

Making the most of your reception area

In this issue's Top Tips, Caroline Johnson explains how your practice can make that all important good first impression.

Clients make judgments on the quality of service and patient care as soon as they see the practice sign, the outside of your building or enter the car park. The greatest impact however is upon entering the building; the person greeting the client (or not) and the cleanliness, tidiness and layout of the reception area all contribute to a client's expectation of clinical expertise and service. Therefore, it is wise, once in a while, to take your shoes off, don the shoes of a client and walk through the door. What you see, may just surprise you!

1. Ditch the waiting room

If you have a waiting room, re-name it immediately! Having a reception area has less to do with the title and more to do with mindset; client-service improvements are likely to follow if your team thinks of receiving clients rather than keeping them waiting. If you're sceptical, try it! Similarly, think seriously about changing the job title of Receptionist to Client Care Manager. As a client, would you not appreciate being greeted by a Client Care Manager who asks you to be seated in a reception area?

2. Keep it clean

Tidiness and cleanliness help shape a client's subliminal judgments on what he/she perceives to be happening behind the scenes.

Appoint someone with responsibility to keep the reception area clean, tidy and smelling fresh at all times. With this in place, clients will feel reassured subconsciously that the rest of your practice, including consulting rooms, kennels and operating theatres are also spotless and well-managed.

3. Think about presentation

Merchandise products in a professional manner. Keep shelves tidy, dust-free and well-stocked with prices clearly marked and special offers highlighted. Ensure also that supporting literature is placed beside the relevant product. If people can see, handle and read about a product they are much more inclined to make a purchase. The availability of quality, veterinary-endorsed products is part of your professional service.

4. Manage busy times effectively

Many reception areas fluctuate from being extremely quiet to



manically busy throughout the day, which can be seriously disadvantageous. Look at the current workload and think about how best to even out the fluctuations. This will ensure better financial return on the space available (for example, running nurse clinics during quieter times) and will contribute overall to better client care; reducing stress during busy times when the reception area is full and the phones are ringing constantly is good for the clients and the staff charged with looking after them. Happier staff and happier clients tend to go hand-in-hand.

5. Invest in your reception team

Finally, do not under-estimate the importance the role of reception plays in projecting the right sort of friendly, professional, caring image associated with prospering practices. Continual improvement in this area should be a priority, with appropriate investment in ongoing training and development for individuals and the team. Your team is the face of your business after all; remember that the majority of client contact is with them, so actively listen to your reception team, hear what they say and invest a proportion of your CPD budget into their development.



About the Author - Caroline Johnson

Caroline has worked in the veterinary sector for many years. She has wide experience in sales, people management and training, mentoring, marketing and veterinary practice development. With her husband, she is Director of Prescription Marketing Ltd. Together they offer a wide range of people and practice development services for veterinary practices and project work for associated companies.