



**Profiting on Puppy Love & Cat Care**  
*A Freelance Writer's Guide to Writing for Local  
Veterinary Hospitals*

by Brian Scott and Stanley Burkhardt

<http://www.FreelanceWriting.com>

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# *Chapter 1*

## **MY STORY...**

Most writers decide in which industries to write, such as high-tech writing, financial writing, healthcare writing or advertising copywriting. Sometimes our destiny decides the specialty for us.

I've worked in PR. Did copywriting work for publishing companies, and wrote sales letters and promotional stuff for small mom-and-pop shops.

I am a communications graduate who minored in graphic design. So what qualifications do I bestow to write on this unusual topic? Where did my ability to write for “cats and dogs” come from?

Years ago the veterinary hospitals who had commissioned me to write sales copy for their hospitals decided I would be a specialist in writing

for the veterinary services industry.

Frequently I am asked by other writers how I got started in writing for “cats and dogs” and why I chose to write — and stay — in this industry, since it’s not one of the top paying industries nor is it favorable on outsourcing work.

**The short story of it all is...**

...more than eight years ago a local veterinary hospital commissioned me to write its newsletter. It was called "Pet Paws" because I couldn't think of any other title that would be appropriate, cute and seducing. The newsletter's objective was to promote a positive image of the hospital. But the newsletter did more than make the hospital shimmer in the minds of its customers. The newsletter became a popular item to read while pet owners waited in the waiting room to see the next doctor. And many pet owners took the newsletter home because it provided newsworthy and useful tips, suggestions and recommendations on ways

to take precious care of their pets, while constantly and subtly reminding them of the hospital at which their pets were treated and cared.

The doctor who had commissioned me to write "Pet Paws" was elated with the results so he commissioned me to do more work. More newsletters, brochures, flyers, Web sites, and publicity stunts flowed my way over the years, so did a cadre of veterinary hospitals that commissioned me to do similar promotions for them. That's how I became a specialist in this field, undecidedly. I've stayed in this specialty ever since because I love what I do.

I think also it's important to know that I had no experience or knowledge writing for the veterinary industry, when I first started out. Writing "Pet Paws" resulted in knowing a good friend — she was a certified technician with years of experience — who knew I was a writer trying desperately to start a freelance career. She also knew I was a wizard with words, I harbored a deep love for animals, and I had the skills to do the task. Having known that her boss wanted to put out a newsletter, she

convinced her boss to contact me. And so he did. And that is how I was first hired as a freelance writer to write for cats and dogs. Much of the content for the "Pet Paws" newsletter derived from meetings and discussions I had with the owner, in addition to talking with other doctors and interns who worked at the hospital. The purpose of the meetings and discussions was to gather suggestions as to the types of content I should include in the newsletter — i.e. what exactly did pet owners want to read and would find important?

I spent a good part of my time with my face buried in veterinary books and periodicals so I could understand the complicated, sophisticated technical language that doctors often speak, and transform their tangled ribbons of sentences into language that the average person can understand.

Gradually, over many years, I've acquired a vast warehouse of knowledge and experience in writing copy for veterinary hospitals — and making a steady living doing it. Because somebody had helped me

get my foot in the door, I am forever grateful to help you get your foot in the door.

I am probably the first writer you have met who has written for veterinary hospitals. My opinion is that many writers don't see the profit or work potential in writing for veterinary hospitals, and don't make attempts at securing work from this industry. The other reason is that writers try many approaches to secure work in this industry and fail doing so.

I've overcome all of these obstacles, and much more. I will show you how to secure work in this industry, how to garner numerous and repeat assignments, and how to profit on puppy love and cat care. Let's get started!

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## Chapter 2

### THE SKILLS YOU NEED

I hope I stirred your interest in writing for the veterinary services industry by revealing that I had no previous experience in this field. You don't have to either. What you lack in knowledge and experience you can supplement with your willingness to learn and your determination to acquire the skills you need to succeed in this field. In short, it takes time and trial-and-error.

However, let me clarify the skills you do — or must — need to get your foot in the door. After all, you want to act professional and know what you are doing. Here they are:

**1) GOOD WRITING ABILITY.** I'm convinced you already possess good writing ability, otherwise you wouldn't have an interest in reading



this e-book. The type of copy you'll write is conversational. It's short. To the point. And most of all, it's simple so the lay person understands what you're saying and does not feel alienated. The exception is if you decide to ghostwrite or write byline articles for veterinary or trade publications, which requires more sophisticated and educated writing.

