

THE BUSINESS OF NUTRITION:

Home Delivery Bolsters Client Convenience & Clinic Profitability

PURINA
PRO PLAN
VETERINARY
DIETS



Lon Randall, DVM, opened St. Francis Veterinary Hospital

in January 1997. Dr. Randall, his wife Blythe Lyons, DVM, and Emily Burke, DVM, are full-time veterinarians at the practice, which also has two part-time veterinarians. Dr. Randall says the clinic delivers “high-quality medicine at an affordable price,” often performing surgeries that other area clinics don’t offer.

Q The COVID-19 pandemic created a “new normal” in veterinary practices, with clients sitting in their cars vs. inside clinics. What have you learned from this experience?

A The pandemic may have changed how we interact with clients for a time, but we know that veterinary care is still needed. People continued to bring in their pets for care and our business, like that of many veterinary clinics across the country, actually increased. I thought the opposite would happen. My theory is that because more people were at home, they saw more issues with their pets so were bringing them in for things they wouldn’t have noticed before when they were at work.

Our clinic philosophy is unchanged. We deliver quality medical care, do our best to live by the Golden Rule and let our clients advertise for us through good word-of-mouth and positive social media postings. We also have an excellent staff. Running a successful clinic takes a good team.

Q Do you anticipate that some of the changes you have made in your practice will be long-term?

A Our clinic already had a system in place prior to COVID-19 restrictions where clients could drop off their pets without an appointment, leave them at the clinic for the day and pick them up later. After learning that drop-off service can be a convenient alternative, more clients may choose that over face-to-face appointments in the future. But I’d venture to say that most clients would rather be in the exam room with their pets and I know I’d rather talk with clients face-to-face than over the phone. We’ll see what happens with client preferences after things settle down.

In addition, we started offering an online pharmacy service several months ago for clients who wanted products we didn’t stock in our on-site clinic pharmacy. It’s about providing greater convenience and more choices for clients.

Q Your clinic is enrolled in the Purina® Pro Plan® Vet Direct program. What prompted you to participate and what has your experience been?

A Food inventory takes up a lot of room and is very time consuming for members of the veterinary team. We’ve also had the scenario where a client comes in to pick up a specific food—and we’ve just sold the last bag. And although we enrolled in Vet Direct to save on staff time and inventory management, there has also been an additional benefit: a growth in Purina food sales.

We receive a commission on the sale of Purina products equal to our margin.* Our Purina product sales were good prior to enrolling in the program in 2019, so it was a leap of faith to see if sales would continue to grow or if they might decline. Any doubt that we had proved to be unwarranted because Purina sales definitely did grow.

When the pandemic hit, our Vet Direct clients were already set up to purchase food directly from Purina and have it delivered to their homes. Our first full year of being enrolled in the program was 2020 and Purina sales went up 38% from 2019. So far this year, Purina sales are up 38% from what they were a year ago, so we know that our clients are using the Vet Direct service.

*With Purina as the direct seller, participating clinics receive commission on the sale of products calculated to equal their margin, without ever taking title to or possession of the products.

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Business Insight: The Vet Direct approach pays off



Therapeutic and well-pet diets arrive from Purina and are backed by a 100% satisfaction guarantee.



The practice saves on space and inventory management. Clinic inventory is limited to small “starter” bags and cans of food.



Clinics are credited for Purina purchases. Clients enjoy the convenience of home delivery while the practice earns a commission on diet purchases.