

# Marketing an Avian Practice

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1. "Marketing" is a total system of business activities designed to plan, price, promote and delivery want-satisfying products, services and ideas to target markets in order to achieve organisational goals" (Stanton *et al* "Fundamentals of Marketing" (MacMillan))
  2. "Marketing is the art of making it desirable and easy for people to spend money on products or services in your business".

Marketing is only a part of an overall business plan, but it is an important part, and to succeed, all staff must have a customer/client focus ie. what (more) can be done to help the client? The focus in veterinary practice today, as with all other service industries and professions, is to be pro-active rather than re-active (see Appendix 4).

In established businesses, the "80/20" rule generally applies. This refers to the statistical fact that 80% of business income is derived from 20% of clients, and it is this fact which is often overlooked by veterinarians trying to increase their income and resorting to advertising and telephone business directories to do so. They forget the fact that the practice filing system holds a list of names of people who own birds and other pets, and who have spent money with the practice in the past.

In the following discussion, the marketing "checklist" applies equally to general practice as to avian practice. The principle do not differ. It is important to differentiate between **marketing** and **merchandising**. The latter refers more specifically to the display and promotion of products, and is a strategic part of an entire marketing program.

The first step to successful marketing is to get the practice and staff prepared to attract and deal with extra business:-

- . Ensure the "public" parts of the premises are clean and free of odour. When was the last time you entered your practice via the front door?
- . The staff should be in uniform and have a smile for clients as they enter. "Perceived indifference" is a recurring reason why people change their allegiance to businesses. Aim to exceed clients expectations so that they feel they have received good service and value, over and above what they anticipated.
- . Send staff to training seminars on telephone skills, client relations etc, when they are available.
- . Do not have "doom and gloom" posters in the waiting room. Have merchandise clearly labelled and priced, and have avian products in a separate, distinctly marked area. Several bird pictures help to establish that you do in fact treat birds and that they are welcome in the practice.
- . Other useful ideas include self-serve information sheets, display of degrees and awards, practice photo-album or notice board, video displays, and a visible staff list including nurses, along with all staff wearing nametags.

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.        Conduct regular staff meetings.

Think seriously about computerising your practice if it is not already. The step from being computer illiterate to competent in our practice was about six weeks, and the immediate effect of its installation was a measurable increase in receipts, due mainly to consistency of charged fees, and the ability to recall procedures other than vaccinations (eg. dentistry, heartworm tests etc). After four years of use, I have decided that practice computers are like microwave ovens and dishwashers - once used, you would never go back to being without one!

### **Attracting new clients to your practice.**

"Word-of-mouth" is the single best advertising medium for any business, and the best thing about it is that it is free. Yet it does not come without effort, as the checklist proves. Making your services known in the community is a matter of aiming your efforts at target areas, within the boundaries of ethical and Veterinary Surgeons Board constraints.

These include:-

- .        Talks to clubs, societies and pet shop staff.
- .        Articles for Vet. nurses newsletters.
- .        Practice open days.
- .        Good exterior signage, car parking and landscaping.
- .        Thank-you notes to those who refer clients to you.
- .        Press release to media on interesting cases (this also enhances our profession).
- .        Offer to send information sheets to callers phoning for advice.
- .        Introduce "phone-on-hold" promotional messages.

Bear in mind that clients who have more than one pet or who keep different species of pets represent the best opportunity for practice growth.

The practice should be seen as being progressive, competent, and above all, caring for pets and clients alike.

### **Marketing to existing clients**

This is potentially more likely to be successful and economical than directly attempting to expand the practice client base. Once again, common sense and courtesy reigns, as the following checklist suggests:-

- .        Always show care, concern and give excellent service, to make existing clients "ambassadors" for your practice.
- .        Send "thank you" and sympathy cards when appropriate, and return phone calls promptly.
- .        Send quarterly clients newsletter to specific clients eg. aviculturists, "old cat" owners, target breeds etc. Also have these on offer to **every** client who attends the practice and send them out with vaccination reminders.
- .        Offer to allow clients an inspection of the premises and the chance to look down a microscope/ listen to a heartbeat/ look down an otoscope etc.
- .        Conduct full physical exams and husbandry discussions.  
This opens the door for offering more services.

- . Develop new services eg. aviary visits, client seminars, hydrobaths, dental days etc. (examples are included in Appendices 1 to 3).

As a final thought, devote the next week to considering all the businesses with which you deal and all the mail you receive. Consider how you felt after leaving the business premises, or speaking to the staff, or reading their literature. Did you feel encouraged to use their services **again**, or even **more so**? Or were you ignored, shown indifference or even resented?

This exercise should prove that if you reduce the barriers you currently have in place to prevent people spending money with your business, they **will** become better clients. Of course, this does not mean asking "do you want chips and coffee with your worm tablets"! but the same principles apply.

## Appendix 1

Letter to current aviculturist clients.

Dear

I am writing to you in your capacity as a client who has an interest in birds and aviculture. It has become clear to me over the years that much of the work I do with aviary birds concerns disease which could have been prevented if certain procedures or regular husbandry measures had been carried out.

To address this problem and to provide an alternative approach to assist in keeping your birds healthy I have developed a preventative health care program which I offer to you as a client of my practice.

This program consists of a visit by me to look at your facilities and routine and includes.

- .        Aviary visit (approximately 1 hour) at a mutually suitable time.
- .        Checklist of areas needing regular attention or improvement eg. parasite control, disinfection, quarantine, nutrition and a questionnaire relating to your aviary/.
- .        Discussions of any current problems you have.
- .        Collection of samples for worm and coccidiosis testing.
- .        A photo of your aviaries (with your permission) for inclusion in your file at the surgery, to assist in future phone discussions.
- .        Follow-up recommendations and report sent within 2 weeks, including test results on droppings.

The cost for this program, including travel, is \$                      (please note this does not include other services eg. pathology, individual bird treatments etc).

If you would like to participate in this program, please phone me at the surgery.

Yours faithfully,

## Appendix 2

This is sent to clients on confirmation of aviary visits, and sent back before the visit.

### Aviary Preventative Program Questionnaire

1. How many hours per week do you spend on the aviary and birds?
2. When was the aviary established/built?
3. Is breeding your main priority with the aviary?
4. Have you ever had any major losses of birds through undiagnosed causes?
5. Do you **regularly** purchase new birds?
6. What drugs or treatment do you **currently** have at home for aviary use?
7. What do you consider to be the main problems you have faced in birdkeeping?
8. How many birds do you currently have?
9. Are you a member of an aviculture or bird society? (Please name these)  
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10. If you could change your aviary in some way, what would you do?

### Appendix 3

This is used during the aviary visit, as a basis for report preparation.

**Aviary Description:** - Species Kept.

Facing.

Aspect.

Materials.

Protection from weather.     Roof Type     Shade     Wing Relief

Pest Control.

Flooring Type.

Theft Prevention/Security.

Prevention of Escapes.

Quarantine Area and Procedures.

Perches.

Nutrition.

Feeders.

Waterers.

Hygiene Routine.

Parasite control.

Identification of Birds/Breeding Records.

Aviary Plants.

## Appendix 4

### Target Marketing:

Dear Valued Client,

Please find enclosed some information on summer problems seen in Brisbane every year.

Once the hot weather starts, we see an increase in many conditions in our pets, especially.

.	Fleas	.	Toad Poisoning	.	Eczema
.	Ticks	.	Heat Stroke		
.	Heartworm	.	Parvovirus.		

All of these were a problem last year, you are invited to come in or phone for advice on what steps to take to prevent the same again this year. We also have free information brochures at reception.

Yours faithfully,