

Space Saving Dos and Don'ts of Practice Design by Mark Crotoft, DVM

My work as a veterinary consultant takes me all over the country and puts me in connection with thousands of veterinary practitioners each year. Of all the concerns I hear, one of the most common is about space. How can we squeeze everything we need into a tiny space that allows for happy animals, clients, and doctors? Adding on to or building a new facility is often more than what you need to do at the moment to get the most out of your existing space. In this article, I will explore space saving ideas that are attainable for most practices and can be done in your existing space.

1.) Waiting, Waiting, Waiting

The waiting room is the most common place for wasted space in hospitals. Two easy solutions are available. By switching from individual bulky chairs to built-in benches along the walls of your waiting room, you create storage space beneath your seating surfaces. Another great idea is to replace your large receptionist desk with a much smaller one (I call it the Client Greeter) and do your checkouts in the exam room. This newfound space can be used for something that can make you money, such as a new examination room. Almost every practice can use an extra room!

2.) Easy Come, Easy Go

Have you ever tried to go through a doorway with a cat in your arms only to see a bounding German shepherd coming straight towards you? Two doors, even if it is simply one for an entrance and an exit, are better than one. With the paradigm shift toward “fear free” designs, the small extra cost for installing an additional door IN THE LOBBY OR WAITING AREA will be more than covered in less stress on you, your staff, and your clientele.

3.) Put That Space To Work

By storing animal diets in the newly-created bench seating in the waiting room, you've freed up a significant amount of space that can be used to make you money! This space can be used as a cat or exotic room, or perhaps as an outpatient therapy treatment room for laser or ultrasounds. The idea is to take space that is not being used to bring in profit and do whatever is needed to turn it into a profit-producing area.

4.) Paging the Doctor

Another common area for wasted space is doctor areas. These can easily be built into walls in treatment areas. As little as five or six feet wide, a desk with a few drawers and a laptop should free up a room that was previously dedicated to associate desks. Laptops, or better yet, tablets are better than bulky desktops. They free up surface area so that a smaller desk is needed. Same idea as for pet food storage: put the space to work for profit-generating activities.

5.) Outdoor Spaces

For practices in temperate climates, look outside your office to create additional space. Storage freezers, washers and dryers, and even oxygen can be stored outdoors in a secure area behind or on the side of a building. A shed is a much less expensive option to a costly addition or renovation, and could save valuable square footage inside your practice for examination rooms.

6.) Build Up – Not Out

Another option to get the most out of your exam room space is to utilize the space you have, but not on the floor. While floor space may be limited, your offices have a lot of wasted space on the walls. You can install wall-mounted hanging tables that can flip up and down as needed. As well as exam tables, you can also install a wall-mounted E-nook to eliminate the need for a table all together. It gives space for a computer, to write, and store a small amount of office supplies.

7.) Every Nook & Cranny

For items you need to access less, or for surplus materials, you can build a cost-effective storage closet under a staircase. The addition of a few shelves and a door will create a built-in closet that will look like it was always there. You can also build moveable shelves to make your storage solutions more fluid and easy to use.

What are you waiting for? By turning storage areas into profit centers and streamlining work spaces, you will have happy and healthy colleagues and clients. In doing more with less space, improvements like those discussed here will improve client satisfaction and revenue generation within your practice. Space may be the final frontier, but don't let it be your Achilles heel.