

Seon Ho Lee

UWP 001V

Professor Ringo

09 June 2023

## **Increasing the Success of Veterinarians and Clients with the Power of Communication**

### **Abstract**

Effective communication plays a pivotal role in establishing and maintaining a strong relationship between a veterinarian and their clients. Veterinarians communicate with their clients to deliver diagnoses, present treatment plans, or convey unfortunate news. However, if there is a lack of communication in a partnership between a vet and a client, it can make it harder for clients to trust their expertise or entrust pets in their care. To understand the relationship between communication and client satisfaction, I will interview clients at VCA La Riviera Animal Medical Center as well as Dr. Sloan to determine how clinic communication plays a role in the success of both veterinarian and client. From my findings, veterinary clinics employ strategies such as publishing blog posts, transparent advertising, and 24/7 messaging to improve their line of communication. Research indicates that establishing an open line of communication is crucial for effectively engaging with caretakers. This can be achieved through various means, including targeted advertisements, engaging social media posts, and consistent round-the-clock messaging operated by veterinary specialists. Such strategies contribute significantly to building a strong bond between veterinarians and clients.

## **Introduction**

Veterinarians dedicate their careers to caring for the well-being of animals, including pets, livestock, and wildlife. Since animals cannot communicate verbally, veterinarians can only rely on communication with the caretakers of the animals to provide information about their health, behavior, and any symptoms they may be experiencing. It is essential for veterinary clinics to care for and continuously improve their strategies of communication. Although communication in the veterinary clinic is not a well-researched topic, there are a few studies that show robust data on the importance of communication. A strong line of communication helps facilitate trust. Although the veterinarian can prescribe and discuss treatment options, the patients must decide to adhere to the recommendations. If there is a lack of proper communication with the client, the consequences could be not only tragic for the relationship but also for the animal in question. How could a veterinarian improve communication to set up success for clients, veterinarians, and pets? In this research paper, I will review various credible journals and interview clients and veterinarians of an established animal medical center to understand the role communication plays in the success of both veterinarians and caretakers.

## **Literature Review**

Communication has a few proven benefits: “Communication has always been an important pillar for veterinarians. The ability to communicate effectively leads to better clinical outcomes, such as client satisfaction during the veterinary visit and increased client compliance with the veterinarian’s recommendations” (Pun 2). Pun also explains, “Many factors are known to drive the quality of client–veterinarian communication such as the veterinarians’

communication skills and clients' expectations" (Pun 2). A caretaker entrusts their pet or animal to a doctor and expects them to be understanding, patient, and transparent. Without such, caretakers may feel that the veterinarian's goal is only the monetary benefit of having the customer if there is a lack of communication or empathy for the overall health of the pet. Coe details how clients and doctors focus on different things, "Veterinarians focused on tangibles, such as time and services. Pet owners focused on outcomes as they related to their pet's health and well-being" (Coe 1). Understanding and bridging this gap between veterinarians and pet owners is essential for building a strong and lasting relationship between both parties. A line of trust can begin with the first impression; this can be something as simple as the first meeting and can continue to improve through continuous contact. Citing the literature: "The client-veterinary interaction is delineated in an initial greeting, history taking, performing a physical examination, explaining the diagnosis, offering treatment options and closing the interaction. Trust and rapport are built up throughout the process through the veterinarian's usage of communication" (Pun 7). It is important to identify the ways a veterinarian can improve the client's trust in them. Transparent advertising, open communication, and offering more time can be a few ways a veterinarian can help clients trust them. On average, "Veterinarians spend only 24 min per case" (Pun 5). In turn, many clients may search for information online and may find incorrect information. Pun highlights the problematic issue regarding lack of communication, "This prompts some clients to search for further veterinary information online, which could be misleading and incorrect" (Pun 5). The disconnect between vet and client can be detrimental; however, there are ways to foster communication and help clients who are searching for information outside the clinic. Social media and advertising strategies could be quite helpful as clinics target their clients through posts on vital up-to-date information and interact with

customers which is part of a coined term viewed as “conversational marketing.” This can include blog posts, social media posts, and apps where clients can message a veterinary professional any time of the day as they please. Overall, there may be some dissatisfaction with how veterinarians approach the care of their patients; however, it is plausible to assume that misconceptions and barriers that exist can be broken down with improved strategies of care.

