



Partner with Sales Reps

In Today's Economy, Practices Need All the Support they Can Muster

By Wendy S. Myers

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Staff members excitedly lined up toy racecars on a game board. Each car was labeled with a product name such as Frontline, Comfortis, Capstar, Sentinel, Heartgard, Advantage, Advantix, and more. "Move your car one lap if it kills adult fleas," instructed April Oleniczak, a district manager in North Florida for Merial.

"Now advance another lap if the product on your racecar gets ticks." Completed laps and false starts identified who needed more training and helped the team clarify differences between brands. The practice owner and manager welcomed April into their hospital as an advisor because her role was to improve the team's knowledge so they could better serve patients and clients.

During my travels nationwide as a consultant, I've seen sales representatives who are trusted business partners and others whose phone calls are never returned. In today's economy, practices need all the support they can muster.

Why you Need to Build Partnerships

Welcome representatives with open arms because they can contribute to your hospital's success. Here are powerful ways they can support your business.

- Sharing research and technical information on the products they represent
- Expanding staff members' medical knowledge
- Teaching your team proven ways to improve compliance
- Networking with area practices that may

- be experiencing similar challenges
- Organizing a practice managers' group in your community
- Providing client-education materials
- Bringing experts into your clinic for hands-on wet labs or seminars
- Suggesting "best practices" from other hospitals (Remember, sales reps call on hundreds of practices. They see the best—and worst—in action daily.)
- Giving you feedback on merchandising and educational displays
- Training employees
- Providing free or discounted products for employees to use on their own pets
- Helping you understand trends in the local veterinary market

Ways to Develop a Reciprocal Relationship

Meet to identify how you can support each other. Discuss your needs for inventory management, staff training, merchandising, and more with sales representatives. Then they can tailor offerings to your hospital. For example, a company could provide in-clinic training, as well as, free registrations for webinars and online courses. Create an annual training calendar for your most frequently used

products. For example, I recommend parasite training twice a year so new team members get a thorough orientation and seasoned staff have their knowledge refreshed.

With effective training, staff members can describe, recommend, and demonstrate products. Because your employees are informed pet owners, clients want to know what products they use on their own pets. The dialogue isn't about selling a bag of food, preventatives, or toothpaste—it's about a passionate recommendation for improving pets' health. Describing first-hand experiences and demonstrating confidence lets team members excel.

Go beyond lunch-and-learn sessions. Have sales representatives help you develop scripts to overcome common objections. Schedule training on product categories such as:

- Preventatives
- Therapeutic diets
- Pain-management drugs
- Vaccines
- Dental home-care products
- Shampoos

to Grow Your Business

Your team can turn role-playing into heartfelt conversations that help clients select the right products for their pets.

Let sales reps help you assess and improve compliance. Measuring your compliance identifies where you are today and allows you to make positive changes. Think of this tool as a road map to accelerate your success. If you call a business to get driving directions, the employee will ask "Where are you now?" in order to guide you along the right route. When you measure your compliance, you determine where Point A is and set a path to reach Point B.

A 2003 study by Boston Consulting Group found seven months is the average number of doses that clients purchase annually. Share data with company representatives so they can create a compliance audit and identify opportunities for improvement such as:

- Percent of active dogs and cats that are getting an annual intestinal parasite test
- Percent of active dogs that are getting an annual heartworm test
- Percent of active dogs on year-round preventatives
- Percent of active cats on year-round preventatives
- Which products are top sellers and poor performers
- Revenue opportunities for diagnostic testing
- Revenue potential for preventative sales

After the sales representative presents data to the practice owner and manager, have him share a summary with staff and facilitate a brainstorming session on ways to improve compliance. Re-assess your compliance quarterly and post results so your team can determine the most effective strategies—and see results!

When you greet company representatives as allies rather than adversaries, you'll take a unified approach to growing both of your businesses. The next time a salesperson calls, answer the opportunity!

Wendy S. Myers owns Communication Solutions for Veterinarians in Denver, Colorado. Her consulting firm helps practice owners and teams improve compliance, client service and hospital management. Communication Solutions for Veterinarians has provided mystery phone shopper training for more than 1,500 receptionists nationwide. Wendy is the author of three books and five videos. Subscribe to Communication Solutions for Veterinarians' monthly e-newsletter at www.csvets.com.

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