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How to Attract & Support Pet Owners in the Post-COVID Era

48 actionable tips to help you boost growth and increase efficiency within your practice while adapting to the new normal.

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Introduction

2020 has been a year marked by significant events - from worldwide protests to the global health pandemic, COVID-19. The latter pretty much changed the veterinary industry's landscape overnight, presenting extreme challenges for practices such as reduced revenue, staff layoffs, and social distancing requirements.

Overcoming these new challenges can be difficult, especially with all of the regulations in place now (and likely for the foreseeable future). As we optimistically move away from the peak and towards our new normal, it's more important than ever to innovate and change how your practice operates from top to bottom.

The trick with adapting isn't just to be reactive to issues as and when they surface. Effective transformation is all about refining your strategy over time by using sustainable and proven best practices.

Luckily, Vetstoria and VetMatrix have teamed up to bring you 48 actionable tips to help your practice continue acquiring new clients and supporting existing ones in the post-COVID-19 era. This ebook will help you optimize your website, communications, and operations, and adopt new technology to not only survive but thrive in the future.

Optimizing Your Practice Website

The circumstances surrounding the pandemic are undoubtedly contributing to stress and uncertainty—particularly as it affects your veterinary practice. In spite of the uncertainty of the day-to-day, one thing that remains constant is the significance of your website performing well in search engines and generating traffic to your site.

As your practice makes adjustments to how you interact with your clients, it's important to apply these changes to your digital presence, and what better way to start than your website.

Now is a great time to evaluate your website and to look internally at what you can do with your digital marketing strategy, in order to be in a better position online in the Post-COVID-19 Era.

1 Upgrade the Design of Your Website

Your website is the digital version of your practice, and now more than ever, people are connecting with businesses digitally. By using a simple and modern design on your website, you'll be able to attract more web visitors. With an effective navigation design, you can deliver content clearly and easily to users.

2 Refresh Your Homepage

Your homepage will be a user's first impression of your practice. You don't have to reinvent the wheel to give off a new look. You can simply start by updating some photos, changing a call-to-action, and adding in a promotion or a safety precautions blog.

3   Replace Old, Outdated Content

Now is a great time to discard old events, products you no longer carry if you have an online store, or close down promotions that ended. Offering something to a user that is no longer valid can be a frustrating experience.

4   Evaluate Your Website's Navigation

Present your web visitors with a well-structured and easy-to-follow navigation to help streamline their experience. Modify your website's menu page by adding a dedicated coronavirus page to your dropdown menu that provides the latest and updated information about the pandemic and how it relates to your practice and your patients.

5   Create Profiles of Your Staff Members

Allow your clients to get to know your staff by creating a profile for each member, including everyone from the office manager to the veterinary surgeon. Add a professional photo of your staff member to accompany the bio.

