

Central Line: The AAHA Podcast Transcript

Episode Title: Front Desks, Facebook, and Five-Week Waits: Marketing When We're Really Busy

Guest: Eric Garcia

0:00:00.6 Speaker: Welcome to Central Line, The AAHA Podcast. This is the official Podcast of the American Animal Hospital Association, dedicated to simplifying the journey towards excellence in veterinary medicine for every member of the veterinary team. Here's your host, Dr. Katie Berlin.

0:00:17.7 Katie Berlin, DVM: Hi, welcome back to Central Line. I'm your host, Katie Berlin, and I'm here with a guest that we've been super excited to be able to talk to. We had a couple of reschedules and we're just really excited to get this episode... This conversation to happen. And Eric Garcia, thank you so much for being with us today. I'm just putting down the chihuahua.

0:00:41.9 Eric Garcia: [laughter] That's okay, Katie. It's an awesome to... It's a pleasure and awesome to be here with you today.

0:00:48.5 KB: So Eric, before we get started, I have a feeling that it's a rare person listening who probably hasn't heard your name, you have been a speaker and a trusted resource for such a long time in Vet Med, but in case they're not familiar with you, would you mind just giving us a little introduction to yourself and what you do...

0:01:06.5 EG: Absolutely, so I am an IT and digital strategist. So in short, that means I help support practices in the profession and industry on digital strategies that are aimed at enhancing communication, workflow efficiency, and also attracting clients and engaging with pet owners across the spectrum there. So in short, spend my time traveling, speaking on this and working in coaching practices, so it's a very rewarding line of work.

0:01:35.3 KB: Yeah, I remember seeing you, I think it was at VMX one year when you were in New York, you did a presentation on marketing to millennials, and I loved it because it was one of the first millennial-centered presentations that was not viewing them in a condescending way. It was more like, "Hey, these people are... They really care about their pets, and this is what you should do because you want them as your clients." And also then you reinforced my deep hatred of stock photos, so...

[laughter]

0:02:07.8 KB: I also really appreciated that. [laughter]

0:02:09.8 EG: Yeah.

0:02:10.4 KB: Anyway, [laughter]

0:02:11.4 EG: And that could be a soapbox for me. Yeah.

0:02:15.2 KB: Yeah. So before we jump into the conversation, I wanted to ask you something because we spend so much time asking your opinion on specific questions, but I wanted to hear a question that gives you freedom to answer it, so if you were... If you could put up a billboard that

every single veterinary professional could see on their drive to work or a tweet, if you're a Twitterer, [chuckle] what would it say?

0:02:37.5 EG: Yeah, so I'm gonna glance over here because it's something I probably looked at for the last two years, and I... So I have a little white board off to the side of the screen, and I look at it every time I'm answering emails, but it's actually something that a friend told me, and I think it's actually a well-known statement, but that was new to me. But it says, "Say no so you can say yes to the things that you want to do." And I think we can apply that in so many ways. But for me, it's just to say that you don't have to say yes to every opportunity or everything that someone is asking you. I think for the average veterinary professional, it could be as simple as not having to say yes to working an extra shift and to say yes to the things that you wanna do, whether it's for yourself, whether it's for your family, or whatever it may be. And so it is something that I [chuckle] very much live by day-to-day for sure.

0:03:32.6 KB: I love that. Yeah, I love that. And that makes it even more meaningful that you're here talking to us today. But yeah, there are so many things in the profession we can't get out of doing that could be unpleasant, and so having the choice and knowing that we have the choice when things are... When we have the power to say yes or no, and really using that power for our own good and for the good of the people that we know will help.

0:03:54.0 EG: Absolutely.

0:03:55.5 KB: Love that.

0:03:57.9 EG: Thank you. [chuckle]

0:04:00.3 KB: Okay, so today we're gonna be talking about marketing and something you know a lot about and something I have an interest in and zero training. But marketing is something that I feel like could either be something people love or it's like a dirty word, and they're like, "Necessary evil." But right now, everybody is so busy, I have not talked to anybody in our profession in the last two years who isn't just totally slammed, short-handed, frustrated with clients sometimes and just feeling like they're overwhelmed. So the good news is, when you're so busy that you can't take new clients, you don't have to focus on marketing. Right?

0:04:35.6 EG: Yeah, not so much.

0:04:37.7 KB: Yeah.