### **Methodology**

To further understand communication and the client-doctor rapport in a clinical setting, I contacted Dr. Sloan at the VCA La Riviera Animal Medical Center. I had already visited this veterinary clinic a few times before as I used to shadow Dr. Sloan to gain experience and knowledge in the veterinary setting. Before interviewing the doctor, I drafted a list of questions to find more information to complement current research on how various lines of communication can improve the success of both clinic and the client.

Additionally, I will interview a few patients in the office with the following questions:

- 1.) Did advertising play a significant role in choosing VCA over other local clinics?
- 2.) Do you believe that VCA advertisement has a holistic approach to its advertisement rather than thinking about profits?
- 3.) How satisfied do you feel with your care at VCA?
- 4.) Do you feel as if the Vet doctors are communicative, patient, and understanding?

## Results

I visited the VCA La Riviera clinic to conduct an in-person interview. Dr. Sloan was very kind to guide me through the VCA's primary source of communication which include their website, social media, and new app. She begins the interview by telling me the importance of trust. “Our clients come to the clinic because they trust we have the expertise and experience to care for their dearest pets and one of the ways we chose to reach clients and potential clientele is to have open-ended communications.” She guides me to their website which includes blog posts that licensed Veterinarians write in regards to “a stress-free trip to the veterinarian” and “safety procedures.” Dr. Sloan also mentions, “One of our strategies of promoting and advertising is to do so by promoting pets' health on social media rather than depicting it as promoting our business; overall this strategy helps us retain long-lasting and valuable customers.”

### Ask Questions

Your first visit is an opportunity to ask any questions you may have about your pet's breed. Symptoms of many hereditary conditions are not always obvious, so awareness is important for early detection.

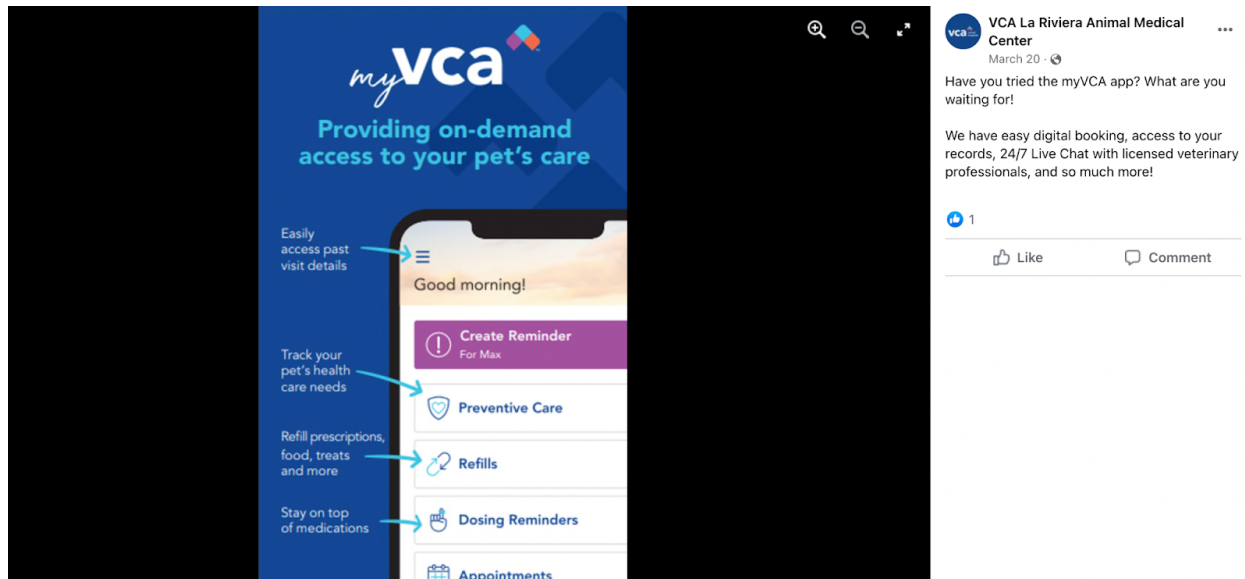
This is also a great time to ask for any recommendations or tips about care, training and feeding. Don't forget to schedule your pet's follow-up visit before you leave. After all, preventive care can help your pet live a longer and healthier life.