**2) AN UNDERLYING INTEREST.** I often wonder if copywriters who write for tar manufacturers, bottling companies, packaging plants, chip manufacturers, cancer-causing cigarette companies, or shady politicians have any interest in the stuff they write or they do it just for the money. I can't find interest in any of those things and have stayed away from such manufacturers and industries. I think the same is true if one is to write for veterinary hospitals. You must have an interest — at least to write for the long term. If you love animals, have a curiosity about how hospitals treat and care for pets, and a sensitive spot to help people, then you already have an interest or can cultivate an interest, easily.

Over the years you may — as I have — cultivate a strong interest in

learning and studying the rules, regulations and procedures that help hospitals operate efficiently; you may also take an interest in following outside third-party services and manufacturers of drugs and sophisticated diagnostic equipment that help veterinary hospitals better care for their patients. The more you know about how a veterinary hospital operates, and how outside services and new products and drugs contribute to the success of the hospital, the better you'll be at writing "client-expected" copy; in return, you'll be able to multiply your writing opportunities.

**3) RESEARCH.** Writing for veterinary hospitals requires you to go beyond your basic knowledge and dive into the area of specialization. You, too, will bury your face in books, I guarantee it, drumming up definitions to complicated or confusing terms, and pounding out those complicated terms into lay terms so that the average pet owner can understand. Before long, you'll have a working knowledge of common pet diseases and how to prevent each one; at what age pets ought to be neutered; how much chocolate dogs need to consume to reach a deadly

toxicity level; what types of Science Diet pet foods work best with various health conditions; why Parvo disease may be deadly; how dogs get bloated and why they could die; how euthanasia is performed; how often pets should get their teeth scraped and cleaned; when puppies should get their deciduous teeth pulled or their ears cropped, and so on.

**4) SELLING.** Many freelance writers consider selling to be the “curse” of commercial writing because it usually requires you to spend more than half of your time selling yourself to prospective clients — and swallowing many rejections — than spending time writing. After a while selling becomes easy, especially after you’ve landed your first client. Word gets around that you’re a terrific writer. Referrals snowball. More work effortlessly flows your way. Your specialty becomes known, so does your track record of boosting sales and productivity. Shortly after, you have doctors knocking at your door, begging you to help boost their profits, or spit-shine the hospital’s image, or increase its productivity.

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## Chapter 3

### HOW TO GET WORK

I mentioned before that the veterinary services industry is not favorable on outsourcing work to freelancers. This has been the norm for the last ten years (and beyond, perhaps) and I do not predict this will change, even with more companies farming out freelance work. A commonly asked question is, "Why?" Some reasons are:

**1) VETERINARY HOSPITALS DON'T REGULARLY SEEK FREELANCE HELP.** Work is generally done in-house by employees who are not necessarily as skilled as professional writers, marketers, and consultants. Printed materials, such as newsletters and brochures, are written in-house and completed by a local printer.

**2) VETERINARY HOSPITALS DON'T SEE THE NEED.** Would

you believe me if I told you that many veterinary hospital owners don't know how their hospitals can greatly — and measurably — benefit from a regular newsletter, brochure, Web site, PR work, or other types of internal and external literature? Believe me, it's true. Veterinary hospital owners aren't stupid — they've never been educated or shown how.

**3) VETERINARY HOSPITALS DON'T HAVE THE BUDGET TO HIRE FREELANCE WRITERS.** A false popular belief among many freelancers who have tried — and failed — to secure work. Veterinary hospitals have the money to hire freelancers, but because they rarely outsource work, they don't adjust their budgets and allot money for freelancers.

**4) FREELANCE WRITERS DON'T KNOW HOW TO FULFILL THE NEEDS OF VETERINARY HOSPITALS.** We should not let veterinary hospitals shoulder all blame, because freelancers are guilty as well in that they don't specifically know the specialized needs and problems of veterinary hospitals. Pinpoint their specialized needs and

know how to fulfill them and you'll get the work.

### **MY PREFERRED MARKETING IS NETWORKING**

My preference of marketing is networking. Friends (many now who are doctors) get me work because I let them know who I am, what I do, what I'm seeking, and if they can help me out. When I attend local and national vet-related conferences, workshops and seminars, I let people know who I am, what I do, what I can do for them, and how they can contact me.

Referrals are my goldrush. My satisfied clients do the networking for me, bragging to their colleagues about the great results I get them and that I can probably do the same for them, if the price is right.

There's an art and science to networking effectively — you've got to do it convincingly and subtly; to make sure you network tactfully and not like a pushy salesman (or an annoying one). You also have to know what to say and in what way to say it. Again, I urge you to read some books on selling your services so you can find out which types of marketing services fit your style, needs, and budget.