[chuckle]

0:04:40.3 KB: I had a feeling like you were gonna say that. [chuckle]

0:04:42.6 EG: Yeah. Well, it's interesting that you mentioned that because that's something that I've been trying to get practices to think differently about over the last few years. And I... [chuckle] I have a lot to say around this, but I'll try to distill it down to some of the most important points. One being that, it's a... We've practices across the spectrum have been just insane, and that's just not been here in the US, but also in Canada and in other parts of the world. And so practices are thinking, I don't need to change my website, I don't need to do social media, I don't need to do these

things that are called marketing, or I don't need to spend money. But the reality is, is that there are two things. One is we should always have a brand presence or some sort of marketing that we can easily scale up.

0:05:27.8 EG: So it is important to have a fresh, new looking website and to have a social media presence and to have some search engine optimization, things that maybe you don't truly need to spend a lot of money on, but we need to have that presence there, so when we start seeing the growth decline and then we can ramp up that presence. And so it's very critical because if we don't invest on these things on a routine basis, especially when we're busy, and then when we start to see this decline happen, then we're gonna have to spend months creating a website, we're gonna have to spend months investing in a search engine optimization strategy that doesn't change over night. We're gonna have to spend time fine-tuning a Google ad campaign or creating content for social media.

0:06:10.5 EG: And so it's gonna take months before you can reap the benefits of that one. If you already had a system in place you can scale up. The second part of that is, retention is a form of marketing, and a lot of practices aren't realizing that this influx of growth that they're receiving, if they're not investing in retention marketing strategy, so for example, in a reminder system that meets client expectations to ensure that those pet owners continue to come back into the practice. Reaching out the appropriate number of times using these methods, social media is a form of retention marketing.

0:06:46.4 EG: If we're not investing in retention marketing strategies, then all of this growth that we've received, we're simply going to bleed and the way that you grow a truly sustainable practice, and what I mean by that is, where you don't have any more exam rooms where you're booked out for a long time, where you need more doctors and staff is to retain the majority of what you get, which unfortunately based off of what we see, most practices haven't maxed out their retention capability. And so all that simply means is that any growth that you receive, your marketing is just gonna replenish what you're losing, and so often times we become complacent 'cause we're like, "Oh, new client numbers look great, revenue looks great." But then they fail to realize that they're bleeding a subset of clients, and so retention marketing is probably the most... It's always been important but definitely within last year, the most important part of that strategy.

0:07:43.2 KB: Yeah, that makes so much sense. And I've heard out of the mouths of practice owners recently like, "Well, we don't really need that client anyway, 'cause we're bleeding... We're bleeding staff and we have so many clients waiting to get in." And obviously, if that client was screaming at your staff, that's probably not the one you need, but some clients are just frustrated and there's still good clients and people have gotten a bit complacent, I think, in some ways about just never needing to worry about having enough clients. That definitely speaks volumes about where we should be putting resources even in times like this. But I feel like there are a lot of veterinarians who are reluctant to invest in marketing, they might put up a Facebook page but not really use it much, or have a website where you can find out where the clinic is and they feel like that might be all there is that you really, really need. Why do you think that is?

0:08:38.7 EG: Yeah, so I think a lot of that... I think there's multiple reasons. I would say probably the most common reason is that they may have invested in marketing at some point, but have failed to put systems in place to be able to track the effectiveness of those campaigns. And so a lot of times what happens is they say... For example, they say, "Hey, I think we can get new clients, we

wanna grow." And they don't really trend data before to know where they're at, they just say, "Hey, the last few months, it doesn't look as strong."

0:09:13.5 EG: And then they hire a marketing company or an agency or whatever it may be, and then they spend money on search engine optimization and Google ad campaigns and having someone coach them on social media content. And they'll spend this money for a year or so, and then at some point, they'll just have this gut feeling where they say, "I don't really know if that's helping, I don't really know... Our new client numbers have been a little bit better, but it doesn't feel like it's doing much." And so either they'll stop spending or they'll fail to invest further, and a lot of that is just not knowing where they came from. And so I always tell practices in order for you to feel good about any money that you're spending on marketing, it's important to be able to track your success before those efforts, I always tell practices... And there are so many great tools out there that you can use, I know that Covetrus has a financial metric dashboard called Sparkline that you can invest in, there's VetSuccess.