6   Place a Pop-Up Banner on Your Website

Add a pop-up banner message to the top of your website to share any urgent messages related to your practice. This is a great way to update all web visitors about any changes you've made during the pandemic. You can add a link to the banner that directs the user to a page discussing the topic.
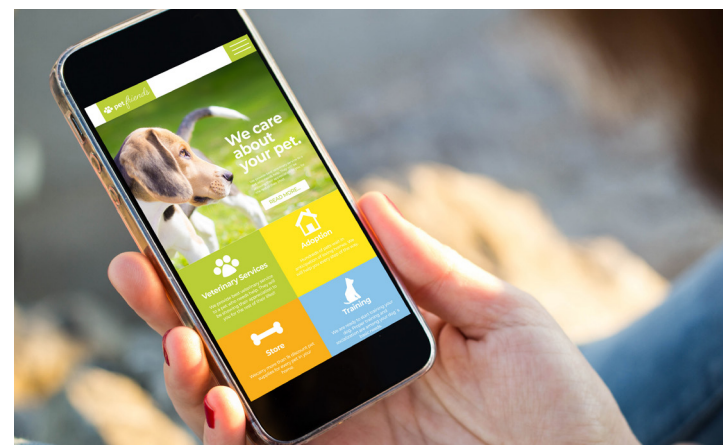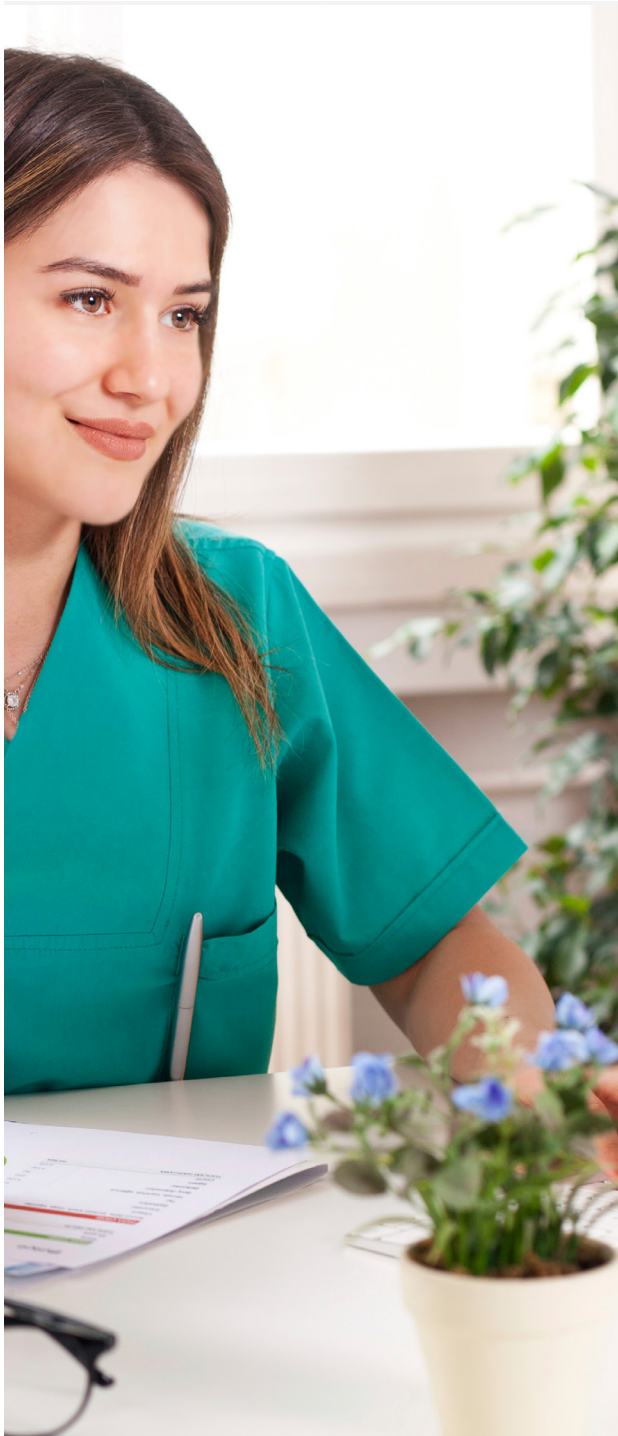
7. Add a Safety Precautions Page to Your Site

If you've enhanced your cleaning procedures at your vet clinic, let your clients know the steps you're taking in your practice to protect them when they visit. You can do this by adding a safety precautions page on your website.

8. Update The FAQ Section on Your Website

Keep your FAQ page relevant and up-to-date as the pandemic evolves. Revise your FAQ page so your visitors get current information on any policy changes. Consider including a "last updated" or "last reviewed" date on the page to help instill trust.

9. Optimize Your Website for Mobile Devices

Today, many people use their smartphones as their sole computer. Make sure your practice's website is mobile responsive so that no matter how big or small a screen is your site will fill the screen and present the information clearly.

10. Display a Callback Request Button

Provide web visitors with a simple callback request button to your website and receive instant email notifications whenever a new prospective patient wants to get in contact with you.