## **USE LOCALITY IN YOUR FAVOR**

Since locality is in your favor, take a trip to the hospital and see if it presently uses any types of print materials. If not, what kinds of print materials do you think this hospital can benefit from? If it has print materials, how can you improve these existing print materials, or what types of print materials would work better in place of these existing print materials? Start thinking. See if the hospital also has a Web site. If so, much of the background information will be there to educate you; if not, perhaps this is an opportunity to pitch yourself as a freelancer who'll



create a Web site for the hospital.

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## *Chapter 4*

### **WHICH HOSPITALS TO TARGET**

Veterinary hospitals come in different sizes, like all businesses. For simplicity, let's categorize them as being small (1-2 doctor practice), medium (3-10 doctor practice) and large (11-25+ doctor practice). I recommend you target the medium to large size veterinary hospitals, since they're more inclined to outsource work and provide you with repeat assignments. I am not suggesting you should ignore small veterinary practices; they, too can be a rich reservoir of repeat work, depending on their needs. However, my experience tells me larger veterinary hospitals are apt to offer you more because:

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**1) LARGER VETERINARY HOSPITALS HAVE LARGER BUDGETS.** And a lot more elbow room to do advertising and marketing throughout the year. A larger budget means less restrictions as to how and what the hospital spends its money on, as well as the type and amount of freelance services it will happily invest in.

**2) LARGER VETERINARY HOSPITALS HAVE MORE NEEDS TO BE FULFILLED.** They're more likely to need internal and external materials that will help boost their sales and increase their productivity.

**3) LARGER VETERINARY HOSPITALS HAVE MORE PROBLEMS THAT NEED SOLUTIONS.** More often than not "problems" occur when sales or productivity wane like a dying wind and you are hired to solve the problems so sales or productivity return to normal or is measurably increased.

**4) LARGER VETERINARY HOSPITALS SOLICIT AND**

**MAINTAIN MORE CLIENTS AND PATIENTS.** Hospitals spend a lot of money and deploy many gambits to lure these first time and infrequent pet owners back for repeated sales.

**5) LARGER VETERINARY HOSPITALS HAVE MORE INCOME/PROFIT VENUES TO PROMOTE.** Throughout the year larger veterinary hospitals spend more money to update or purchase new equipment, to add new “operating” rooms and new staff doctors and internists, and to offer a slew of new or improved services. For example, the addition of a new ultrasonography room and equipment (along with new inpatient and outpatient ultrasonography services) became a highlight in many newsletters, ads and brochures I was commissioned to write.

**6) LARGER VETERINARY HOSPITALS USUALLY HAVE SMALLER SATELLITE PRACTICES THAT YOU CAN WRITE FOR.** One large veterinary hospital I write for has four other smaller facilities that do routine check-ups, yearly shots, and treatment of

hotspots, fleas, and other non-threatening conditions — all of which need promotional materials to be written.

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## *Chapter 5*

### **HOW TO SELL YOURSELF**

Maybe I got a lucky break with my first client. While other freelancers had plundered their last penny from their nearly-non-existent budgets to market their services to veterinary hospitals, I had a friend quietly sneak me in through the “back entrance,” past the competition and the rejections, to a client who had a present need (he wanted a newsletter) to solve a present, and a possible future problem (the hospital needed a stronger positive image to generate repeat income). The friend also served as a credible endorsement that I would do a good job and meet the client’s goals. And so I was hired, almost without any questions about my qualifications.

I think we can learn a lesson here about which marketing services are more effective and less costly. I don’t mail out slick promotional

packages profiling me as the bigwig of boosting profits and productivity; nor do I advertise my services in trade publications, or do “cold” phone calling, or do PR stunts to get my face — and name — out to the public. Instead, I prefer networking.

Whether you choose to network, blog, write articles for trade publications (another excellent way to promote your name and talents to prospects in the profession), call owners of hospitals directly, or mail out sales letters or promotional material to prospective hospitals, you must achieve two objectives to secure work or lead up to securing work.

The first objective is to grab the prospective client’s attention. Part of my job in networking is to commence or engage in conversations with doctors.

Tactfully and tastefully, slowly and subtly, I reveal who I am, what I do, and how veterinary hospitals have benefited from my services. Usually when doctors find out that I have boosted a hospital’s profit with a series

of ads, or how I landed a hospital on four national TV news programs without costing the owner a penny, or how I increased the rate at which pet owners come back for repeat services, I'm able to grab their attention and build rapport.