0:10:11.9 EG: There are so many tools out there that integrate with your management software and give you a financial dashboard and metrics dashboard to be able to monitor your performance. And so I truly believe you should sign up for one of those services, find what's best for you, and thus invest in marketing. And have those conversations with your marketing company, your website company, whoever it is that's managing your marketing and saying, "Here's where we were trending before, patient visits, client visits, new client visits." And then have a quarterly conversation and say, "We've invested this much, here's where we're at." And then say, "Oh look, we're growing. This is great and it's working." Or look at it and say, "Hey, we were investing money but we're not seeing growth, why does that." Have those conversations. I remember I met a practice... Oh gosh, a few years ago at VMX during a workshop and he said, "I don't really believe in marketing." Although it was a marketing workshop that he paid extra to attend, so I knew that wasn't fully true.

0:11:14.3 EG: And I asked him why, and he said he was spending \$70,000 a year on marketing with a firm, and he said, "I just... And our new client numbers have been declining." And so I said to him, "Why didn't you have the conversation when you were only \$5000 in about why you're not getting a result." And he just... He admitted, he said, "You're right, I should have recognized this early on." And so I always tell practices in order for you to have that confidence, it's really important to monitor where you're at and to work with your marketing company, and the reality is if you don't get results after a certain time period that maybe that's not the right fit for you, maybe they're not delivering. But the ones who aren't reluctant are the ones who... Do you track that very closely and see those returns. And I'll tell you, Katie, I try to share a lot of success stories in the lecturing that I do, whether it's someone I don't know that emailed me after a session, or whether it's someone that we work with to say, "This is not theory, it works when it's done right." And so that's where practices are like, "Oh, okay, maybe I should be doing this." So it's probably one of the most common reasons I would believe.

0:12:20.6 KB: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense too. As veterinarians I know we are used to thinking about things with a direct cost-benefit analysis, we're gonna buy this therapy laser and we're gonna charge this much per session and it's gonna pay itself off in this amount of time. And sometimes, especially when we're not trying to attract new clients and can measure those numbers, I feel like it's probably pretty hard to just intuitively say, "I know how to track my return on a marketing investment."

0:12:47.3 KB: But when you think about the number of clients that now are so used to seeing brands online and building loyalty that way, if we're not in front of them, then I could see why they would maybe gravitate towards another clinic that had a presence online, whether it's through a newsletter or website or social media, so... That makes a ton of sense. And I was thinking about that in terms of branding, 'cause I was thinking about all those internet... All those ads you get on Facebook, and if you look at the comments, people are like, "Why are you advertising a product that's always out of stock."

0:13:24.6 KB: Every time I see this ad, I try to click on this pair of jeans and it's out of stock in all the standard sizes, and the comments build up like that, and you're like, "Yeah, why are they doing that?" But... Of course then there's this enormous demand for this product as soon as it's out, they don't even have to advertise 'cause you have been stalking the site for six months, and I feel like it's got it... We've kinda think about it that way. We wanna be in demand and have people say, "Okay, they're not taking new clients now, but they will one day."

0:13:55.8 EG: Yeah. And so you're 100% right, and I love that, that way of looking at it. And just to even take that and go back to your first question, practices are busy and so they say things like, "We don't... We don't want new clients to call us 'cause we're not gonna be able to schedule for two, three weeks out." Or, "We don't wanna do more with our reminder system because they're gonna get upset because they can't be seen for two to three months." And I think somewhere something was lost where I don't believe... And I could be wrong, but I don't believe we ever painted a scenario where preventive medicine wasn't an emergency service you had to have right away, and if we did, then we probably did something wrong at some point, and so it's really important to set expectation. So when we send a reminder or when we get someone who's a new client, instead of saying, "Oh, I'm not gonna be able to see you for two or three weeks, it's really busy." I think instead of saying that, which is natural for CSRs to do just like when we present the bill, we're like, "Oh, I don't know, it's gonna be high... "

0:15:03.0 KB: Sorry, yeah.

0:15:04.1 EG: Yeah, sorry. Instead what we should do should say, "Hey Mr. Garcia, it's great that you received this health reminder for Frankie, we are booked out two or three weeks. But it is important that we get this on the schedule because we want Frankie to get those necessary vaccinations, necessary exam to ensure that we keep Frankie healthy. So right now we're looking at booking for the month of May, what is your availability like the first two weeks of May." And start to look at it that way. Because the reality is, we need to get those pet owners to continue to come to you. We need to get them to understand the importance of these services, and the reality is that right now, you might be booked out two to three weeks in advance, but all good things come to an end and that will slow down, and so the way that you, again, become sustainable is that you continue to forward... It's not even forward booking, it's just continue to put those appointments out to when there's availability. And so you saying that... Someone saying something's out of stock, really kinda jogged my memory on... Yeah, that's a great example of that too.

