put them off.



# EFFIPRO<sup>®</sup>

SPOT-ON

UNIQUE  
DROP-LOCK  
TECHNOLOGY  
STOPS DRIPS & SPILLS



NON-DRIP  
START · STOP  
CONTROL

## SPOT·ON·OLOGY

*Isptát ãn 'nã-ã-jé/ noun:1. The science of applying flea and tick treatments with the Effipro<sup>®</sup> pipette<sup>®</sup> in just the right place on a cat or dog (that refuses to sit still)...with no mess or fuss.*

**Effipro<sup>®</sup>, with its Drop-Lock pipette, is a tried and trusted Fipronil based solution to flea and tick problems:**

- Easy to snap open - won't drip or spill
- Easy to apply - squeeze gently when ready
- Easy to control - start and stop as you need
- Easy to see - clear chamber to see full dose applied

**Ask your Virbac Territory Manager about Spotonology<sup>™</sup> and give your clients a good reason to keep coming back to you for flea and tick treatments.**

EFFIPRO<sup>®</sup> - ONE STEP AHEAD.  
CALL 01359 243243



EFFIPRO<sup>®</sup> contains Fipronil: Spot-on Cats & Dogs: 100mg/ml UK only [NFA-VPS] Vm 056534150, 4151, 4152, 4153, 4154.  
UK Distributor: Virbac Ltd - Suffolk IP30 9UR, UK. \*Patent pending.  
Use medicines responsibly. [www.nah.co.uk/responsible](http://www.nah.co.uk/responsible).

Virbac

Passionate about animal health