Now that you have the prospective client's attention, the second step is to arrange a meeting, preferably at his or her hospital. My favorable success rate in securing clients in this industry shows me that establishing a meeting measurably increases your chances of securing work, as you'll see why. Tell the prospective veterinary owner you'd like to meet him for 20 to 30 minutes to discuss, in detail, how you'll be able to boost his profits and productivity, and how he and his customers will both benefit. I've never met a prospective veterinary owner who'd refused to spend 20 to 30 minutes of his time to find out how I'd be able to boost his profits — especially when he or she knows that I've already successfully done so for other hospitals.

One tip I've learned quickly is not to tell veterinary owners you need

less than ten minutes of their time because they'll want to talk with you over the phone, instead of sitting down with you in person at their place of business.

**Remember:** results, connected with boosting profits and productivity, sell like free Mercedes. If you don't have results to showcase, the next best gambit is knowing specifically how you can boost sales and productivity — and then transforming the “how” into a sale's pitch that gets the prospective client curious as to what you can do for him and how his business can benefit.

## **THE MEETING**

You should attempt to arrange a meeting, rather than speaking further to the prospective veterinary owner over the phone, because I've found face-to-face meetings noticeably build rapport and friendships faster.

Here are some pointers to help ready yourself before the first meeting:



**1) GET BACKGROUND INFORMATION.** I usually give myself a week before I meet with the owner to drum up whatever information I can about the hospital. This includes date of establishment, employee size, types of services offered, number of doctors and internists (and what type of internists), etc. Having some type of knowledge about the hospital and its operations beforehand will help you to determine the hospital's strengths and weaknesses, its benefits for patient care and customer service, and the types of freelance services you'll be able to offer now and in the future. Don't worry about not having a lot of information about the hospital before your first meeting — that's one of the reasons for arranging a meeting. Eventually you'll find out the owner's exact needs, problems, expectations, and desires; then your job is to figure out how to fulfill these needs and the owner's expectations.

**2) SAMPLES.** The owner might ask to see some samples, or he might not even think about it. If you have samples, bring a few. I always show owners samples of my work because I can showcase my skills visually,

while leaving an impression as to the type of results I've achieved for other clients. If you don't have samples, don't sweat it. Because I know first-time veterinary hospital owners are interested in launching a newsletter as my first assignment "to see how things go," I always bring a few samples of newsletters because I'll want to discuss the benefits of producing a regular newsletter.

**3) UNDERSTAND THE "HOW" BEHIND PROFIT AND PRODUCTIVITY.** The hospital owner doesn't care if you're a great writer or you're looking for work. He wants to know what's in it for him. The quietly- whispered secret all business owners want to know, including veterinary hospital owners, is this: "How are you going to boost my sales and/or productivity?" — though they may not say it as brazenly as that. If you don't know how your skills and services will be able to boost the owner's sales and/or productivity, you will be wasting his time and you will not get any work. It's that simple. If one of your writing services is writing and producing newsletters, you must know how a newsletter will be able to boost the hospital's sales or increase its

productivity. The same is true if you're looking to write brochures, ads, press releases, Web site content, and so on. So prepare yourself — because you will be asked, maybe not directly, but you will be asked “how.”

**4) BRING A NOTEPAD AND A PEN.** Mostly, you will be listening and writing down what the owner is seeking; i.e. his present needs, present and future problems, unfolding events and new developments at the hospital, etc. Most of the time owners don't directly tell you what they're seeking or what their needs are because they don't consciously know — but their needs will eventually be revealed in bits and pieces throughout the meeting, and you have to have a quick-witted ear to capture them.

**One final tip:** Don't bring a tape recorder to your first meeting, until after you've been hired and the bonds of trust and friendship have flourished and you have permission to record “confidential” information.

## Chapter 6

### FIRST MEETING GOALS

Here are some important goals you'll want to achieve by the end of your first meeting:

**GOAL #1:** Make it clear that you are not just a writer who is going to write copy; you are a writer who is going to write copy that will boost sales and increase productivity. You also provide “copy to completion” services on every project you are commissioned to do. This means you not only write the newsletter or brochure, but also you coordinate the design and printing and you deliver the finished product.

**GOAL #2:** Find out the owner's present and future needs, and what his problems may be.

**GOAL #3:** Ask the owner to tell you what he thinks the hospital's strengths and weaknesses are and why pet owners choose his hospital over another hospital.

One hospital I write for has pet-boarding facilities with 24 hour care. Because it is one of the hospital's best strengths — besides the fact they have an emergency doctor on staff all the time — I focus on these benefits because it clearly shows this hospital has high-quality care for pets.