0:16:10.1 KB: Yeah, we should view it as a good thing that we're in demand and that you can't get in right away. If your vet clinic has preventive care appointments open all day, every day, then that sort of... Unless they're strictly a preventive care clinic, then you wonder where are all the pets with ear infections that have to get fit in.

[chuckle]

0:16:27.1 KB: But I... Yeah, I definitely... And we were talking about this before we started recording. I had two ER visits in eight days back in January, February, and I was really scared and I still had to wait eight weeks for a specialist appointment. Human medicine doesn't view it as an emergency most of the time, even if you're sick. So it is definitely a perception thing that, I think we need to not make it so the people are waiting to the last minute to get those vaccines done.

0:16:56.4 EG: Beautifully said. Yeah. [chuckle]

0:17:00.5 KB: Yeah. So let's talk about the strategy a little bit, if you're currently in that situation that so many of us are in, where you just feel like I can't take one more client and I really don't want them to be calling me unless they're calling, asking if they can be put on the wait list because they just can't see them. What kind of strategy does that look like for your marketing? What do your ads and your social media post in your website look like?

0:17:23.3 EG: Yeah, so I kinda wanna answer... 'Cause I think there's two way... There's two different strategies, so I'll answer with the retention marketing strategy first, and then I'll answer with the new client acquisition part of the strategy, 'cause I think both are equally important right now. When it comes to the retention, the strategy there is, and I've been talking to practices about this over the last few years, is that when it comes to our reminder system, it is important that we deliver the appropriate number of touch points that are necessary to yield high compliance. And so what I mean here is any time a practice sends a text message, an email, a push notification, a post card, any one of those reminders regardless of how its delivered is considered a touch point. And so there was a study that was done years ago in the veterinary space, and it was several thousand practices. And what the study was able to distill down is that the practices that spent... That sent between nine and 12 touch points yielded the highest compliance possible.

0:18:29.8 EG: And so a lot of practices here are 9 to 12 touch points. And they're like, "That's a lot. I already get complaints. People are really gonna freak out. I'm not gonna do this." And so I wanna kinda paint some color behind this. So the reason that 9 to 12... Well, that we suspect the reason that 9 to 12 came to be true... And by the way, it was a very thorough study to say, these few hundred practices you're gonna send six touch points, these few hundred you'll send nine, these few hundred you'll send 12. And then they said, "Okay, great, we know what your retention is, now swap it and see. Did it affect it in a negative or positive way?" So the study was able to prove it, and it's since been validated numerous times with practices that we work with or people who've implemented it in sessions and have followed up since then. But the reason practices don't do it or our fearful of it, which I actually kinda like that as a profession, we've taken a more conservative approach with client communications, I think once you overdo it, that it's hard to undo it.

0:19:28.1 EG: So I actually appreciate that as a profession we've been always worried about what the client might think or how they feel about it. But the reason that most practices don't do it is because they apply their own personal feelings to what they think all of their clients would feel. And the reality, Katie is, is that... And we all kinda feel the same, is we're like, "Oh, well, I'm tired of getting messages from these retailers, and they send me five a week." And we have to remember that the reason they do it is not because it annoys the majority of people who are following them, who subscribe, they're doing it because it leads to that desired action, which is a purchase or whatever the call to action is.

0:20:08.9 EG: A major online pharmacy in the veterinary space, so not a... I don't like to mention names, but a major company we've been talking about over the last few years, people don't realize that if you look at their metrics, they send 4.8 emails per week to our pet owners, and 95% of those emails actually include marketing. And they don't do that because pet owners are annoyed that they're getting almost five emails a week, they do it because it leads to that desired action, which is purchasing something online. And so it's important to recognize that we shouldn't really apply how we personally feel, we should always kinda go where the data leads us. And a lot of data... And what's great is we have veterinary-specific data. But even if you look at non-veterinary specific data, it does tell that story of increased touch points.

0:21:00.5 EG: The other thing I always say with this is if you get a client who's annoyed with too many touch points, we have to work with them. Instead of saying, "Okay, I'm sorry," and then they get a Post-it note, and they put it on the manager's desk. And then the manager has five to 10 Post-it notes, and then they say, "Well, we're gonna turn off six touch points." Instead of doing that blindly, we should have our CSRs change the conversation and say, "Hey, Mr. Garcia, we're so sorry that you received a text message in a post card, what is your preferred method of communication? Is it only text messages? Or do you have our app, and do you appreciate that more?" Work with that client. And if they say, "I don't want a post card. I don't want a text. I don't want an email," then work with them, change that communication preference to where ultimately that client is then going to be communicated in the way that they want to be communicated.

