

Making the most of an open house

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VETERINARY ECONOMICS

Q. How can I get the most out of my practice's open house?



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An open house can acquaint clients and the community with your practice, says Linda Wasche, president of LW Marketworks in Bloomfield Hills, Mich. And if it's done right, it can be an effective tool for introducing your services, building practice awareness, and adding client value. Follow Wasche's steps to make sure your open house delivers results.

- 1. Set goals.** State your goals in measurable terms and be prepared to track results. Do you want to increase your number of dental exams? Introduce your new holistic practice? Attract more clients with exotic pets?
- 2. Offer a range of activities.** Think about whom you should target. Consider demographic traits and the types of pet owners you want to attract. Should you focus on new puppy owners? Singles? New families? Tailoring a few activities at your open house to meet the interests of some of these targeted groups may increase the attendance at your event.
- 3. Build practice identity.** Use the event to further establish the identity you're trying to build for the practice. (For more on developing your practice's identity, see the following 2007 issues: May, June, and July). Do you want the practice to be perceived as offering advanced diagnostics? Or as the leader in orthopedic surgery?
- 4. Time it right.** Avoid vacations and the days surrounding holidays and religious observances. Check local events calendars for conflicts as well as opportunities. Also think about coordinating with national observances like National Pet Dental Health Month (February) or Pet First Aid Awareness Month (April) that could add interest and credibility to your event.
- 5. Collaborate.** Consider co-sponsoring an open house with a vendor, related business, or organization. Invite a local expert to speak at your event. Host a local pet-book author. Collaborate with a boarding or grooming facility. If your practice is new or trying to build its presence, connecting with an established and respected entity could be beneficial.
- 6. Make it newsworthy.** Promote your open house to the local media. (For more about working with the media, see the September 2007 issue.) If your event is open to the public, develop a news release and distribute it to news outlets before your event. Just be sure to check your local paper to make sure you don't miss critical deadlines for publication. If you don't want the public to attend, send a release afterward focusing on what took place during the event. For example, share highlights from the guest speaker's talk or the puppy training tips you offered.

7. Follow up. Finally, remember that you're not just sponsoring an event—you're building relationships. Once you've captured the attention of an audience, maintain it with updates on services, tips on pet care, gift certificates, or invitations to other events.

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