**GOAL #4:** Discuss some of your writing services and how each one can boost sales and increase productivity. Go through the benefits, and provide specifics as to how some of your services have helped other clients meet their goals.

**GOAL #5:** Ask the owner to show you around the hospital. This offers you the opportunity to see the operations of the hospital, what type of equipment it has, how many doctors are on staff, the type of specialties

and services the hospital offers, and its strengths and weaknesses compared to other hospitals you might have visited. This also gives the owner a chance to tell you some of his goals and expectations on how he thinks he's going to improve the operations and care of his hospital in the months to come, which typically reveals future needs that you can fulfill with your services.

**GOAL #6:** Set up a second meeting. In my first meeting I inform the owner that my objectives are to find out his needs, to see if he's interested in what I'm offering, and to collect background information on the hospital. At the conclusion of my meeting, I inform the owner that I'll need a few days to formalize a proposal for him to peruse, at which time I may arrange a second meeting to answer questions.

**DISINTERESTED PROSPECTS ARE REALLY INTERESTED —  
TRUST ME**

Don't be fooled by prospects who decide they are not interested — at

first. I've culled many sales from prospects who've declined my services initially, only to hear from them weeks or months later, requesting my skills to help solve a problem or fulfill a need. They finally realize they do need my help after all. "Something" comes up; or sales are sliding; or they've invested in expensive equipment and they need to leverage the extra overhead by increasing sales somehow. Can I help? The point: keep selling to prospects who initially decline your services. Eventually, through repeated marketing in which you remind the prospect of your existence, you increase the need and desire to hire you.

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## *Chapter 7*

### **WRITING A WINNING PROPOSAL**

Your first question may be why you have to spend extra time and effort to write a proposal when you could try to secure work at the first meeting?

You might be able to secure freelance work at the first meeting — or you might leave the hospital empty-handed.

I think it's easy for a prospect to say no at your first meeting and a lot easier to say yes at your second meeting.

One purpose for not securing work at the first meeting is to quell the owner's temptation of saying no immediately. Let's face it: saying no is the easiest way out of a tricky or unfamiliar situation. When a prospect



is “forced” to wait to receive your proposal, he has time to think things through, about everything you’ve discussed with him. And writing a proposal, in which you tailor it fittingly to the owner’s needs and expectations, beckons an unfeigned yes to hire you.

After an owner peruses through my well-written proposal, he clearly understands:

1. I’m more than a writer — I’m somebody who is going to solve his problems, fulfill his needs, and boost his profits and increase productivity.
2. I’m qualified to produce excellent results.
3. Increasing his budget or allotting money to hire me is an excellent choice. He sees he will receive a “return” on his money. Very important.
4. How my services are going to meet his expectations and goals. My

proposal goes in-depth about the benefits of producing a regular newsletter, a series of ads, brochures, a Web site, etc. I back up these benefits with specific results I've achieved for other satisfied clients.

5. I'm capable of handling various writing and publicity projects. My proposal provides an overview as to what I'm capable of doing, informing the owner of services he may want now or may want in the future.

6. I budget costs for each of my services that I think the owner would be interested in investing. Overshadowing these costs — which may appear “high” to an owner who's considering my services for the first time — are reasons why my services positively outweighs any type of burdening costs. At the beginning of this e-book I mentioned veterinary hospital owners infrequently outsource work because they don't understand how they can benefit from hiring freelance help. A proposal is the solution to this problem, because it educates owners and convinces them that hiring a freelancer is a sensible, tactical decision. Think about all the

possibilities of how a business benefits from hiring a freelancer and include some of these reasons in your proposal.

The format in which you write your winning proposal is up to you. I prefer an outline format, using numeric numbers, headings and subheadings, so information is showcased clearly and simply and the owner and I can easily refer to specific portions of the proposal. Write your proposal using the same rules that apply to writing a sales letter. Keep sentences short and your wording simple. Bullet benefits so they stand out. Punctuate your copy with specifics, and make your solutions shimmer like a sun-lit sea. Above all, educate the owner so he sees you as a valuable asset who is going to contribute to the success of the hospital, and he does not see you as a writer who is just going to sling fancy words across sheets of paper.

I either mail my proposal or hand-deliver it. After the owner has had five business days to look over my proposal, I make my follow-up call. By then, the owner can tell me if he's interested in proceeding or not. If he

has questions, I answer them over the phone, or if more accommodating, at his place of business.