0:21:44.9 KB: I love that.

0:21:45.6 EG: So the... Yeah, that's a retention strategy.

0:21:48.1 KB: Yeah, like the actual personalized care like we're always talking about for the patients. And have the default be to communicate more, and you can work with clients who want less. I love that.

0:22:02.4 EG: Absolutely. But just... And I'll probably say this numerous more times, but before you increase touch points, you gotta know where you're at before with the retention, right? So I don't want you to listen to this podcast and say, "Oh, Eric Garcia said according to this study, I should have 9 to 12 touch points," and then just change 9 to 12 touch points, I want you to know where you were before. So use a financial dashboard or some sort of practice health dashboard, find out what your retention is or what your bonding rate, which is another word, or attrition rate, they're all the same thing, find out what it is, make the change and monitor success. So that way at the end, you can say, "Hey, marketing, it works. This decision, it worked." The other strategy... So when it comes to marketing to the new clients, it is important that we have something in place. So meaning here that if your practice and you... And new clients are going to be seen at soonest two or three weeks, which by the way based on what I'm seeing it, it used... That used to be the case, but we're actually starting to see that shrink down a little bit, I think it's regional probably right now.

0:23:02.8 EG: But say a new client won't be able to be seen for two to three weeks, and that's been consistent. Then the strategy there's going to be, "Let's have a website. Let's make sure it looks good." You talked about stock imagery before, it's something I get on my soapbox about, "Let's take this as an opportunity to swap out pictures, make things look good, make things sound good, make the website functional and make sure it's mobile-friendly. Let's have that. Let's spend that time

making sure the website is what it should be in order to differentiate ourselves from our competitors. Let's spend that time engaging with our existing clients on Facebook and Instagram and sharing case studies of just the cool things that we're doing." Let's take it as an opportunity to do those things, not to say anything like, "Hey, we're accepting new clients," or to... I wouldn't even recommend having a major ad presence at that point, it's just to have those systems where we're constantly pushing ourself out there.

0:23:52.8 EG: And then when you see that, hey, maybe your two to three-week time period is now one to two weeks, and it's starting to shrink, you can forecast that as long as you're looking at your scheduler and say, "Okay, it seems like consistently we're not as far booked out." So then from that point, that's where you say, "Okay, well, the website looks good." So now you have the confidence to push an ad out there through Google or a Facebook ad or an Instagram ad or... I still firmly believe in local marketing opportunities that exist for certain communities. So look at those opportunities and then start creating ads to push out your practice at that time to be able to ensure that you continue to then fill that schedule back up in the way that it should have been. So again, have that baseline. Take this as an opportunity to make change.

0:24:46.6 EG: There's a great quote from Bob Jones of Brakke Consulting that came out in, I believe, April of last year. And it says, "We'd like to say the animal health industry is resilient, successful. But we're not immune to change, and it's easier to change when you're successful." And I fell in love with that quote, because it's such a true thing. It's to say our new client numbers are great, our patient visits are great. We're successful, we don't need to make change, but it's an opportune time to make change, it's an opportune time to say, "You're busy, you have a lot going on, let's upgrade the website, let's spend more time on social media. If we're only on Facebook, let's start doing Instagram." It's to say, "Let's start making these changes now so we can continue to remain successful in the future."

0:25:25.8 KB: Yeah, that makes a ton of sense. And I think practice owners and managers a lot of times I feel like they have to do everything themselves. But Caitlin DeWilde was on the podcast a while back. Yeah, she's so amazing. And she had talked about some ways that you can get team members involved in helping out with things like social media, people who really gravitate towards those platforms and love them and use them anyway. It won't feel as much like work when you're doing it in a medium that you really like. And so take advantage of that, right?

0:25:57.0 EG: Absolutely.

0:26:00.0 KB: Yeah. Have a plan, but definitely it seems like a lot of the team can get involved in these initiatives where you're taking pictures of your team doing their jobs, and that tends to boost morale too, in my experience. There's nothing like seeing yourself in a selfie with this cute puppy and you're like, "Okay, my job's pretty cool."

0:26:17.3 EG: For sure. It's interesting. What Caitlin's saying is 100% true. The thing I always add to that is, pay them, right, so...

0:26:25.0 KB: Right. Yeah.

