



Profitable Partnerships: How Identifying a Good Dog Trainer Can Grow Your Hospital's Business and Your Client's Trust

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A dog's behavior is an important part of their overall health. More owners are seeking professional help with their dog's training, and this presents an opportunity for a beneficial partnership between veterinary practices and professional dog trainers.

From my own experience working with local veterinary clinics, I have seen the value of working together as a "whole-dog" care team. Group classes that focus on teaching a dog cooperative care have consistently been my clients' favorite classes to attend. Seeing how cooperative training helps build a positive relationship between a dog and their veterinarian is incredibly rewarding.

What adding a dog trainer can do for your clinic

1. Create a new revenue stream

A trainer or behavior consultant can create a new revenue stream in a few different ways. Dog trainers can rent clinic

space for group classes or private training sessions. Private sessions in an exam room are a great option for dogs that need additional help feeling less stressed at the vet. If you hire a trainer on-staff, they can assist with exams and other procedures. This service can be used as a marketing tool to differentiate you from your competitors and be an add-on option for clients.

2. Retain clients and attract new ones

Dog owners are asking their veterinarians about different training and behavior issues. Partnering with a trainer means that you will be able to confidently refer clients who ask about training to a vetted and reputable source, allowing veterinarians to save time and focus on medical care. If this trainer provides services in your practice, the client doesn't have to look elsewhere and will consider your practice the go-to for veterinary and behavior resources and information. This builds trust and long-term retention.

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If a trainer is renting space in your clinic for group classes or private training, their marketing materials are doing double-duty—advertising their services *and* promoting your practice. Group classes bring in new business as training clients become familiar with your practice. Since they (and their dog) are building a positive association with your location, many will choose to seek veterinary care from you as well.

3. Take the lead in cooperative care training

An important way that clinics benefit from a trainer partnership is by building up cooperative care training for the community's dog population. A trainer can take the lead in getting owners involved in training their dog for cooperative care, as often these skills are integrated into a variety of group classes and private training sessions. When dogs are introduced to positive handling experiences, the owner's at-home treatment compliance increases, leading to faster and improved treatment outcomes.

To see videos of cooperative care in action, visit:
<https://www.preventivevet.com/mwi/trainer-partnerships>.

4. Increase staff safety

Cooperative care means increased safety for your veterinary staff. A dog who is comfortable with being handled, and one who has more appropriate ways to communicate discomfort, is less likely to bite. Cooperative care means that staff must be involved and committed to training, as well as the pet owner—a trainer can be your staff's resource in learning different body language cues and stress-free handling techniques. Not having to rely on force or restraint means less stress and more safety for all involved!

Ways to integrate a trainer into your practice

1. Beneficial referrals

Most clinics already refer any training or behavior inquiries to dog trainers in their area. Referrals can be beneficial in

creating a positive-sum relationship, as trainers can offer a discount to clients referred by a partnered clinic and vice-versa.

2. Clinic space rental

If your clinic has an appropriate area, such as a large lobby or exam room, group classes are the most popular option for dog owners looking for training. Being able to utilize these areas after business hours means that the clinic space, which would otherwise be empty, can help pay for itself. For examples of fee structures and types of classes a trainer can offer in your clinic, visit www.preventivevet.com/mwi/trainer-partnerships.

3. On-staff trainer

Whether you decide to hire a dedicated trainer onto your team or invest in a trainer certification for one of your current staff members, having a trainer on site gives you a broader range of potential training services that can be offered directly through your clinic.

How to properly screen a dog trainer

Unfortunately, the dog training industry is unregulated, which has led to many sad stories of mistreatment of dogs and owners being scammed out of a lot of money. To ensure that you're promoting the best training options for your clients and their dogs, interview any potential training partner and review their education, experience, philosophy and methods. Just because a trainer drops off nice-looking marketing materials doesn't mean that he or she is necessarily qualified to train dogs professionally. Certifications are a good benchmark to look for, as certified dog trainers and behavior consultants have invested time, energy and money in their previous and continued education. However, certifications aren't everything, as even certified trainers might still use outdated and inhumane methods of training.

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Avoid any trainer who uses physical punishment, intimidation or fear when teaching a dog. You also want to avoid a trainer who touts “dominance” training or believes in pack theory. These methods and philosophies have been proven to not only be ineffective in behavior modification, but have been shown to actually *increase* aggression and fear in dogs. A competent trainer will do everything he or she can to set a dog up for success by managing the environment and teaching the dog, with positive reinforcement, what to do instead of any unwanted behavior.

Visit <https://www.preventivevet.com/mwi/trainer-partnerships> for in-depth resources about what you should ask a dog trainer during a screening process and the different kinds of dog training certifications available.

As the dog training industry continues to evolve, your practice cannot only help hold the training profession to a higher standard, but also reap the benefits of building a strong relationship with a certified dog trainer or behavior consultant. Your clinic, staff, human and canine clients will all be better off for it.

Cathy Madson is Preventive Vet’s certified dog trainer and behavior consultant.

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