



PARASITE-FREE-PET



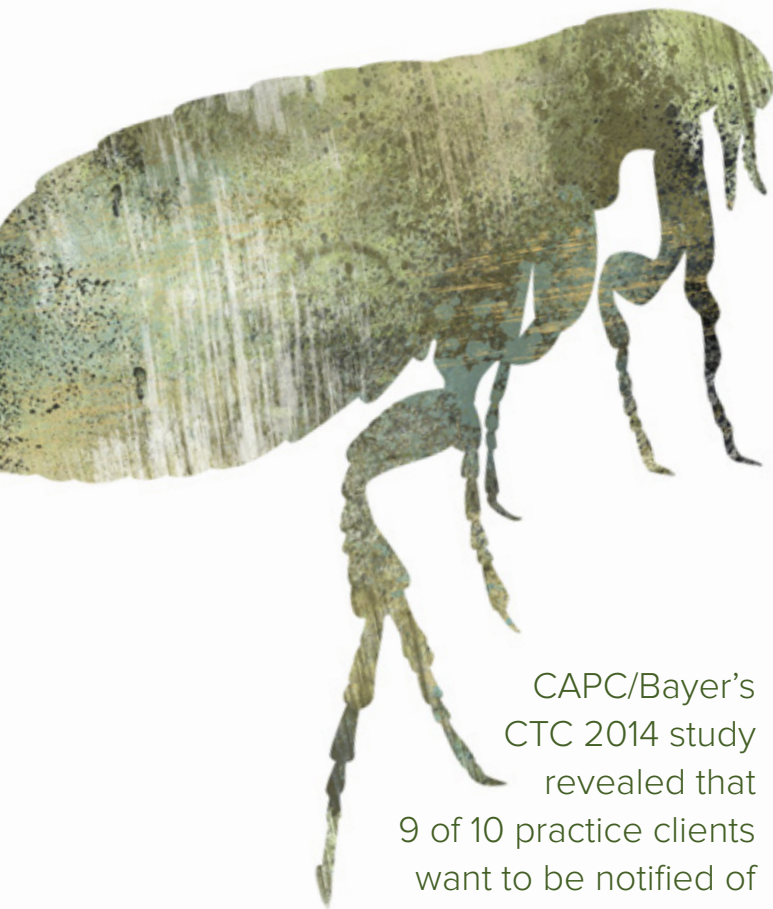
DIY MARKETING CAMPAIGNS

And Why Every Veterinary Practice Needs One

by Jane Harrell

FLEA, TICK, AND HEARTWORM SEASON IS AROUND THE CORNER. Is your practice—and are your clients—ready? The discussion with clients about preventive and early-detection measures for parasite control has changed from spring and summer to year-round in most practices.

However, the coming of warmer weather signals a perfect time to remind clients of the danger parasites pose, keep the parasite conversation going, and increase your patients' compliance. We dove into some of the latest parasite compliance results from practices' marketing efforts, connected with other leading consumer experts, and prepared a simple, step-by-step DIY guide for creating a lasting, scalable parasite-education campaign for your practice.



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Why Bring This Up in February?

Most practices wait until National Heartworm Awareness Month (April) is upon them before they start planning parasite education. Worse, many practices do little to nothing to educate clients about parasites outside their practice walls.

“If you aren't starting the conversation on parasite control before your clients come into the hospital, you have already lost,” says Chris Carpenter, DVM, MBA, executive director of the Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC).

And this is assuming the conversation in-practice is really educating the client. “We know too often parasite protection isn't brought up—due to time constraints, clients pushing off the topic saying ‘I already purchased brand X at the big box store or online,’ or veterinarians just happy to see clients and not wanting to ‘sell,’” says Steve Dale, award-winning pet writer, radio host, and founder of StopLyme.com.

So what can practices do differently? And how will it make a difference in your patients' care and practice growth?

New Technology Leads to New Client Expectations

Last summer, a *Trends* article (“Upgrade Your Status,” August 2016) featured consumer surveys about clients' expectations of Facebook advertising from veterinary practices. The data showed that consumers are not only accepting of veterinary practices using channels like Facebook advertising to share education but also that topics like pet health threats and alerts were two of the three most requested types of information consumers wanted to see.

Here are a few more indicators of how pet owner expectations of education from their veterinary practice have shifted:

- Clients are looking for—and expect—education when they're outside the practice. CAPC/Bayer's CTC 2014 study revealed that 9 of 10 practice clients *want* to be notified of a high incidence of parasites in their county. In all, 89% of them said they'd likely set up



an appointment to discuss parasites and testing.

- New client education must be relevant, localized, and timely. “Clients today are different,” says Carpenter. “When I was practicing, we had the nationwide heartworm prevalence map up on the wall in the clinic. That was great for the 90s, but today’s client expects something more.”

In a world where nearly 9 in 10 consumers from households with incomes more than \$75,000 per year have smartphones, today’s pet owner is conditioned to seek out and expect *localized, relevant, and targeted* information about nearly everything.

