

The Secret to Bonding Millennials to your Practice

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Raised in a digital era, millennials have an eerie comfort with technology that sends the other generations into panic mode. But are they really that different? Let's break down the issues and explore innovative ways to connect with the largest pet owning population on the planet.

The Issues

- It's no wonder that millennials struggle with in-person communication. Most millennials were raised with a smartphone accessory compared to other generations whose primary communication involved landline telephones and drop-in visits. One of the most exciting times in technology was email and AOL's popular "You've got mail!". Mention this to a millennial and it is likely they will have no idea what you are talking about. For these reasons, just the thought of a sit-down in-person conversation will inspire an anxiety attack in any millennial. It is important to recognize this when considering common veterinary-client conversations such as a sick pet or end of life decisions. Providing a millennial with options like texting after the visit can enable them to communicate in an easier and more comfortable way.
- Millennials often struggle with top-down orders. Growing up in a digital age with access to as much information as needed results in the ability to investigate problems and discover options rather than just accepting what is stated as "fact"



to actually be fact. Traditional top-down style management such as “This is how we have always done it.” will frustrate a millennial. Instead, explain the goal of the task and current operating procedures, then invite them to suggest alternatives if they see opportunities for improvement. This will result in an employee that feels inspired and mission-focused.

- As a pet owner, millennials have the same desires for their pet as any other client but the way they differ is in their **perception** of value. Traditional communication methods will likely result in a decreased perception of value with millennials as they have a completely different language that centers around digital interactions. Therefore, standard practices may send the wrong message to a millennial. Here are a few examples:
 - **The standard operating procedure:** You send a postcard to remind them of when their pet is due for services.
 - **Millennial impression:** You are very old school and don't have the latest equipment to provide top level care to their pet. Plus, they may not even have a mailbox.
 - **The solution:** Push notification or text reminders delivered to their smartphone.
 - **The standard operating procedure:** You call with a post op update to let them know their pet is ready for pick up.
 - **Millennial impression:** You didn't care enough to give an update earlier. They've been worried all day. And since most millennials don't answer their phone, it is likely they won't receive your message in a timely fashion.
 - **The solution:** Frequent digital updates with pictures via push notifications or text.
 - **The standard operating procedure:** Delivering great care is all you need to get client engagement and referrals.
 - **Millennial impression:** You don't appreciate loyal customers like other businesses they frequent with reward programs.
 - **The solution:** Offer a reward program to reward top performing clients.

The Solution

The secret to bonding millennials is to create an emotional connection that will strengthen the bond to your practice. The key elements are:

Get personal.

A little effort goes a long way with a millennial. By focusing on ways to recognize and celebrate the uniqueness of them or their pet will result in massive loyalty. And don't be scared because a little effort will go a long way since most businesses fail on this point miserably. Here are a few ideas:

Send a “Get well soon” or “Nice to meet you” box.

This is a very simple and massively effective way to create a strong bond with your millennial client. Send a toy or bone in the mail to the client with a handwritten note to the pet: "Dear Fluffy, I hope you feel better soon. Make good choices. Love, Aunt Stacey"

Send a Bonjoro video-gram.

Bonjoro was named one of the best apps of 2017 and allows cloud-based transmission of video-grams via email. The innovation is that the video is stored in the cloud so there is no upload/download time which allows videos to easily be shared. One of many ways to use this in practice is to send a Bonjoro after a new client visit.



"Hi Mary! It was so nice to meet you and Fluffy today. Please know we are only a phone call away if you ever need anything for Fluffy. Thank you for choosing our hospital. We look forward to seeing you again."

Selfies.

Ask your client to share a selfie of their pet with you! If you have a mobile app, clients can share their selfie through the app then all the selfies of the practice can be seen in the app and even projected to a monitor in the lobby or exam room. This is one way to show the love and celebrate the human-animal bond.

Allow clients to do business without having to call

In the last few years technology has evolved so rapidly that many people now prefer to do business without having to talk on the phone. This allows them to knock off items on their to-do list while in a meeting, in a loud environment or even after hours when the business is closed. Here are a few things veterinarians should allow clients to do without having to call:

Request or book an appointment.

- Widgets can be installed on our website to allow clients to enter their name, pet name and type of appointment they would like to request. The simplest version of this results in an email to the practice containing the details of the client's request. Unfortunately, more steps will be needed to firm up the appointment date and time so consider direct appointment booking.
- Direct appointment booking, currently offered by Rapport for Henry Schein practice management systems and Vetstoria for Cornerstone systems, allows the client to see the real-time appointment availability and secure their date and time. These systems allow the veterinarian to customize what dates and times are visible to the public which will allow blocks for urgent care appointments.
- It is now common and affordable to have a mobile app for your practice. After a client downloads your app, they will be able to request or book an appointment

(depending on the practice's preference) directly from the app which keeps all the communications in one place.

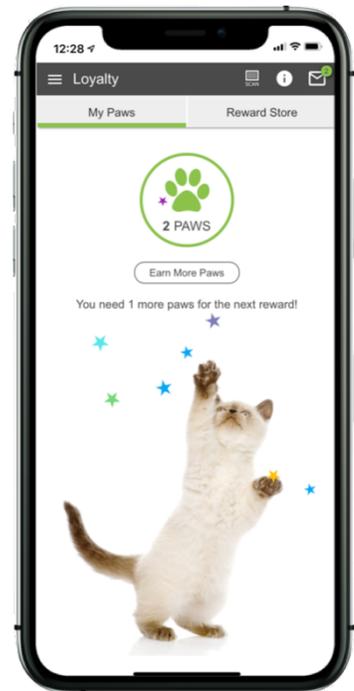
Prescription and food refills.

One of the most powerful features of having a mobile app for your practice is allowing clients to use the camera of their smartphone device to snap a picture of their product to trigger a refill request. Clients can place orders easily from their phone for same day or next day pickup. On the practice side, orders can be processed in bundles without interruption resulting in higher efficiency and less prescription errors. Take it to the next level by allowing clients to securely store their credit card on file in your practice management system, or use a third party like Gravity Payments, to create a “grab and go” experience.

Engage millennials with a loyalty program

Millennials love, love, love loyalty programs and incentives to shop certain brands over others. 80% of millennials participate in loyalty programs and are more likely than other generations to remain loyal to a brand because of loyalty rewards. When millennials spend money, they prefer to spend money with brands that reward them for their choice. Loyalty programs are gaining traction in veterinary medicine in the last few years as practices are seeing increased visits and increased ATC with clients that are earning rewards. In 2017, the first report for loyalty programs in veterinary practice was issued by Vet2Pet solidifying the ROI of a well-crafted program. Read the study [here](#).

In the end, millennials aren't really that different from other generations with their expectations of pet care. Perhaps all that is really happening is that they are challenging veterinary practices (and nearly every other business) to raise their game and join the modern world to deliver more of a client experience than a service.



Purchase the 2019 Well-Managed Practice Benchmarks Study [HERE](#).

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