0:26:27.0 EG: They're probably not going to be able to do it all when they're on the clock in the practice because of the nature of how busy things are, so pay them when they're doing it after hours,

and then the other thing is celebrate it with the team. During a team meeting, say, "Look at what Caitlin was able to do on social media. This is awesome." I was... This may sound stalker-ish, but it's not. So I had a practice recently that I know where they re-shared a TikTok on their Instagram from an employee, which is not normally something I recommend doing because it has the employee's personal TikTok handle, but naturally I was like, "Okay." I went to look at the employees TikTok because it was a really good social media post, and she was doing all these amazing things in the practice, and I said... I was like, "If she's not on the social media team, she needs to be on the social media team," and by the way, don't share her personal TikTok account.

0:27:18.8 KB: Right. And make sure you get permission from that person. [laughter]

0:27:20.4 EG: Yeah, right. Yeah, to Caitlin's point, to your point 100% should that be the case. And the practices that are successful and consistent are those that have more of a team approach.

0:27:32.1 KB: Yeah, absolutely. I also liked something that you've come back to a couple of times in the conversation, where we're always looking for ways for team members... Hopefully there are team members listening who aren't practice owners or veterinarians or practice managers, and who oftentimes feel like they don't have a ton of power to change the way things are done in their practice. That's just... That's the lot in life of many team members because you can't change everything yourself, especially when you're coming at it from a CSR position or a technician or even an associate vet, and so... But the CSRs, there's no reason why a CSR can't start communicating with clients on the phone the way that you were saying where it's not a, "So sorry, we can't accommodate your request." It's more of a, "Yes, I'd love to accommodate your request, let's see when we can make that happen." Such a big difference, and that's a mindset and a vocabulary shift really.

0:28:28.9 EG: Yeah. My heart goes out to our poor CSRs who are just so bombarded with everything.

0:28:32.8 KB: I know. Oh, I know.

0:28:37.8 EG: And so I also think that by just changing how you approach things that hopefully gets a better reaction out of the pet owners so our CSRs don't have to be beat down with words like, "What do you mean I can't come in for vaccinations for two weeks? This is completely not okay and unacceptable."

0:28:57.9 KB: Yeah.

0:29:00.0 EG: So hopefully by just changing that, they also won't get beat up as much, which I... And my heart always goes out to our CSRs.

0:29:06.5 KB: For sure. And they can make such a difference, like you guys who answer the phone, you who at the front desk, who are face-to-face with a client who's just been told that they owe \$3000 or who's very scared because they scheduled this appointment, they don't know what's wrong with their pet. You can make the difference with just how you're talking to that person. I don't know how many clients I've heard say, "Oh, I left my last practice because every time I went to the front desk, I was just treated like I didn't matter." Or, "Every time I come here, I feel like I'm welcomed and they call me by name, and that's why I stick around." It can make the difference. It's

not always the veterinarians. A lot of times it has nothing to do with what happens in that exam room, so...

0:29:46.8 EG: Yeah. I agree, it's like when you get holiday... Cards around the holiday at the practice, a lot of that is... Does come from the CSR who's taking that extra five minutes to say, "Hey, how's your son or your daughter doing and how is your... You just got married or you just had surgery in your arm... How's that..." It's the CSRs who are so good at remembering those things that... You're so right, Katie, a lot of those interactions are what they remember and that's what bonds them to the practice.

0:30:17.1 KB: Yeah, you might not get the credit, which is unfortunate, and you should get way more credit than you do, but you are making a huge difference every day with those clients. Okay, so I have really two more questions for you.

0:30:31.3 EG: Sure.

0:30:31.9 KB: Social media, so right now, if people aren't really so much trying to attract new clients, people might say, "Hey, this is a good time to start putting more educational posts on our social media." Do you think that educating clients on social media is a good idea? Do you think we do it too much or too little, like a post about heartworm prevention or why Lyme disease is a big issue?

0:30:56.6 EG: Yeah, so education's critical to the success of your social media, but education in the right way. So I have a lot to say about this, so I'll... I could do...

0:31:07.2 KB: Yeah, we could do a whole podcast just on this. Yeah. [laughter]

0:31:08.2 EG: I was just gonna say, yeah. We could do... But a few things. One, education's critical. But education in the right way. And what I mean by that is a few things. One is, according to psychologists, people remember information up to 22 times more than straight facts alone, as long as it's woven into a narrative. So if Katie, you were coming to Disney, which I happened to live an hour away from, and I was like, "Katie, when you go to Disney, don't start in Mexico. Never start with tequila. Start in Canada, and then work your way around to Mexico." There is... You're gonna remember a lot of those experiences as short narratives, and it's no different with pet owners. If you were to share a story of a dog that was heartworm positive but is recovering, or a story of a dog that the owner originally thought had a seasonal allergy, but really ended up being a food allergy.