11. Add E-commerce Capabilities to Your Website

Sell pet products online to clients and generate an additional source of revenue for your veterinary practice. An online store gives clients the convenience of purchasing their pet's medicine, toys, brushes, and much more from the comfort of their own home.

12. Adapt Your SEO Content Strategy

Search behavior has drastically changed as a result of the coronavirus, but you can still better perform in local search engine rankings with optimized content. Be sure to monitor the shifts in keywords that pet owners are using. Targeting easy-to-rank-for keywords that relate to your business, brand, and industry will help you to appear higher in search engines.

13. Capture Your Website Data

Your website gets many visitors, but how well do you know them? Install a free analytics tool such as Google Analytics - it will help you capture data from your website, allowing you to market your practice effectively. It also enables you to provide the best online experience because you understand how visitors interact with your website.

Embracing New Technologies

We can all agree that the "our way works just fine!" mentality is prominent within the veterinary industry, and for a good reason. Vets have better things to think about than adapting the way they work. They care for our furry family and have a hectic time doing so.

Then COVID-19 came along, with imposed social and business restrictions that forced many veterinary practices to deviate from that mentality and adapt to the challenge they faced. Unfortunately, some practices were unwilling or unable to adapt to their new challenge and, sadly, suffered the consequences of furloughed employees, anxious pet owners, and lost revenue.

Some practices continued to thrive in their new normal. Why? They reassessed the way they deliver pet care, embracing new technology to do so.

Practices that are willing to consider some of the following tips will succeed now and in the future. After all, technology is a key driver of innovation and is at the heart of enabling businesses to evolve and maintain a commercial advantage.
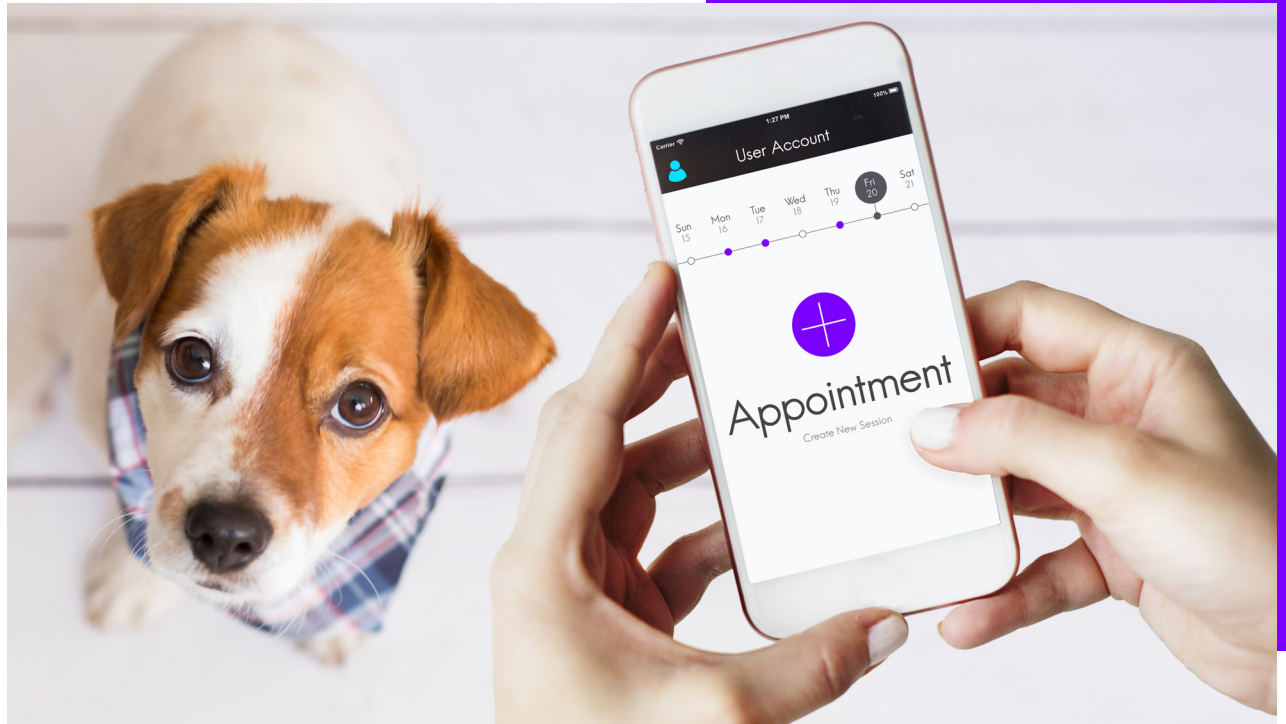
14 Carry Out a Technological Audit

