

Press #1 To Delete Technology, Press #2 To Use Technology Correctly

By: Louise S. Dunn



Description: Read any industry magazine and you will see an article about the use of technology in today's veterinary practices. From digital x-ray, to computers, to social media, technology is infiltrating every aspect of veterinary practice management. Yet, given all this technology, many practices are still not seeing outrageous ROIs when they invest in technology. Why is that? Could it possibly be that technology alone is not the answer?

Learning Objectives:

- Analyze the “fads” as compared to business concepts
- Recognize the need for the human factor

Does Technology Solve Your Problems?

“The first rule of any technology used in a business is that automation applied to an efficient operation will magnify the efficiency. The second is that automation applied to an inefficient operation will magnify the inefficiency.” Take a moment to contemplate this quote by Bill Gates ... Now think about all those technology fads you have instituted or tried to institute in your veterinary practice. This quote speaks loud and clear about the use of technology as some type of bandage on problems in the veterinary practice. Maybe you have tried a technology “fix” on waning client bonding, disappearing profits or bleeding ROIs. Perhaps we are becoming too comfortable with throwing technology at our own inefficiency.

We attempt to engage clients by simply creating a Facebook page. We think we gain a competitive advantage by blogging a warm, fuzzy animal story. We tell our team to sign up for webinars in the hopes it teaches them something. In all these efforts we are throwing technology at problems we want to fix – the low client bonding numbers, the poor appointment occupancy numbers, or the disengaged team member. Yet in all this we are forgetting about something...the human factor.

What is Technology Missing in Veterinary Practices?

Technology is here to stay, it is always changing, and always evolving, always touting that it will solve our problems. It influences how we diagnose medical conditions, how we keep records and how we communicate with each other. This may sound impressive, but consider this thought by Walter Lippman, “You cannot endow even the best machine with initiative; the jolliest steam-roller will not plant flowers.”

There you have it; once again we are forgetting about the human factor. The human factors of creativity, engagement and initiative. That new computer won't email your clients until a human tells it what and when. The freshly created Facebook page or blog won't attract clients unless a human updates and posts stories and information. To see the benefits of all this technology we must consider the human factor in keeping your Circle of Care rolling along – who will operate the technology for the best results and who is receiving the information from the technology.

It's About the People in Your Practice

As much as we would like to think that we can do away with wages and employee expenses by replacing them with technology, the truth of the matter is that it requires a human factor to make technology work its magic for the practice. That said, it is time to explore the benefits of connecting technology with the right people – benefits for the patients, the clients and the business.

Pets

Until pets can access your practice via their “smart collars” we will need humans to manage the technology connection for improving the lives of pets. Consider these benefits for your patients:

Press #1 for Diagnostic Updates – We can benefit pets by notifying their owners when it is time to retest and what the results are. Think how often we forget our own wellness tests, why not send a message to clients to call you for Fido's test?

Press #2 for Treatment Updates – With all the new medical knowledge and treatment plans out there why let it up to chance that your pet owner will contact you? Contact the owner about their pet's medical condition and a new medication or treatment plan related to their specific condition. The pet may welcome the change.

Press #3 for Food Recalls – What better way to keep pets eating healthy than to get the word out when a problem is reported (and cut down on all those phone calls asking your receptionists for information about “some pet food recall”)?

Which do you prefer? Waiting for pet owners to show up for an annual visit, or having the owner schedule an appointment for a specific reason that you notified them about? Once you get the technology set up, these options are not only quick

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• [Front Page](#)

In this issue

- [Press #1 To Delete Technology, Press #2 To Use Technology Correctly](#)
- [How to be Much More Effective in 2014](#)
- [Risk Management: Sexual Harassment Policy and Related Issues](#)
- [Veterinarians Treating Humans, Where Do We Draw The Line? ©](#)
- [Words from the Past May Enlighten Today's Bosses](#)
- [Preventing Feline Housemate Aggression](#)

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and easy to send out, they will also strengthen the bond with the pet owners because your practice is notifying the pet owner about issues relating to their specific pet and its medical condition.

Clients

Technology isn't just about the pet – it is also about the client and catering to their needs. Their need for information, their need to care for their pet and their need to know you provide valuable services to them.

Press #1 for Client Surveys – Find out what your clients really need from you by conducting client surveys. An easy link and a few questions may help you make some strategic plans for the future of your client service.

Press #2 for Education – Instead of leaving it up to chance, or some crazy internet site touting the benefits of a weird concoction, provide links to your clients about their pet's medical condition at sites you recommend. Now the two of you can work from a common knowledge base to provide the best care for the pet.

Press #3 for Live Feed – Nothing like a webcam to provide real-time pictures of a pet, or a text message that appointments are running late and the client can delay their arrival so as to avoid the wait to provide real-time information to your clients.

Since we and our clients live in a world of instant access, why not take control of some of the instant access available to your clients? Learn about their needs instead of hearing about it later on some negative post, provide correct information to enable teamwork for pet health, or show clients you value their time and concerns. Use technology to bond with your clients.

Business

Your Circle of Care would not be complete without including the business and your team as you explore options for using technology in your practice.

Press #1 for Reports – Reports from your practice management information system and financial programs. The trick, knowing what report is important, what numbers are your key practice indicators and how to effectively change those numbers.

Press #2 for Team Growth – Informing and educating the team can happen in the blink of an eye with the use of internal list serve questions, newsletters and tweets. Webinars provide easy access to educational topics and training programs using internal emails and Survey Monkey services can make for a continuous learning environment.

Press #3 for Change – Changing the way you can do business in your practice with remote access. We are familiar with remote access to specialist, but what about other areas? Consider the use of technology whereby you can have people answering your phone from offsite locations (i.e. their own homes) rather than in the practice.

A business improvement plan may call for technology interventions to not only help you work ON your business, but to also help you to work more efficiently IN your business.

The Caveat

“The real problem is not whether machines think but whether men do” (B.F. Skinner). Technology requires people. The right people creating, monitoring, responding and updating. With any project, take the time to do some homework and prepare a game plan by identifying some important criteria for the project:

- The objective of the technology project
- Factors affecting this objective (limits, constraints, roadblocks to be aware of)
- The strategy or process
- Who will be responsible
- Budget or finances required
- Time frame for project milestones
- Metrics or evaluation points to monitor the progress and effectiveness of the project

Having the right engaged and thinking people in the right positions on your technology bus will help you to realize all the benefits technology has to offer you. You cannot expect to throw technology at a problem and hope it will solve the problem. The use of technology requires people – people to plan, to operate, to participate and to evaluate. So, until Fido's smart collar can make its own appointment you will need to depend on people to make technology work for your patients.

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