If he's interested in proceeding, I arrange a second meeting to finalize the details, such as objectives and deadlines for the first assignment, payment fees and arrangements, who's my contact person, and so on. If he's not interested in proceeding, I try to find out why so I can convince him otherwise. If my persuasion fails, I thank the owner for his time and tell him to keep my proposal and business card on file in case he changes his mind in the future.

## Chapter 8

### FINALIZING THE DETAILS

Now that you are on your way to your first writing assignment, you need to finalize some details with the owner. They are:

#### **1) What is the first assignment, exactly?**

Sometimes you'll need to direct the owner as to what is the most cost-effective project or which project is going best to achieve his expectations and goals. From that point, you and the owner can map out what other projects will follow, perhaps to strengthen the initial project or to solve other problems.

#### **2) What's the deadline?**

What are the owner's expectations and objectives, in addition to your own, for this first assignment?

### **3) How much are you charging?**

Fees for this industry vary. I charge as little as \$35 an hour up to \$55 an hour. I always charge project rates, in which my hourly rates are tactfully fixed in.

### **4) When do I get paid?**

Because you're delivering a finished product, not just a piece of the product, do you get paid after you complete the job? I usually arrange with first-time clients to pay me half now, and the rest upon completion of the job. Sometimes I ask for payment in steps: when I finish the research and writing, I get paid; when I finish the design, I get paid. When I get the job printed and delivered, I get paid the final costs, etc. Getting paid in "steps" is helpful if the project is going to take weeks to

complete; you need some sort of salary in between to compensate you for your time.

**5) Who's my contact person, if not the owner?**

I always get a second contact person who can answer all my questions or guide me in the right direction, in case the owner takes a vacation or attends a week-long convention. Sometimes this second contact person may be your only contact person, because the owner is tied up with other things that need his attention.

**6) Lastly, have the owner sign your Letter of Agreement** — that piece of paper that spells out your role, objectives, deadline, and how much he will pay you and when. His signature is evidence that he agrees with all of the clearly-specified terms.

**Avoiding Conflicts of Confidentiality**

I write regularly for five veterinary hospitals, four of which are located in one state. From time to time clients remind me about keeping the operations of the hospital confidential, such as pricing, competition, sources of referrals, customer-base, where it advertises, etc.

I promise my clients that I keep all information confidential — especially information that would help their competitors.

Clients trust me. I never had to sign a Confidentiality Agreement, nor create one, to quell owners' fears that I may leak information if pressured.

It's wise to establish rapport and friendship at the beginning — I suggest at your first meeting with an owner — so the owner trusts you and gives you plenty of writing opportunities — and referrals.

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## *Chapter 9*

### **EVERY VETERINARY HOSPITAL'S BEST-SELLING PRODUCT**

Before you begin to write “client-expected” copy that is going to boost sales or increase productivity, you need to know what every veterinary hospital’s best-selling product is, because it truly affects the substance of your writing and the direction and focus your copy takes.

Pet owners spend hundreds and thousands of dollars each year on elective surgeries, teeth scraping and care, over the counter and prescribed drugs, shampoos, and allergy treatments for their pets — but none of these things are a veterinary hospital’s best-selling product.

Stumped?

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Here's the answer: Every veterinary hospital's bestselling product is an intangible product called "tender loving care" (TLC, for short). When veterinary hospitals know how to sell TLC effectively, they're able to bring in more customers, generate repeat sales, sell more products, generate a "buzz" in the community about their existence, and "trance" first time and repeat pet owners into telling their friends about the hospital.

Of course, veterinary hospitals don't tell you their best-selling product is TLC, because it sounds ridiculously silly — and you can't actually sell it or see it. But you can feel its mighty presence.

We can best describe TLC as an emotion that most pet owners strongly and passionately connect with in their hearts. I stumbled upon TLC — and writing TLC copy — when I researched why pet owners choose one hospital over another and what brings first time pet owners back for more services. TLC is directly responsible.

The hospital with the strongest TLC wins, because TLC is directly connected to pet care. Pet owners want the best care for their pets and will pay top dollar for high-quality TLC.

Pet care is king in the veterinary services industry; everything else, such as quality customer service, high or low prices, convenient location, etc. follow behind in whatever order pet owners find more important to their needs.

Occasionally I hear stories about pet owners flying from Florida to New Jersey just to get a second opinion from a top-rated orthopedic specialist about the best way to treat their dogs with paralyzed back legs.

I also hear stories about pet owners driving three to four hours to a hospital who they hear has better qualified surgeons (in these owners' minds they think these better qualified surgeons will deliver better pet care), even though their own local hospital is capable to do the surgery

without complications.