Create a simple spreadsheet listing the systems you use and their features. Then list features you need to comply with post-COVID-19 plans and highlight the missing areas. Examples of systems could be your website, accounting software, or practice management system. Once you have a clear idea of what you have versus what you need, you'll be in an excellent place to plan future implementations.

15 Offer An Online Booking Option

Social distancing has accelerated the adoption of the internet for everyone, including pet owners. With more of them using the internet to seek out veterinary services, now is the time to offer an online booking option if you're not already. Pet owners will thank you and so will your admin team, who may be busier than ever over the next few months. What's more, your admin team will appreciate the additional control over the schedule, since they will be able to limit the days, times, and types of appointments they allow.

16 Offer Remote Video Consultations

COVID-19 restrictions resulted in many veterinary practices adopting video to continue providing pet care and generating revenue. Even after restrictions lift, practices can use video consultations to:

- Triage
- Offer post-op checks
- Handle nervous pets
- Assess abnormal behavior or chronic conditions
- Provide end of life care
- Offer referrals

This will be appreciated by pet owners who find it difficult to travel or are self-isolating and can be an effective way of reducing the number of pet owners in practice at any one time.

17 Enable Online Payments

When it comes to pet care, payments are a sensitive topic. They also create extra workload for busy receptionists and sometimes result in debt for practices to chase. So why not make payments more accessible by enabling them online? Add a payment option during the booking process (if available with your online booking provider) or email payment links to pet owners, using a gateway such as PayPal or Stripe to collect payments.

18 Integrate Your Systems

There's nothing worse than scrambling around trying to find information, especially when you are busy. By ensuring that your essential internal systems are connected, you can reduce stress and free up time. For example, if you have an online booking system or use a telemedicine tool, make sure they connect to your practice management system. It will save you from having to update each system separately.

Spreading The Word: Online Advertising & Marketing Campaigns

There is no doubt that marketing after COVID will not be the same as it was before, but by paying attention to how consumer trends are changing due to the virus and by implementing the best online advertising and marketing practices, you'll be in a much better position to ensure your practice stays on top.

An actionable plan to prepare your practice for marketing post-crisis is necessary in order to push forward and optimize your marketing performance.

Therefore it is important to stay alert on the ever-changing marketing trends after COVID. You can do this by listening to your client's needs and adapting your services for the current situation.

19 Stay Social While Social Distancing

As you keep your social distance from others, stay connected with your followers. When creating social media advertisements focus on visual content. The most successful content on these platforms are images and video, so it's important that you incorporate either of these into your advertisement.

20 Create PPC Ads to Attract Your Ideal Clients

Pay-per-click advertising (PPC) enables you to connect with prospective clients who are searching for services like pet dental. Using paid advertising you can generate more patients for your higher revenue services and place your website at the top spot on search results.

21 Improve Your Online Reviews

Boosting your online reputation and getting more online reviews is one of the most effective and efficient ways to take your practice to the next level. You can do this by educating your patients about leaving reviews, providing excellent customer service, optimizing your listings on each platform, responding to negative reviews, and constantly monitoring your online presence.

22 Optimize Your Directory Listings

Your name, address, and phone number (NAP) should be accurately represented throughout your website, Google Search, and Maps. If your online business listings aren't accurate on Google, Yelp, Facebook, Bing, and Yahoo, your patients who are seeking urgent information quickly won't be able to reach you.