If you have any questions at all about your pet's upcoming visit, don't hesitate to contact us. We're looking forward to seeing you and your pet soon.



Source of Image: (VCA La Riviera Webpage)

Dr. Sloan mentioned how VCA's advertising strategy strongly encourages a line of communication between the Vet and the Client. “Questions are always welcomed and we hope to facilitate lifelong connections!”



Source of Image (VCA La Riviera Animal Medical Center Facebook page)

Dr Sloan guided me through VCA's new program where clients have access to a licensed veterinary professional 24/7. "We understand that our clients may have confusion and worry outside of business hours, which is why we offer a 24/7 hotline for any concerns. I believe that VCA's advertising strategies promote this to encourage clients that VCA is a hospital that is dedicated to their patients and strives to maintain their client satisfaction." She continues by saying "VCA is a hospital, not a business that cares about the monetary aspects."

Dr. Sloan gave me extensive information about VCA's advertising and communication strategies. Albeit, before I concluded the interview I thought it would be a great idea to ask patients about their personal experience and how they felt about VCA advertising and communication. I interviewed patients in the office with their consent to an anonymous survey. In total, the interview included 4 people who have companion animals that are current clients of VCA La Riviera.

The results are the following:

## What were the results?



100% said that advertising played a large role in finding the clinic

100% believed that VCA had a holistic approach to advertising

75% were satisfied with their pet's care at VCA.

75% felt that the vets were communicative, patient, and understanding.

**\* To clarify, the results of this study are on a very small scale compared to other published literature on this topic. Many patients did not have time to answer thorough questions but were still amicable about answering the questions nonetheless. \*\***

After conducting this interview, I was able to better gauge how new communication and advertisement strategies have been implemented. Blog posts for clients, social media posts, and apps remain the most popular ways clients can get in touch with the vet clinic. Overall, clients felt satisfied with VCA's approach to building trust for their clients and improving communication. 75% of respondents felt satisfied with their care at VCA and 75% also felt that their veterinarians were patient, communicative, and understanding. Advertising, social media, and apps have helped clients communicate more than ever with their pet's doctor. After all, the way we use technology can be used in many ways and one of the benefits of social media and technology is to improve the way we communicate.

## **Discussion**

VCA La Riviera has implemented an inventive approach to improve communication between veterinarians and clients by providing a 24/7 live chat accessible to all patients, blog posts for customers, and holistic advertisement. This indeed matches the idea of a “client-centered approach.” According to Pun, “A ‘client-centered’ approach has been promoted to facilitate clients’ adherence, aiming to make more clients decide upon a treatment option in line with the veterinarian’s recommendations.” (Pun 2). Focusing on the client's needs will improve the care outcome and in turn, strengthen the relationship between the veterinarians and clients. By actively involving clients in the decision-making process and addressing their concerns, veterinarians can create a sense of partnership and mutual trust, leading to better health outcomes for the pets and greater satisfaction for the clients. VCA is a well-known and established clinic, but it is still necessary to promote its business and another way for vet clinics to communicate with potential clients.

