

Tips for Trainers: Veterinary Marketing



By Casey Lomonaco, KPA CTP
Rewarding Behaviors Dog Training
www.rewardingbehaviors.com

Top trainers know that veterinary referrals are the best way to increase your business. While some pet owners may board or groom their dog, virtually everyone (or at least anyone you'd want as a client!) has a veterinarian and sees this person as the primary source of information for all things dog. Marketing yourself to veterinarians is not difficult, but it does require a good strategy and a commitment to following through on implementation. Here are some tips you can use to build your reputation among local veterinarian's as the area's best dog trainer.

- Make an appointment! Veterinarians are busy professionals who have spent many years and likely, hundreds of thousands of dollars on their education and the establishment of their business. They want to be compensated for their time. Calling to make an appointment (and yes, forking over the \$50 office visit fee) illustrates professionalism and that you value their time. Don't worry, you can probably write the visit off (contact your accountant for details) as a business expense, and the \$50 investment will be paid off with your first client referral! Do not walk into a busy vet clinic expecting to give a sales pitch.
- Emphasize how you can help them. Ask not what your vet can do, but what you can do for your veterinarian! How can you improve their bottom line? Examples of how you can make a vet's job easier include:
 - If you teach puppy classes, explain how early socialization can reduce stress at the vet's office, increase appointment turnover (and thus, income), and reduce bite risk to the veterinarian and staff.
 - Offer discounted services to veterinarians and their staff, including coupons for attending class, presentations on dog body language, bite prevention, or low stress handling techniques, stress reduction techniques, etc.
 - Emphasize how your crate training services will reduce stress and decrease recovery time for clients being boarded after surgeries.
 - Explain that dogs can be taught to tolerate and even enjoy a wide variety of veterinary procedures (including muzzling) well in advance of critical care situations, so vets can concentrate on healing animals instead of worrying about being bitten!
 - Think of creative ways to market your strengths. If you specialize in working with fearful dogs, offer to do "Fear-Free Fridays" or "Not-so-Manic-Mondays," where you might offer discounted rates if the veterinarian can schedule a block of fearful dogs in a given afternoon so that you may help the vet, dog, and owner learn healthy coping skills in the veterinary environment
- Be professional: what sets you apart from your local colleagues? Emphasize education - veterinarians understand the value of education and, "I just love dogs," will not cut it when it comes to impressing them. What are your

credentials? Are you insured? What professional associations are you affiliated with? What is your experience level? Be prepared with a resume and marketing materials which include this information. It's a good idea to have referrals from clients, fellow behavior professionals, and other veterinarians as well.

- Don't hesitate to make use of a well-timed "lure." It's not a bad idea to stop at Dunkin' Donuts and pick up a box of coffee and another box of Donut Holes on your way. Again, tax deduction!
- Be prepared! Come prepared with a variety of marketing materials, including brochures and business cards. If you have any handouts on common behavior issues, consider burning these to a c.d., the staff can easily load this onto the clinic's computer and print copies for interested clients. Make sure to include your logo and contact information on each of these so clients can readily contact you. You may want to print these handouts as well, place them in a binder, and leave them in the veterinary reception area for clients to peruse as they await their appointment.
- Offer specials! You can create a coupon that says, "For this month only, all of Dr. Jameson's clients receive a 10% discount on training services!" Vets like to see their clients treated well and this will give them incentive for referrals.
- Offer to let the veterinarian observe your work. Provide a copy of your class schedule and make sure your new associate understands he is welcome to attend at any time!
- Know (and be honest about) your limits. If you specialize in family dog training and puppy classes, say so. If you do behavior modification, let him know that as well. BONUS: If you network with other local trainers and behavior consultants, don't hesitate to mention those who have other specialties - your vet will respect your honesty, your ability to network and speak respectfully about your colleagues, and will appreciate knowing where to send

clients for the services most appropriate for each individual dog's training needs. (An added benefit is that this improves your relationship with other local trainers, and thus, you may even get referrals from them as well!)

- Send a "thank you" card. It doesn't have to be fancy, but a short "thanks for your time, I look forward to working with you," note can do wonders.
- Don't drop the ball! Make sure you stop by frequently to refill supplies of brochures, business cards, and other marketing materials.
- Follow up on client referrals - make sure you keep in contact with the vet to keep her up-to-date on your client's progress and/or setbacks. Perhaps send a weekly or monthly report briefly recapping vital information about mutual clients.
- Don't judge - we all know that some veterinarians are still in the dark ages of heavy-handed, antiquated, dominance-based techniques. While you certainly won't win all veterinarians over, make an effort to provide succinct, well-researched documentation which supports the behavior modification or training techniques you employ. The American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior has a nice collection of [Position Statements](#) which work wonderfully.
- Offer to give presentations for their clients at their facility - perhaps a once-a-month presentation on the value of puppy classes, understanding canine body language, myths about modern reinforcement training techniques and dog health, etc.

These are but a few suggestions on how you may increase your credibility with and referral revenue from local veterinary professionals in your area. Building veterinary referrals, like building any relationship, is a process which does not happen over night, takes time, commitment, and a willingness to invest in maintenance of the relationship. With a little perseverance, you will find your efforts are well-reinforced by increased revenue!

© Rewarding Behaviors Dog Training, 2011. All rights reserved.