23 Listen to Your Clients With Two-Way Texting

Engage with your clients quickly with two-way texting. Marketing isn't just about one-way communication with your patients. Two-way texting is one of the best ways to market to your clients because it enables you to send them messages and allows them to ask questions in return.

24 Offer Discounts and Promotions

Keep your revenue flowing during this period of uncertainty. Discounts can be helpful in attracting new clients, building loyalty among existing clients, and driving traffic to your site.

25 Give Back to Your Community

Practice social responsibility while promoting your brand by supporting local causes related to your business, such as your neighborhood animal shelter. When you create connections with other local organizations it can strengthen your brand recognition.

26 **Adapt Your Services For The Current Situation**

Create ads that market your practice for services that apply to your clients during this time. Right now puppy adoption rates have increased amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Ensure you're promoting new puppy exams and vaccinations ads. As the weather gets hotter you can advertise parasite prevention or provide hot weather safety tips to your clients.

27 **Determine What Should Be Paused**

Rollback any campaigns that are not relevant or appropriate at this time. This does not mean it needs to be completely terminated because it's likely that things will eventually return to normalcy. You can start by focusing on what's important for your clients during and post-pandemic.

Assessing Your Imagery and Language

Recent weeks have been tough for, well, the world as we navigate a new normal amid the coronavirus pandemic. Therefore it's important during this time to have empathy for each other and for your clients.

As you shift your imagery and language style to accommodate and treat your client's pets, it's crucial that you use sensitive language to directly address any fears your clients may have.

Build trust with your clients during this trying time and instill confidence in your practice by prioritizing ethical and transparent communication, as well as matching your marketing messaging.

28 Revise Your Imagery

Visual communication is powerful so it's imperative to think about the messages your brand is sending. Be sure to refrain from any images that showcase close interactions or large crowds during this time.

29 Use Tactful Communication

Acknowledge the difficult situation and be empathetic. Stay active and let your clients know you are listening and providing your full support during and after COVID-19. It's important to choose your words carefully and clearly communicate your message while being sensitive.

30 **Send a Survey to Your Clients**

Your clients may feel anxiety over whether or not it is safe to return to your practice. Send a survey to your clients to better understand their concerns about visiting your practice. You can then use the survey results to develop an effective patient communication strategy regarding your safety precautions and instill confidence in your practice.

31 **Display Safety Signs in Your Practice**

Let your patients know the steps you're taking in your veterinary practice to protect them with safety precautions signs. Use them in your office to ensure they have a safe experience when they visit. To help your practice, we've created a Safety Signage Kit that you can easily download and print out to display in your office.

Click here to download your Signage Kit

Adapting Practice Operations

The COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing regulations resulting from it have drastically changed how the veterinary industry operates now and in the future.

This is most evident in practices, where the hustle and bustle of veterinary doctors, technicians, admin staff, pet owners, and their pets mixing in a close setting is typical.

Therefore it's no surprise that veterinary practices are a natural candidate for drastic change, which can be a great thing. Practices that are willing to adapt in some of the following ways can thrive in their fresh new approach, elevating their services and revenue.

32 Offer Curbside Consultations

One of the most creative ways that we've seen practices adapt their operations to suit the post-COVID-19 era is by conducting consultations off-site, for example, in car parks or curbside. The same concept applies to the waiting room - where you can ask pet owners to wait outside the practice to allow for active social distancing. Leverage video to allow pet owners to watch their pets being treated by video while they wait outside - giving them a huge sense of comfort.

33 Offer In-Home Appointments

One step beyond offering services in car parks or curbside is offering in-home consultations. If you have the resources, this will be a high-demand service for vulnerable groups that wish to self-isolate and avoid traveling. You can usually charge a premium for this type of consultation. However, take note that in some countries the advice is to only perform a house visit if absolutely necessary and safe to do so.

34 Triage Patients Over Video

If you're struggling to keep up with demand or want to offer a more accessible way to provide your services to pet owners, triage patients over video. This has the potential to be an excellent customer retention tool and an additional source of income for your practice, as well as a huge timesaver for your team - since you can prioritize the patients that need to come into the practice.

