

## PEER REVIEWED

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### Of (Computer) Mice and Men

Some practices are heavily involved in social media and computer technology; others barely scratch the surface, making them appear old and stale. This is more damaging than not using social media technology at all.

Warm, cute, and fuzzy: What comes to mind? Kittens and puppies.

Ethernet cables, computer monitors, and software updates? Not likely.

Alarmingly few practices embrace what technology can do to improve their patient care and financial health. As Peter Weinstein, DVM, executive director of the SVCMA, said: “In the numerous practices that I visit, I am underwhelmed by their willingness to adapt to the world around them. There is a wide open canvas for the practice that gets out of its Edsel and into its Tesla.”

Technology can help veterinary medicine in 2 primary areas—medicine and marketing, with more practices taking advantage of the former than the latter. A number of practice owners do seem willing to embrace at least basic medical technologies for administrative duties (eg, electronic medical records, electronic billing) and digital diagnostics (eg, laboratories, radiography, ultrasonography, vital sign monitors, MRI, CT, minimally invasive techniques, interventional radiology, surgical equipment). Some practices have also embraced technology for services such as client communication, including Sean Sawyer, who owns a practice outside Boston and uses online resources during a patient’s examination to help develop a diagnosis, form a treatment plan, and educate the client.

Andrew Roark, DVM, who speaks regularly on technology in the veterinary practice, says, “If clients understand *why* we recommend services, then they are more likely to comply with our recommendations. While we can’t put them through veterinary school to have advanced medical conversations, we can use technology to give them a level of understanding sufficient to accomplish our goal.

What about other important technology in practice – computers, smartphones, tablets, apps, digital CE, digital references?

We see many practices taking full advantage of many of these items, but for every practice that does, there are 5 or more that simply are not willing to take the time to learn how to really integrate these into their practice.

Where veterinary practices do lag is in the areas of digital marketing and business infrastructure. Only a very few are embracing these technologies, despite a long list of possibilities.

Most practices have a website, but websites are an example of *pull* technology (ie, the client has to make the effort to extract information). Practices should instead embrace *push* technologies—all of which can be seamlessly integrated into daily practice:

- Social media initiatives
- Texting and emailing clients with reminders about checkups, appointments, and payments
- Patient laboratory work
- Before-and-after photographs
- Birthday wishes
- Discount coupons

“Ultimately, the information we exchange with clients has to populate the technology for anything of benefit to occur,” Dr. Roark says. “The really progressive practices are the ones who have succeeded in capturing human communication and digitally integrating it into their workflows, not just the ones who simply purchase the most gadgets.”

Even these technologies are fairly basic. To be truly tech-savvy, practices can set up webcams, build their own apps, have social media accounts, set up computer kiosks or tablets for digital registration, and place televisions in waiting areas or examination rooms to provide educational information. Websites like “Online Doggy,” which can help with setting up a webcam, and webcam apps like “How’s My Dog” can keep clients in close touch with their pets.

Consider practice management consultant Louise Dunn’s advice: “I see practices heavily involved in social media and computer technology; others barely scratch the surface, making them appear old and stale when you read their website or blog. This is more damaging than not using social media technology at all.”

Embracing technology may be much more daunting than embracing a cute kitten, but practices that build a digital infrastructure will be the ones that succeed. As Peter Weinstein emphasizes: “There is no question that the practices of today, to meet the needs of their clients, will have to enter the 20th century, and preferably the 21st century, from a technological standpoint.”

*Mark Crootof, DVM, owner of Crootof Consultants, advises veterinary practices ....*

*Items to look more into if interested*

SNOUTschool.com,

VTB social medial calendar,

VIN website of week

Mark Crootof has been a veterinarian for over 25 years. He is a successful practice owner and a consultant who specializes in helping veterinarians build and startup new practices. His first startup venture was in 1984 when he renovated two horse barns and converted them into a 3000 sq. ft. veterinary hospital and luxury pet boarding resort, one of the first in the country.

A few years later, he bought a second practice, but because of growth, he again ended up needing more space. This time, however, he designed and built the hospital from scratch, wrangling with bankers, construction teams, zoning boards, and more on his quest to complete the project on time and on budget. During this period, he also helped create a local emergency facility, of which he is a founding member.

Dr. Crootof decided to follow a consulting career a few years ago when he realized he was spending as much time helping his veterinary friends with their construction projects and startups as he was practicing medicine in his own hospital. He also realized how much he enjoyed the startup process and three years ago, he became a full-time consultant in this specialized area.

Dr. Crootof has worked with over 75 veterinarians across the country to help them successfully launch their own practices. He advises them on finding the correct location, financing, hospital design and renovation, computer software, staffing, marketing, pricing, and equipment purchases.

Dr. Crootof is a feature writer for Veterinary Product News, a member of VetPartners (Veterinary Consultant organization, was on the Board of Directors for the North American Veterinary Conference (NAVC) ( ^ years) , Leadership board of AAHA, Travels extensively talking to Veterinary students at various schools on Business Expertise and to Veterinarians on Recession Proofing their businesses and a proud father to three human children, two dogs and two cats.

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