“We, as veterinarians, must keep up and meet those same expectations. We have to give them local and timely parasite information to make it relevant to them. Anything less is really worthless.”

- New client education must meet them where they already are. Successful education is delivered *where your clients most often are*—whether this is surfing the web, on an iPhone app, or in their inbox. “Pet owners want, need, and are 100% seeking out pet care information online, on social media, and in a host of other places,” says Jason Nicholas, BVetMed, president and chief medical officer of Preventive Vet.

As their trusted professional, you have a real chance to influence where your clients go to learn about their pet’s health. Several research efforts on the

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topic have found that pet owners will not only access the digital-based education you recommend, but also that their use of search engines as a pet-health resource will drop and they’ll view the education you give them about their pet’s health as a bonus to your practice’s services.

This spells a large opportunity for those practices and veterinary experts who have made the shift toward consumer-centric education and digital outreach—especially when it comes to parasite education and prevention.

Increase in Compliance Reported by Hospitals After Parasite Alerts

Recently, CAPC and a large network of animal hospitals in the Northeast looked at the effects of an alert-style email campaign. The email shared the results of Lyme disease tests in the area, making pet owners aware of the danger, what it meant, and what they could do. After 90 days, the organizations examined the target group versus a control group that did not receive the messaging and found that the target group had a 58% higher rate of visits and a 76% higher rate of Lyme-related purchases in that time.

How Are Other Practices Educating Clients About Parasites?

“Clients walk into our clinics on average once or twice a year (less, if you look at the Banfield report). They’re walking into

pet stores monthly or more,” notes I. Craig Prior, BVSc, CVJ, president of CAPC and medical director of VCA Murphy Road Animal Hospital in Nashville, Tennessee.

“We have to find new ways to ‘tap them on the shoulder’ and remind them we are there for them,” he says. Using digital outlets strategically and in a scalable way can provide that “tap” to get clients coming back in the door without breaking the clinic’s marketing budget.

Prior uses CAPC’s monthly incidence data in his county (available free via email) as a story to share with his clinic’s clients. “I engage them through Facebook, Twitter, or any social media that may work. I tell them about what’s going on in their backyard, ask them if they’ve remembered to use their parasite-prevention products, and if they have forgotten, to call us so we can discuss what’s going on.” The practice sends seasonal emails as well.

Creating Your Own Online Parasite Control Campaign Materials

While online marketing campaigns like this can scale to be as big as you want, keeping things focused and as simple as possible your first time around can help you keep resources in check and measure results. Keeping that in mind, it’s time to get started on your campaign for parasite season 2017. Here’s how:

- 1. Pick your key message points.** Choose 3 to 10 things you want clients to know about parasites and keep them simple, actionable, and relevant for your clients. Are you talking to both dog owners and cat owners? Make sure you’re talking about issues that affect both, like heartworm and fleas. Are you able to segment your audience into only dog owners or only cat owners? Even better! Pick three to five key points for dogs and another three to five for cats. Keep each point simple and short—about a sentence each. “A digestible, tip-based format is perfect for today’s busy pet owner,” says Nicholas. “It’s easy (and fun) for them to read and learn from the tips and stories at their own leisure.”

Here are some example points you can use, with possible phrases to illustrate them:

- **The number of positive test results or prevalence of a specific type of threat near you.** “1 in 37 dogs tested positive for roundworm

in Maine last year.” Data for your area can be accessed for free at capcvet.org.

- **Draw on natural aversion.** “What’s your level of tolerance of parasites in your home?” Something Prior uses in-hospital, this great tactic opens the door for them to say “none,” and for your campaign to drive home the need to call for an appointment.
- **The change of seasons and increased exposure.** “Warmer weather might be fun, but it also means more risk for Fido.” If you use this one, it’s always a good idea to follow it up with a message point on year-round protection.
- **What you usually see in your practice.** “Last spring we treated five cases of Lyme. This spring we want to see fewer. Here’s how you can help.” Including facts about what you see in-practice reinforces to clients that the threat is local and relevant to them.
- **The possible impact of the threat.** “Treatment for heartworm in dogs is dangerous and costly, making protection and prevention key.” Remind your clients of the consequences of ignoring the dangers of parasites. Just give the facts—no need to elaborate too much and terrify clients. Pet owners are “already grossed out by fleas, ticks, heartworm—and become more so with just a description of the blood-sucking facts,” says Dale.
- **The possible impact of early detection.** “It’s possible for an infected pet to show no signs, inadvertently exposing your family to hookworms if left undetected.” Does detecting the issue impact treatment or even family safety, like with intestinal parasites? This may not seem real to clients, so make sure they’re aware of the threat and how detection keeps everyone safer.
- **IMPORTANT! What they can do.** “Contact us now to find out how we can keep Fido protected together.” This one’s vital and should *always* be included. Never leave clients with an educational dead end, especially when letting them know about a threat that may be in their own backyard.