35 Add 'Buffer' Periods Between In-Practice Appointments

Your practice may find it useful to have an extra five or ten minutes to clean and reset between every appointment. This ensures better hygiene and less likelihood of transmitting infections, but it also puts clients and colleagues at ease in their new normal. You can achieve this buffer between appointments by increasing the duration of every appointment by 10 minutes in your booking system or calendar.

36 Offer Post Surgery Checks Over Video

Where possible, start carrying out post-op checks over video. These checks can be carried out by veterinary technicians to manage resources and increase efficiency. Even better, as you are providing the same service, you can charge the same amount, and as no travel is required, it is more convenient for the pet owner. Win-win.

37 Stagger Food & Medicine Pickups

If your practice provides food or medicine, limit the flow of people by requiring them to book specific timeslots to make their pickups. This will reduce the number of pet owners in your practice at any one time, maximizing safety and reducing admin team overload. You can also offer home delivery if you have the resources or use a third-party partner.

38 **Offer Pre-Booked Phone Consultations**

Video consultations are all the hype right now, but what about good old phone calls? Allow pet owners who prefer a simple call to book slots for phone consultations. By booking these types of appointments, you can better manage your schedule and add an element of formality to the discussion, which makes asking for a fee more straightforward.

39 **Enable Call-back Requests**

If you have the capability on your website or phone system to do so, enabling call-back requests are an excellent means of relieving pressure from the front desk while maintaining a high level of service. During busy times, pet owners can avoid the frustration of being placed on hold and request a call-back, which a member of an admin team can return once things have calmed down.

**40** **Include Video Consultations in Pet Health Plans**

If your practice offers pet health plan memberships, you can add extra value by including some video consultation appointments. Not only are video consultations a great way to make a pet owner and their pet feel cared for, but they are also logistically easy to carry out compared to in-person check-ups.

Adjusting Your Practice Communications

As you adapt your services and operations to suit the new normal, it's necessary to maintain effective communication with pet owners.

By opening up new communication channels and adjusting your messaging, you can reassure and keep pet owners engaged with your practice.

Veterinary practices that explore the following tips can expect increased loyalty, word-of-mouth referrals, and, ultimately, more business.
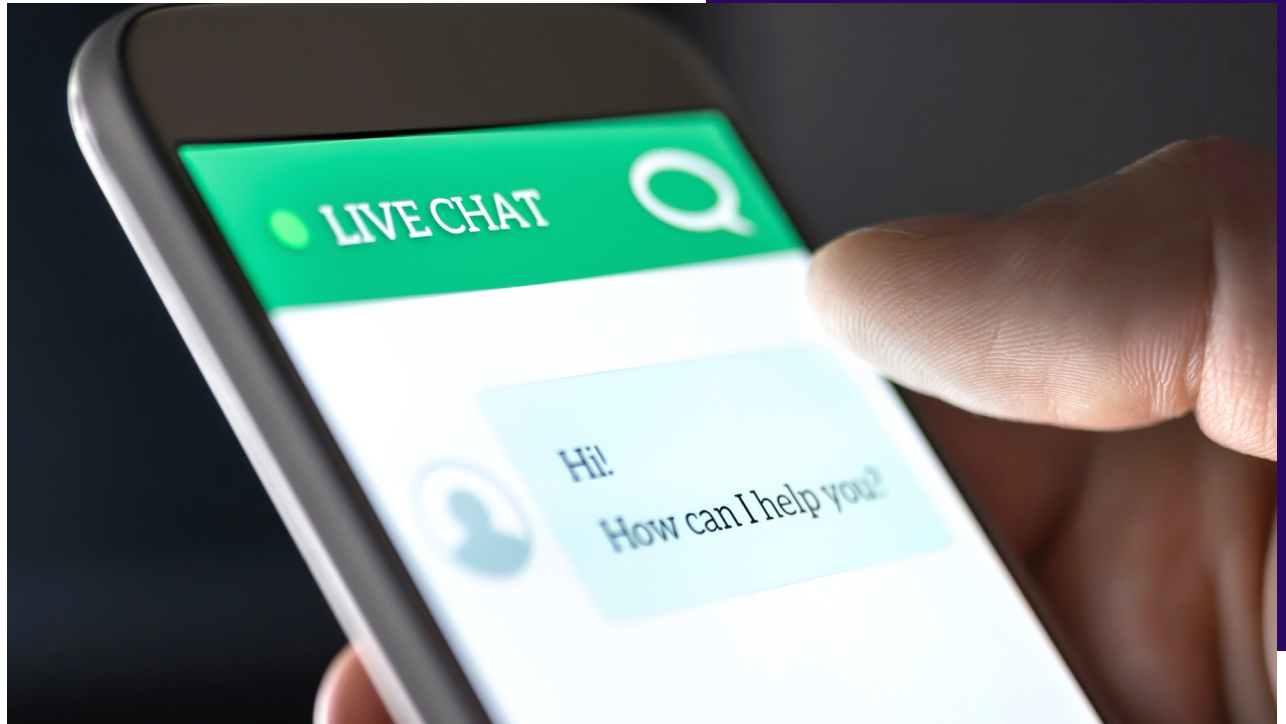
41 Add Live Chat To Your Website

