

Thriving in a Competitive World *with our Own Web Store*

Submitted by Dr. Jonathan Bloom, Willowdale Animal Hospital



The Challenge

As a practice owner, I understand the competition that Ontario veterinarians face in today's market. Veterinary practices are under increasing pressure from pet retail stores and non-conventional pet care providers, such as online pharmacies and big box stores. Retailers have already mastered the art of marketing to pet owners, and veterinarians are now finding themselves in a position where they need to do the same. Today's pet owners live in a world of added convenience and simplified transactions; features that many practices are not equipped to offer.

With this in mind, our team wanted a tool that would help us accomplish the following:

- Offer our clients added convenience, without incurring additional expenses
- Develop our own in-house ability to sell medications and veterinary diets online 24/7
- Improve veterinary diet and medication compliance
- Accomplish these goals while maintaining the Willowdale Animal Hospital brand.

The Solution

After some consideration and research, we decided to sign up for the OVMA endorsed web store service, MyVetStore.ca. After learning how the program worked and training our team, the next step was to get our clients on board. There has been a substantial amount of team effort involved in communicating the web store service to our clients, but in less than one year, our hospital is seeing regular monthly profits as a result of our efforts.

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The MyVetStore.ca member service provides our practice with a uniquely branded online store, available exclusively to our clients 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. We have control of which products we want to sell to our clients, as well as the pricing and the prescriptions. Registered patients can order refills for prescription medications and therapeutic diets, as well as over the counter items such as toys and leashes. Orders can be delivered to the home, cottage, or made available for in clinic pickup.

We are able to offer a broader variety of products with the online catalogue, and there is no need to stock our shelves or take up precious space in the practice with products we would not normally offer. In the last year we have seen an increase in the amount of veterinary diets being sold because our clients have taken to the more convenient on-line ordering and home delivery options. Clients also receive email reminders when it's time to re-order, so they are far less likely to run out of food and opt for the convenience of the local grocery store brand.

Keys to Success

We attribute our successful implementation of the web store service to five important factors:

Staff Training: This is particularly important for reception staff. They must be empowered and motivated to speak to the clients they encounter on a daily basis about this service. This is also part of the training that Acumenex provides to clinics when they sign up for the service. When staff understand the value of the web store, it's easy for them to share that knowledge with clients. For example, during team meetings and as part of the ongoing training, we discuss real world scenarios on how the web store can help our clients.

Web Store Marketing: Like any service a practice may offer, the effort put into marketing a practice's web store is directly proportional to the success it will experience. In addition to staff explaining the value of the web store to each client who comes in, we also use a number of promotional tools (home delivery food bag stickers, posters and in-practice TV advertising). This really helps to create interest in our web store.

Client Motivation: A five per cent discount on web store orders encourages clients to try the web store...and they come back! The discount is more than offset by the reduction in labour expenses and inventory carrying costs associated with orders NOT made through the web store. With a typical practice running a 25 per cent overhead, and web store transactions are a fraction of this cost – even with a five per cent shipping discount and the four per cent fee charged by Acumenex to administer the program.

Commitment to the web store program:

According to our Hospital Administrator, Denise Harness, "The web store is a very good system...but it doesn't happen by itself. Check it daily and it will work for you." Make the web store a key part of your practice strategy and procedures. Work with it daily and use the marketing tools provided by Acumenex.

It takes time to grow the web store business. The growth of a practice's web store depends on the efforts put forth in promoting it. By actively promoting the service daily, either by word of mouth to clients who come in to the practice or by using the tools provided by Acumenex and committing to their use; a practice will see consistent growth, and over time it can become substantial.

The web store is an important part of our push for improved pet health and nutrition. Better pet health is tied to a high quality diet and compliance on veterinary medicine. We promote this to every client, at every visit. MyVetStore.ca is the perfect solution to drive veterinary product compliance.



Willowdale Animal Hospital is one of five practices in the Pet Wellness Network of Toronto. They are a 24-hour emergency clinic offering preventative health care services and diagnostic and hospitalization services. The practice was founded in 1960 and currently employs 10 veterinarians and 45 support staff. If you have questions about this article, Dr. Bloom (left) can be reached at 416.222.5409.

About MyVetStore.ca & Acumenex

MyVetStore.ca provides Canadian veterinarians with their own branded web store where veterinary clients can exclusively purchase prescriptions, therapeutic diets and other pet products for home delivery or in practice pickup. The program is supported by OVMA and AMVQ, as well as the major manufacturers and distributors. The program also includes unlimited training and support.

MyVetStore.ca is developed and supported by Acumenex, a Canadian company with over a decade of experience in providing web store solutions across Canada and the United States. For more information on MyVetStore.ca or to learn more about how Dr. Bloom used it at his practice, call 1.877.788.5028 or email info@myvetstore.ca