



Puppy and Kitten Welcome Packs— An Overlooked Opportunity to Enhance Client Loyalty and Knowledge

Article by Lori Kogan, Ph.D. Courtesy of Preventive Vet™

We have all heard that it costs five times more money to attract a new client than retain an existing one or that increasing client retention rates by even 5 percent can increase profits by 25 percent. In other words, loyal clients are the bread and butter (or doggy/kitty treats?) of your practice. They visit their veterinary hospital more often and are more likely to follow through with recommended treatments—both of which impact pet health and hospital revenues. Pet owners measure service quality by how their veterinary hospital interactions make them feel, and positive experiences help develop trust and loyalty.

One path towards increased client loyalty is through the dissemination of pet health and safety information to help build client education and awareness. As a study by Bayer in 2011 pointed out, the top reasons pet owners give for visiting their veterinarians more often pertain to education and awareness. The 2018 Ontario Veterinary Medical Association's Pet Owner survey found that the No. 1 factor

influencing a pet owner's decision of which veterinarian to use isn't the pricing or quality of medicine at the practice, but rather how clearly the practice demonstrates its interest in the pet's overall well being. We also know, as a recent study I co-authored supported, better-educated pet parents are more likely to make decisions that positively impact their pets' welfare (<https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/9/11/978>).

Taken together, we know that clients want to be educated by their veterinarians—and better-educated clients offer their pets a better quality of life. They also have increased loyalty to their veterinarians, which positively impacts your hospital's bottom line. The question is, therefore, are we missing an opportunity to capitalize on a way to better educate clients in a practical way—one that does not turn each appointment into a mini-marathon—and in the process improve client relations?

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

"Welcome packs are indeed a great use of limited resources. They are an opportunity to help supply your new owners with the pet health, behavior, and welfare information they need to be good pet parents (and good clients)."

These are the questions that Preventive Vet asked me to explore. Preventive Vet's mission is to educate pet owners by offering useful, practical information through their engaging, user-friendly book series that veterinary teams use in practice (<https://www.preventivevet.com/mwi>). While confident that their books are making a difference by educating pet owners, they were curious to explore whether it makes sense to include these books in new kitten and puppy packs. To help answer this question, they placed a link to a survey on their website and asked pet owners to anonymously complete a short survey about their views of puppy/kitten welcome packs. They then asked me to independently analyze the data.

When they approached me, I was eager to explore this topic. I started by exploring what is already known about client welcome packs. What studies have been done to support the plethora of suggestions on what to include in a pack? Or for that matter, the idea that welcome packs are worth the time and money involved in their creation and distribution. The answer astonished me—I could find no studies that explored these topics. My inner geek was nearly giddy with the chance to help analyze and interpret data to help veterinary hospitals make informed, data-driven decisions about the investment they were making in their welcome packs.

To begin, it seemed prudent to start with the basics—do pet owners like welcome packs? Do they expect them? What do they really want in a welcome pack? And what about the educational materials? Do they appreciate and use this information? Does the quality of the educational material impact how they feel about their veterinarian?

New kitten and puppy visits

Let's take a minute and set the stage. New kitten and puppy visits are likely some of your favorite appointments—new owners who are excited and eager to show off their new 'baby' and the opportunity to play with a cute (because,

honestly, are there any other kind?) puppy or kitten. Often, though, the fun play time (and puppy breath) can be accompanied by a sense of pressure—feeling overwhelmed with the number of questions and concerns raised by new owners, and all the things that you want and need to tell them, running up against your limited appointment times. You realize that you have an opportunity to create a lifelong loyal client and help shape a positive new pet experience, but often feel you need more time.

What do you offer to clients during these new kitten and puppy visits? Many of you likely offer some type of kitten and puppy welcome pack. Welcome kits are touted as a way to exceed client expectations, build hospital loyalty, and encourage a positive future relationship. Puppy and kitten kits typically contain a variety of items that can broadly be categorized as food/treats, toys/supplies, and educational materials. They range in price from free (everything donated or photocopied) to upwards of \$15, with an average cost of approximately \$5. While some may argue the value of free samples and coupons, the general consensus is that these packs should contain at least some educational materials to help ensure new owners make informed choices regarding their new pet's care and position the veterinary clinic as the expert—the place to go when issues or concerns arise.

While intuitively, most hospitals feel that welcome packs are a good idea and often spend a considerable amount of money and resources creating and distributing them, unfortunately, there is little to help guide them in these efforts. So, let's start with the first question: Do clients like receiving a puppy/kitten welcome kit? The answer is a resounding 'yes,' with over 90 percent of both dog and cat owners reporting loving/liking their welcome pack. Given that only 16 percent of cat owners and 22 percent of dog owners expect a pack, welcome packs are a no-brainer way to exceed client expectations.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Ok, so it sounds like packs are a good idea. Does it matter how much they cost? How about those packs that cost nearly nothing because they primarily consist of free samples and vendor swag? Do clients view their packs different based on how much money they think their veterinarian spent on the pack? We now know the answer is ‘yes’; those who receive packs they perceive as costing more money appreciate their packs more than those who perceived their packs costing very little.