Live chat systems are a great way to offer a pet owner instant support when phone lines are busy or when they're unable to make a call. By adding one to your website, you will increase engagement rates and make it easier for your team to serve customers.

42 Send A Personalized Video to Your Clients

Send a video to your clients explaining the steps you're taking to ensure their safety when in your office. Video is the most trendy content medium on the internet right now. With a quick video message, you'll be able to keep your clients informed about your practice reopening and share the safety measures you have implemented at your practice.

43 ## Update Your Appointment Reminders

Appointment reminder systems are common-place within veterinary practices and are usually used to remind pet owners of upcoming appointments or routine checks and vaccines. Take advantage of this additional engagement channel. If you are using reminders, remember to update messaging to address any changes to practice procedures.

44 ## Update Voicemail & Automated Phone Systems

One of the most prominent communication channels for veterinary practices is the phone. By updating or adding new messaging to the automated phone system, you can keep pet owners in the loop with any changes to practice policy. For example, a voice message that pet owners hear once they get through stating that all routine appointments should be booked online.

45 ## Update Your Social Media Channels

After your website and phone, one of the main places pet owners engage with your practice online is through social media. Therefore you need to ensure your channels are kept up-to-date with the way your practice plans on operating post-COVID. Adjust your opening hours, edit your bio, and post any relevant updates you want to communicate to your audience.

46 **Send Mass Email Communication to Your Clients**

The most cost-effective way to get a message across to a large number of clients is by email. By sending a mass email to your entire client database, you can quickly update them on any changes that you may have to your services or practice procedures. Most practice management systems allow mass emails. However, if yours doesn't, there are affordable options out there, such as MailChimp (free up to 2,000 contacts).

47 **Use Communication Apps**

If you can ignore the inconvenience of additional downloads, veterinary communication apps are fantastic channels to push notifications to pet owners about changes to your practice or new services you offer. Some veterinary industry-specific examples include iRecall and Vet2Pet.

48 **Update Online Booking Messaging**

Another creative communication channel is online booking. If you offer online booking through a partner that allows you to customize the messaging seen by the pet owner, you can communicate changes to your service or procedures during the booking process. For example, you can display a notice that advises pet owners to call before booking certain procedures.

Conclusion

Are you ready to come out of the pandemic stronger? Remember, this is not a time to sit idle; it's a time to act, and while some veterinary practices are waiting for the world to get back to normalcy, others are coming up with fresh new ideas on how to manage the current situation.

That's why it's so imperative to implement these 48 actionable tips to your veterinary practice, both now and in the future, so your business can generate more revenue and build long-lasting relationships with your clients.

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