0:31:56.2 EG: Whatever that might be, it's important to share those stories because it's what people remember and share less statistics. So we don't respond... Well, it's interesting because as a profession, veterinarians and veterinary professionals respond to a lot of science and data, and so we assume it's the same for the average person when it's really not. If you were to go out there and say, "One in three pets will get heartworm disease at some point in their lifetime", they're less likely to say, "Oh, I need to give that parasiticide." But if you share a story of a real pet that was in your community that was actually suffering from this disease, then they're more likely to act. And so it's really critical to think about that. The other thing is, is we wanna try to stay away from sharing too many articles, which really interesting... So I talk about future podcasts, I do a lot of work in understanding the mindset of cat owners, and in short we don't market to cat owners merely in any

way that's effective.

0:32:50.7 KB: That's another whole podcast. [chuckle]

0:32:52.3 EG: 100%. And let's do that because I've got a lot to say there.

0:32:55.3 KB: Okay. [chuckle]

0:32:56.3 EG: But, what's interesting is, according to the American Association of Feline Practitioners, 52% of cat owners said that they would actually bring their cat to the vet more often if they knew that they could present problems. But when you look at the counter statistic or the statistic that even leads to that, 81% of cat owners believe that their cats are in excellent health and self-sufficient, so they don't actually believe that their cats get sick and don't self-correct, but if you were to tell them otherwise... And so the reason I say that is, cat owners tend to respond even better to education than dog owners, and interestingly enough, if you were to share an article on a dog health-related topic, it's probably gonna get very, very little clicks. If you were to share an article about cat health, it actually gets more engagement just to kind of prove that. So yes, it's important. The one thing I'll also add is, 'cause I know we have a lot of AAHA accredited practices in Canada, in Canada, depending on where you're from, you're actually not allowed to market products or services in Quebec, you're not even allowed to market your practice at all.

0:33:58.7 EG: So it is important to recognize that no matter what province you're in within Canada, that as long as we take an educational approach, we're not violating the guidelines that our governing bodies have put in place. So if we go out there and we say, "You need to purchase this term diet 'cause it's gonna be great for your pet and give them a healthy coat," you can't do that in most provinces. But if you were to say, "We had this cat come in with this skin issue, the owner thought it was a seasonal allergy, through an examination we were able to actually find out it was a food allergy, when we started giving this pet this diet, we noticed a dramatic shift. So it's very important to keep an eye out for these type of issues with your pet because if they go undiagnosed they can become a problem." You're actually allowed to do that. It's a very subtle way of marketing, but more importantly than anything it's educational. So in short, yes, let's do education, but let's do it in a way that's effective and more meaningful, so let's share more stories and things like that.

0:34:48.7 KB: Stories, I love it. Stories are my favorite thing, and I wish all we could do in this podcast is tell stories all day because vet professionals have the best stories.

0:34:57.3 EG: So true.

0:34:57.8 KB: I feel like we don't realize how lucky we are compared to say, your average dentist or lawyer that we... Every single appointment we see is a story and a cute picture, and marketing could be just that easy if we were just like, "Hey, let's just mine this content for what it is," and that makes a ton of sense. And I love that about Canada, that you can't just put an ad on your social media, but you can say why this pet got better with the help of a product. I think that's really cool. One of the things that... And I am circling back to that marketing to cat owners, by the way, you'll be getting an email from me. [laughter]

0:35:35.3 EG: Yeah. Okay, let's do it. [laughter]

0:35:39.3 KB: But I think this has been such a great conversation because there are so many things that you said that I think will resonate with people who maybe don't see marketing as something that comes naturally, one being that data is important, and as you say, we're data-driven people. We use this medication 'cause the data says it works, and we use this diet because there's tons of data behind it versus just buying something off-the-shelf. And if data tells us that marketing is important, even when we feel like we can't see straight 'cause we're so busy, then it seems like it's probably worth spending some time and resources to get that done and get it done right.

0:36:19.4 EG: Yeah, and I'll also add to that, even if you're successful in what you do today, it doesn't mean that you can't be more successful. I've had practices over the last few years who said, "Our new client numbers are great, our patient visits are great, but I want an exit strategy, and when I sell, I wanna sell for the most that I can." And so they say, "Even though I'm doing well, I wanna do better." And so I always tell practices, you don't have to make change when key performance indicators are going in the direction that you don't want them to, you can very much make change now, especially if you're an owner looking to sell at some point in the future. You've built this practice, you put a lot of blood, sweat and tears into it, it would be nice to get what it was worth in that, and so, just always think about it from that sense as well, but... Yeah.