Importantly, not only do clients appreciate a more expensive pack, their estimate of the pack’s cost is positively correlated with how appreciated they feel as a client and how invested they feel their veterinarian is in keeping their pet healthy. Remember when we mentioned that clients’ perceptions of a veterinarian who cares about their pets’ health and wellbeing impact their loyalty? And that loyalty impacts owners’ decisions regarding frequency of office visits and recommendation compliance? It would seem that these factors begin to paint a picture that suggests throwing a bunch of free samples and photocopied bits of information in a bag is not the answer.

Perhaps at this point you are convinced that welcome packs are important and that they should include some items of substance. I would argue that the place to allocate resources within your welcome pack is in your educational materials. We know that clients want preventive information from their veterinarians. When Preventive Vet asked pet owners ‘How important is it that your veterinarian provide you information to avoid and/or recognize problems’ on a scale of 0–100 (with 100 being critically important), the median score was 94. Unfortunately, we also found that nearly 40 percent of dog and cat owners feel they do not get enough preventive information from their veterinarians.

Yes, there is certainly Dr. Google, but the truth of it is, owners are still looking to their veterinarians for pet health, behavior, and care information. Good information is arguably always important, but it is absolutely critical for new puppy and kitten owners. People, in general, don’t search Dr. Google for preventive information; it’s the reactive information they’re looking for. There is so much to tell them, yet logistical time constraints and the owner’s mental overload prevent us from giving clients all the information they want and need in the first series of puppy/

kitten visits. That is where the educational material in your welcome pack can step in to help fill the gaps.

In terms of your welcome kits’ educational materials, are photocopied papers and/or brochures on a variety of topics good enough? Good question—compared to a book, are these types of resources viewed similarly by owners and able to accomplish the same end result? The survey results indicate it does make a difference. Pet owners who received a book (any book, not just books by Preventive Vet) were more likely to say they loved their pack. Both dog and cat owners were also more likely to perceive the pack as more costly (which, remember, is correlated with positive feelings about their veterinary clinic and the perception that the veterinarian cares about their pet’s health). So, although you can check the educational box and include loose papers or brochures in your welcome pack, investing in a more substantive educational piece appears worth the investment.

Lastly, when exploring different types of educational material, it is important to assess their potential impact on pets’ health and wellbeing. Do pet owners actually use books more often than other forms of written educational material? Again, the data results say ‘yes’; pet owners who reported receiving books in their welcome pack rated the information as better compared to other sources of written information. Additionally, those who received a book spent more time reading the information and were more likely to still refer to the material [see Table 1].

	Pack with educational book	Pack without educational book
Dog health and safety	47.9%	24.5%
Dog behavior and training	61.9%	26.7%
Cat health and safety	38.9%	19.2%
Cat behavior and training	44.4%	22.9%

Table 1. Percent of owners who reported still accessing the educational material they received in their welcome pack.

In conclusion, next time the topic of welcome packs comes up at a hospital staff meeting, and someone asks if 1) a

puppy/kitten pack is worth the money and effort, and 2) if they should include a book as an educational resource, you can answer positively, with data at your fingertips, to both these questions.

Welcome packs are indeed a great use of limited resources. They are an opportunity to help supply your new owners with the pet health, behavior, and welfare information they need to be good pet parents (and good clients). And when someone asks if photocopied pages or brochures are good enough, you can tell them to think of the welcome pack like your (or your kids') Halloween candy bag. Remember how, at the end of the night when exploring your 'bounty,' you quickly sorted out the 'good' stuff from the other stuff? The Snickers[®] bars from the misguided 'healthy' snacks? That is what your clients do with their welcome packs. Sure, go ahead and throw in the swag and coupons from your vendors, but make sure your educational material is 'Snickers-quality.'

Whether you choose Preventive Vet books (MWI Distinct Advantage Program members get two free evaluation copies) or another option, this is your opportunity to help cement this new patient/client relationship, improve client loyalty, and impress them with your desire to help them keep their new family member safe and healthy.



Lori Kogan, Ph.D., is a Professor of Clinical Sciences for the College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at Colorado State University and a licensed psychologist. She is the chair of the Human-Animal Interaction section of the American Psychological Association and editor of the Human-Animal Interaction Bulletin, an open-access, online publication supported by Division 17 (Counseling Psychology) of the American Psychological Association. Dr. Kogan is also the research chair for the International Association of Animal Hospice and Palliative Care (IAAHPC). She has published numerous journal articles and book chapters, and co-edited books including 'Pet Loss, Grief, and Therapeutic Interventions: Practitioners Navigating the Human-Animal Bond,' 'Clinician's Guide to Treating Companion Animal Issues: Addressing Human-Animal Interaction,' and given presentations on topics related to human-animal interactions in both psychology and veterinary medicine venues. She is currently engaged in several research projects pertaining to the intersection of the human-animal bond and veterinary medicine.

Preventive Vet[™] is a content publishing and consulting company comprised of a group of dedicated veterinarians, certified trainers, behaviorists, writers, creatives, educators and, above all, awesome pet-loving people.

Preventive Vet[™] is an MWI Animal Health Distinct Advantage[™] program partner. To discuss how your practice can qualify for a free Distinct Advantage program membership, contact your MWI Territory Manager.

Distinct Advantage[™]
AmeriSourceBergen