- 2. Select your channels.** What ways does your practice have to disseminate information beyond your practice’s walls? For this DIY parasite awareness and prevention campaign, let’s pick those that allow you to segment your audience as much as possible and

measure your success. These most likely include, at least, the following:

- Practice website
- Practice Facebook page (and ads)
- Practice email newsletter (segmented into dog owners and cat owners!)

Other channels, like Instagram, your local newspaper, and Pinterest, can be great additions if you have time, but offer comparatively limited analytics and ways to target specific segments of your audience—something that can be important when talking about parasites.

3. Select your trusted resources. While the goal of your DIY campaign is to educate and engage clients to come in for preventive parasite treatment, a secondary goal should be keeping the campaign itself manageable and scalable. In most cases, linking from your website, social media platform, or newsletter to a third-party article from a trusted resource can serve the same purpose.

“There are a few reliable and noncompetitive sites that veterinarians can be referring to,” notes Nicholas. “Preventive Vet, (PreventiveVet.com), of course, is one. But so, too, are IDEXX’s Pet Health Network and VIN’s Veterinary Partner.” CAPC’s consumer website, PetsandParasites.org, Vetstreet, and AAHA’s consumer website (aaha.org/petowner) all provide free articles that you can link to from your own website, social media, or e-newsletters. Some sites, like Pet Health Network, have even done the work for you and provide templates that you can pull from.



Passing the 5, 5, 5 Test

The rule of 5, 5, 5 is a great way to test your campaign content before you launch. It’s simple. Look at each piece of your campaign and ask yourself:

1. What would my clients take away if they were exposed to this message for 5 seconds? Likely only a headline and call to action. Make sure those are clear and compelling enough to make your clients want to learn more, no matter where they see them.
2. For 5 minutes? Long enough for a short conversation, the 5-minute test helps you make sure clients who are invested enough to learn more have somewhere to go. Of course, your messaging channel can play a big part here. Your list post might fulfill the 5-minute test on its own, while a Facebook post would need to drive somewhere else—like a phone call to your practice or a visit to your practice website.
3. For 5 hours? Pet owners probably won’t spend 5 hours trying to learn more about parasitic threats to their pet, but that’s the point. The heart of the 5-hour test is that no matter where they go and how deeply

they investigate, you should always present them with an opportunity to learn more. Sound complicated? It doesn’t have to be.

Imagine a pet owner first sees your message on a Facebook ad. They click the ad to view a blog post. Don’t worry, the blog post is nothing more than a list of your key message points. Points that need to be elaborated link to a trusted source site. At the end of the list is a button to request an appointment and discuss their pet’s specific needs. Done. The 5-hour test is passed because no matter where they go, they have somewhere else they can learn more—because of you.

4. Pick your imagery. Images are important. They're often what first draws the eye and can determine whether someone chooses to read on or not. This is also where you can dare to be a little more graphic—but don't go too far.

Do:

- Show an actual photo of the parasite, as long as it's not too graphic. A single tick alone is OK, but hundreds of ticks on a dog—no thank you!
- Consider imagery of people and pets that conveys concern.
- Consider template imagery provided by a trusted source you've selected.

Don't:

- Show gore or blood.
- Use search engine image results. Some sites, like Pixabay.com, allow free commercial use of selected imagery. Just be sure to read the terms of use or license some cheap stock photography.

Research shows that clients view the education you give them about their pet's health as a bonus to your practice's services.

5. Create your story. Here's where you assemble everything, but don't go too crazy! Start simple and aim to create:

- **Four to eight short-form educational one-liners.** These should be brief and to the point; they will be used on your social media platform. A good format is a photo with a single sentence and a call to action to learn more by visiting your website or calling your practice.
- **One short-form tip article.** Once you have your four to eight one-liners, bring them all together into a list that includes the relevant links to your trusted resources. Include a simple button, link, or text at the bottom that drives your reader to request an appointment today to learn about their specific pet's needs and safety. Add the list

as a blog post to your website and link to it from your e-newsletter and social media posts.

- **One or two targeted emails.** Once you have the above, put your favorite message points into two emails: one to cat owners and one to dog owners. Link back to the article on your website and include a call to action in the email to contact you for an appointment.

Planning Your Calendar

Once you've created your content, put together a quick calendar to share with your staff. It should outline which post will be going up on what day on social media and when your email newsletter will be released. It can look like:

- **Day 1:** Email newsletter released, list blog post published on website
- **Day 5:** Social media post number one posted (and boosted via Facebook ads)
- **Day 10:** Social media post number two posted (and boosted via Facebook ads)
- **Day 15:** Social media post number three posted (and boosted via Facebook ads)
- **Day 20:** Social media post number four posted (and boosted via Facebook ads)
- **Days 25–30:** New CAPC numbers for county released, shared on Facebook

Launching, Measuring, Tweaking

Once you have scheduled your content, it's time to launch your campaign. With Facebook scheduling, you're able to set up the whole campaign at once, with posts scheduled at regular intervals. Don't forget to check back regularly to see how and whether your clients are converting: You might find that one message attracts and engages more clients than others, which is important to note for next time and something that you can build upon with each year's parasite-free-pet campaign. ✨



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