Receptionists constantly tell me about having to deal on a daily basis with anal-retentive pet owners who will only see a certain doctor, no one else, because the doctor, in the pet owners' minds, care more about their pets than any other doctor. These pet owners will arrange and re-arrange their schedules twenty million times to see their caring doctor.

One animal center I write for is a magnet for referrals. Because it's open 24 hours a day, staffed with full-time doctors, has an emergency doctor on premises all the time, has the facilities to monitor pets 24 hours a day, and is equipped with surgical and diagnostic equipment to perform the most complex procedures, doctors of surrounding hospitals often refer their cases to this animal center to receive better care for their customers' pets.

I read letters all the time from satisfied pet owners who are forever in debt to the hospital for expressing its tender loving care toward their

pets, whether their pets make it or not. Nearly all letters I read highlight TLC as the primary reason why pet owners choose the hospital over another hospital — and why they tell their friends about the hospital.

It's important to know what generates the emotions behind TLC so you can understand pet owners' needs and write emotion-driven copy. TLC is made up of (in no order of importance):

**1) PET CARE.** Death or euthanasia is a reality for all pets and it happens every day at one of the animal hospitals I write for. Pets die on their own or are euthanized via an overdose of an anesthetic injection (that stops the heart) at the request of the pet owner. Sundays are the “Day from Hell,” according to employees at this hospital. Because it's the only local animal hospital open on Sundays, doctors receive more dying or already dead dogs and cats on this day than any other day, to be treated or disposed of. Throughout the day it's common to hear pet owners crying uncontrollably over the loss of their pet.

**The point:** pet owners are attached to their pets in ways that humans cannot express in words. To many pet owners the loss of a pet, which they may have had for 12 years or longer, is like losing a limb or a member of the family. Pet owners will go through great measures to seek the best care for their pets, no matter what. And pet owners will make sure the hospital you write for gives them the quality care they seek. You need to convey, always, the hospital's compassion, dedication, and care for pets, in your copy.

**2) CLIENT CARE.** Pet owners not only expect to receive excellent customer service and exceptional pet care, but above all, they want to be cared for as well. Sometimes pet owners need emotional support or a hand to hold or a shoulder to cry on. They expect doctors to be “honest” with them about their pet's condition and they expect doctors to communicate all important information that will help them make a valid decision about the best treatment for their pets. When pet owners feel as though they are cared for, they undoubtedly believe their pets will be cared for in the same compassionate way.

**3) EXPERIENCE / DISCIPLINES.** Pet owners want the doctor who has the most experience. They equate more experience with receiving better quality care for their pets. This is not typically true, yet it's a common belief many pet owners believe in. As I mentioned before, pet owners will drive hours to see a better qualified surgeon or a top-rated specialist.

**4) EQUIPMENT.** Because advances in technology and medical research are so fast and compelling, every year veterinary hospitals invest loads of money to purchase new equipment or to update their obsolete equipment. Equipment helps doctors diagnose diseases with more accuracy, as well as to perform procedures on pets more effectively.

**5) FACILITIES.** Having the facilities to board pets while being able to monitor them 24 hours a day are benefits that many pet owners might look for, especially if their pets need to recuperate after surgery or are in

critical condition.

**6) SERVICES.** Not all hospitals offer the same types of services; some hospitals are more unique or specialized than others. One hospital I write for operates an outpatient chemotherapy clinic.

**7) COMMUNITY OUTREACH.** One hospital I write for makes an effort to support community programs and activities. Every month or two months the hospital invites the Girl Scouts or Cub Scouts to take a tour of the hospital; and every year the hospital invites three to four students from the local public school to follow a doctor around for the day (It's called Operation Shadow); yearly, this hospital supports fundraisers, walk-a-thons, and makes donations to local animal shelters and organizations fighting against animal abuse. All of these events, which I showcase in newsletters and brochures, convey powerful TLC.

**ALWAYS USE TLC IN YOUR COPY, NO MATTER WHAT YOU'RE WRITING ABOUT**



One hospital I write for has 10 doctors and five specialists. When I write copy that involves any of these doctors and specialists, I highlight their skills, experience, and specialties in such a way that lets pet owners know they're receiving the best pet care no matter which doctor they see. I also stress the fact that these certified interns, full-time doctors and specialists regularly consult with one another on their cases to provide exceptional pet care and treatment. Pet owners not only get the experience of one doctor, but several doctors combined. A great benefit to stress in your TLC copy.