In an article regarding veterinary advertisements, it was stated that “while veterinary specials on spaying or neutering pets are hardly commonplace in media advertising, veterinarians, too, are increasingly facing the reality of professional services ad-advertising as a necessary aspect of their practice” (Stevens Loudon Williamson 2). Clients who I interviewed did not feel dissatisfied with the need for advertising in fact, there was an overall positive association with advertising and this may be due to the lack of information about veterinary clinics through word of mouth. According to the literature, “Apparently it is difficult for customers to acquire accurate information on the nature and quality of veterinary services. They do not see much of this type of information in the media, so when they are in need of veterinarian services, the first place they look is in the yellow pages. The yellow pages ranked



second only to word-of-mouth recommendations. Clients, consequently, would consider valuable the increased access to information on veterinary services media advertising can provide” (Stevens, Loudon, and Williamson 92). This may be why client satisfaction was quite high when I interviewed the patients at VCA La Riviera. The clinic offers clients round-the-clock access to veterinary specialists, shares informative content on social media, prioritizes transparency, and adopts a holistic advertising approach tailored to the client’s specific needs. From the secondary research, there is a general improvement in clinical outcomes in association with a “client-centered approach.” A well-rounded client-centered approach can overall improve the success of a clinic by allowing clients to abide by treatment options as well as helping grow the business with holistic advertisement.

## **Conclusion**

In this research essay, we explored various communication methods employed by veterinarians and clinics to engage with their clients. The most popular approaches included the use of social media, advertisements, direct access to veterinary specialists, and informative blog posts, which play a vital role in alleviating patients’ concerns. With new and improved technologies, veterinary clinics such as VCA La Riviera, can reach a broader audience to connect with their clients more than ever. I was able to compare and contrast the information gathered from secondary sources and the primary research and found that the overall data is similar. Patients need open-ended communication to trust their doctor as a sense of trust allows for a more satisfactory experience and better clinical outcomes. In all, I believe that social media, advertising, and apps encourage clients to build a stronger connection with their veterinarians and allow them to have more trust in the vet's recommendation for the pet. From the research and

analyzing the data, the most successful approach a veterinarian can take is to continuously communicate with the client to provide supplemental information and prevent clients from searching for incorrect information listed online. Communication is the most important part of maintaining a strong relationship between any individual. Effectively addressing clients' concerns and providing optimal, compassionate care for their pets are crucial components for the success of both the client-pet relationship and the veterinarian's practice in the long run.

## References:

Coe, Jason B., et al. "A Focus Group Study of Veterinarians' and Pet Owners' Perceptions of the Monetary Aspects of Veterinary Care." *AVMA*, 15 Nov. 2007, [avmajournals.avma.org/view/journals/javma/231/10/javma.231.10.1510.xml](http://avmajournals.avma.org/view/journals/javma/231/10/javma.231.10.1510.xml).

PUN, Jack K. H. "An Integrated Review of the Role of Communication in Veterinary Clinical Practice - BMC Veterinary Research." *SpringerLink*, 19 Oct. 2020, [link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12917-020-02558-2#availability-of-data-and-materials](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12917-020-02558-2#availability-of-data-and-materials).

Robert E. Stevens, David L. Loudon & Stan Williamson (1995) A Study of Consumers' Attitudes Toward Veterinarian Advertising, *Health Marketing Quarterly*, 12:3, 85-94, DOI: 10.1300/J026v12n03\_09

Sloan, Melissa Dr. In-person Interview By Seon Ho Lee 30 May 2023

VCA La Riviera Animal Medical Center." *VCA La Riviera Medical Center Facebook*, [www.facebook.com/VCALaRivieraAnimalMedicalCenter/](https://www.facebook.com/VCALaRivieraAnimalMedicalCenter/). Accessed 5 June 2023.

Your First Visit to VCA in Sacramento, CA: VCA La Riviera Animal Medical Center. *VCA La Riviera Your First Visit*, [vcahospitals.com/la-riviera/everyday-care/your-visit/your-first-visit](https://vcahospitals.com/la-riviera/everyday-care/your-visit/your-first-visit). Accessed 5 June 2023.