

Using Technology to Meet Client Expectations

Eric D. Garcia, IT & Digital Strategist
Simply Done Tech Solutions, LLC
Tampa, Florida, USA
ericgarciafl.com

For me, technology is a career. But for almost everyone else, it's a way of life. Whereas we might have once considered certain areas of technology, like smartphones, online shopping, and FaceTime to be generation-specific, the data shows this is no longer the reality. We all now shop online, with 2017's \$2.3 trillion in global e-commerce sales expected to grow to \$4.5 trillion by 2021. We binge-watch TV via Netflix, send text messages, and request Uber rides. Hands reach for the ceiling without hesitation during my lectures when I ask, "How many of you use this type of technology each day?"

Still, despite this growing consensus and our love of tech conveniences, veterinary practices are hesitant to adopt the latest technology solutions. Some practice owners I've met tell me that "mostly millennials use tech" and that millennials are generally broke, so why focus on them? Well, some of the sentiment is true. Many millennials are broke, having pursued higher education at a much greater cost than what average wages can pay off. We've all read about the rising student debt.

But take note of this: When it comes to pets and pet care, millennials are doling out big bucks. Statistically, millennials are the largest pet-owning demographic, spending an average of \$1,285 a year on pet care, with the majority of that figure designated for veterinary care. Millennials play a larger role in the veterinary economy than many practice owners readily acknowledge. We live in a world where technology is accelerating into our daily lives. We're simply too far along in the process to reverse course, even while governments learn to appropriately regulate behemoths like Google and Facebook. Whether it's Uber, Netflix, Airbnb, or another tech solution, pet owners leverage conveniences and apps each day because they make life easier. I would be remiss not to mention Amazon, perhaps the most notable example of the new technology revolution. Amazon simply provided everything that other retailers didn't, whether it was a better experience, better service, or greater convenience. Only when brick-and-mortar retailers started losing revenue did they react, but their responses were too little, too late for many of us.

The Golden Rule

That takes us to the essence of this article: Veterinary practices deprive pet owners of the same conveniences and experiences we demand in our daily lives.

We expect to fetch a quick ride through a ride-hailing app, never dialing a phone number, but we force pet owners to call us when they need something. We also expect them to call us and then drive to our clinics to pick up essentials like food and heartworm and flea medications while we — practice owners, consultants, and staff alike — do our personal shopping online. Similarly, we leverage telemedicine by consulting with our physicians online, but we make pet owners take time off work for simple rechecks and evaluations. We receive texts from businesses of all types, but seldom do we provide the same functionality for pet owners.

Even though there's room for improvement, we need to give our profession credit where it's due. The veterinary industry is outpacing industries once known to excel in client communications. My analysis, experience, and research tell me that we're outpacing human dentistry, which used to set a standard for communication. Our industry is changing at a much more rapid pace than even a decade ago.

It's an Online World

Work remains to be done, specifically in areas like telemedicine, online pharmacies, and text communication. Many argue that online pharmacy sales pale in comparison to in-person purchases, but we're seeing more online scripts being filled than ever before from places like Chewy and 1-800-PetMeds. Some practices drag their feet amid such change, while others leap toward it. I urge practices to partner with an online pharmacy and promote the option. Additionally, I urge you to begin texting clients, giving you more intimate, convenient access to the 277 million American adults and teenagers who actively text. (See my article "Keeping in Touch: Texting Pet Owners" at <http://bit.ly/2mMCBr6>.)

We also need to use more mobile apps — many clients would like instant access to their pet's medical records — and we need to leverage telemedicine, a veterinary advent that is just around the bend.

Let's learn our lesson from Netflix predecessor Blockbuster, the taxi companies, and smaller retailers that refused to move toward online solutions and e-commerce. Change is something that can't be prevented or stopped. Instead, it must be embraced.

So, I'll ask one final question to that effect: Would you rather try something once it's too late, or would you rather be an innovator, embracing the new world we live in and offering the best of 21st-century technology solutions to your patients? To me, the answer is all too clear.



About the Author: Eric Garcia is an IT expert. Digital marketer. Industry thought leader. When it comes to helping veterinary practices streamline their technology and attract and retain clients, Eric Garcia has a proven track record of educating the industry and producing results. Eric is an IT and Digital Marketing consultant working exclusively with veterinary practices. In addition to a long list of satisfied clients, Garcia's work has been recognized throughout the industry. He speaks regularly at conferences all throughout the world.

Facebook: facebook.com/EricGarciaFL **Twitter:** @EricGarciaFL **Instagram:** @EricGarciaFL