0:37:04.4 KB: Yeah, absolutely. So, to close out, I'd like to ask you my last question...

0:37:09.1 EG: Sure.

0:37:09.3 KB: Which is, if... If your practice is like, "Oh, I've really been neglecting this area or I know I have to do more, but it just seems overwhelming," like what's one thing that any practice could probably start doing tomorrow to kinda up their marketing game and beef up that strategy?

0:37:28.7 EG: Yeah, so I don't think there's a wrong first thing, I think what I like about the nature of the question is that I always tell practices it's to pick one thing, I think one of the things that I've seen work really well and it ties into what we mentioned a few moments ago is, don't... Don't try to do this yourself. So I think the best thing that you can do is set up a team meeting and say, "Hey, we wanna do more with marketing, we wanna tell more stories, we wanna educate more pet owners, what are your ideas?"

0:37:58.3 EG: And work with your team, and you're gonna very quickly see who's very excited and into it, and who's gonna help you, and then you're also gonna very quickly see people who are just not interested or engaged in that by any means. And once you get that... It could be a group of people, it could be one person, once you get that additional support, then sit down and brainstorm and say, "Look at our website, look at our competitor's website, how is that going? Look at the pictures, are they personalized pictures? Let's go to Facebook and see, are we sharing enough cat pictures in comparison to dog pictures or content?" But a lot of times when you take that team approach, you will start to just get a ton of ideas about what... The direction that you can take, but once you get those ton of ideas, continue to narrow down to one thing at a time, if it's updating the website, updating pictures, adding more cat content, just focus on that one thing at a time. I don't think there's any wrong approach when it comes to just doing something.

0:38:56.0 KB: Yeah, that's great advice. That activation energy to get going is sometimes the hardest thing to find, but getting your team involved is always a good idea with almost every big decision it seems like...

0:39:06.3 EG: True.

0:39:06.8 KB: That's... That's a good rule of thumb is like if you're trying to do it all on your own and your team doesn't know, that's probably the first step you should take, [chuckle] so...

0:39:13.3 EG: Plus it's fun.

0:39:14.8 KB: Yeah, it's fun. It's fun to brainstorm and work on things together. So, Eric, thank you so much, this has been so much fun. And I think I've identified like 65 other topics that we could talk about, so maybe I'll try to narrow that down to one and we can hopefully do this again sometime, but...

0:39:30.3 EG: I would love to.

0:39:31.3 KB: And... Just... I wanted to thank CareCredit too, quickly, because CareCredit is actually making this episode possible and several others this first year of our podcast and I'm really, really grateful to them.

0:39:44.4 EG: Can I add just because it's CareCredit, I always tell people... Just last marketing tip, proactively talk about financing.

0:39:51.8 KB: Oh yeah.

0:39:52.3 EG: Don't wait... So... And what I mean by that is you can easily in your reminders... When I get a reminder that says, "My pet's due for a service," have a link at the bottom that says, "Are you looking at ways to afford care?" Or something a little bit more eloquent.

0:40:03.8 KB: Love that.

0:40:04.3 EG: Have a link that goes to your website that shows all of your financing options including CareCredit, so sorry, I just... Felt the need to throw that in. [chuckle]

0:40:11.7 KB: No, I love that. Eric, where can our listeners find you if they do want to enlist your help with all of this?

0:40:18.9 EG: Yeah, so it's pretty easy. Anywhere online, it's @EricGarciaFL, so @EricGarciaFL on LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, anywhere, any social platform, you'll see me on TikTok but you won't see anything there, [chuckle] so I just don't use it right now, but...

0:40:34.1 KB: It's like my Twitter.

0:40:35.3 EG: Yeah, it's kind of like my Twitter too, you'll probably see me more engaged on Instagram or ericgarciafl.com, but yeah, I would love to meet some of your listeners and hear how they were able to apply this information hopefully.

0:40:49.1 KB: Fantastic, Thank you again so much, Eric. Thanks to CareCredit, and thanks to everybody for listening, we'll catch you next time on Central Line.

0:40:58.4 Speaker: Thanks for listening to today's episode with Central Line, the AAHA podcast. If you love what you hear, please take a moment to leave us a rating and review. For more resources to help you simplify your journey towards excellence in veterinary medicine, we invite you to visit AAHA.org, that's A-A-H-A dot O-R-G.