### **REMEMBER ABOUT PROFIT AND PRODUCTIVITY**

One hospital I write for has tremendous success at bringing in emergency patients because it is open 24 hours a day while many other veterinary hospitals are closed. Yet it had one of the worse success rates at bringing back these first time emergency patients for repeated sales, such as for routine check ups, rabies and distemper shots, teeth and skin

care, and so on throughout the year. An entire campaign was created and implemented to solve this problem. It was a success. Both profits and productivity inclined. The hospital owner was pleased. And of course I was hired again for more work.

## *Chapter 10*

### **WRITING STRONG COPY**

Before I write my very first assignment for a hospital, I list all of the hospital's weaknesses and strengths.

Knowing the hospital's strengths helps me to write benefit-rich copy that educates pet owners about the exceptional care and treatment the hospital delivers.

Knowing the hospital's weaknesses lets me think how I can turn these weaknesses into strengths.

Example: One hospital I write for charges \$300 to neuter a male dog, while most other hospitals charge between \$50 and \$100 per neuter.

The high price suggested that sales for neutering male dogs may be down or not as high as expected. Comparing revenues in this area, I was right: sales had declined over the last five years. (Hospital owners will let you see confidential information, such as revenues and pricing, if you ask. Since it's your job to boost profits, you must know where sales are down or up.)

Pet owners tend to be price-sensitive when they are not educated or given reasons why the hospital charges higher rates, or when pet owners don't think they're getting quality pet care for their money. I turned the weakness of the high price into one of the hospital's strengths by educating pet owners as to the extra care and precautions its doctors and technicians take to ensure the safety and care of each owner's pet.

Commissioned to write a brochure on neutering pets (while subtly selling this hospital as the place to do the low-risk surgery), I not only educated pet owners about the surgery, but also I slanted the copy to include the hospital's exceptional care and precautions taken before,

during and after each surgery. These were extra benefits not commonly offered by other hospitals and were worth the extra high price. (By the way, this is one way to multiply writing sales: find a weakness, then propose to write a brochure or newsletter to counteract this weakness with a strength — then educate pet owners about this strength to boost the hospital's sales!)

## **COPYWRITING ASSIGNMENTS AND PROJECTS**

Here are common copywriting assignments I have been commissioned to write — and you may too. You may want to review the TLC section of this e-book to glean a few ideas on the type of content to write and suggestions on how to write your copy. I also suggest you buy a book on copywriting for the assignments mentioned below, since I have to shorten much of the how-to about each of these copywriting assignments, otherwise this e-book would be ridiculously longer.

**1) NEWSLETTERS.** There is a high demand to produce newsletters for

veterinary hospitals, for the simple fact that a newsletter is cost-effective and performs many functions, while wrestling with many current and important events happening and in development at the hospital. There are three types of newsletters that veterinary hospitals use, but only two of these are worth your time to write and produce.

**2) CLIENT EXTERNAL NEWSLETTER.** This is the newsletter for pet owners, left out on the customer service counter, stacked in piles in the waiting room, and placed in rooms where pets are treated. I write more of these newsletters, than any other type of sales material for hospitals. And because of the newsletter's frequency, I am always guaranteed a writing project every month, or two months (depending on the newsletter's frequency or impact), and I can expect to receive payment, routinely, just like a regular paycheck. Writing an 8-12 page newsletter earns me \$800 to \$1200 per issue.

Some of this newsletter's functions include educating pet owners about the hospital (its doctors, services, equipment, etc.), providing useful

articles on prevention and pet care, showcasing new staff doctors, highlighting important hospital news and how it directly affects pet care, small blurbs about fund raising activities, and so on.

You also should tie your newsletter in with special events and holidays. Each year there's a national event called Dental Care Month, in which veterinary hospitals provide information to their customers on taking care of teeth, basically. This always provides an excellent opportunity to write a newsletter (and a brochure) entirely on taking care of pets' teeth, which I do each year. As an extra function of the newsletter to increase sales, I include a coupon for a free "oral health evaluation" and \$20 off any type of dental procedure for that month only. Many pet owners schedule their pets for dental procedures during this month than any other month.

I recommend hospital owners to produce a monthly or a bi-monthly newsletter. Hospitals with smaller budgets may go with a quarterly newsletter, in order to cover each season — summer, fall, winter and

spring — since pets are susceptible to different diseases and health problems during different seasons. For example, summertime brings more fleas, hotspots, maggots, and dehydration. Typically, during the summer I write a newsletter on how to prevent these things. A newsletter published in the fall, of course, wouldn't contain any of those topics.

**3) DOCTOR EXTERNAL NEWSLETTER.** Large veterinary hospitals with bigger facilities and more doctors focus a lot of their attention on generating referrals from smaller hospitals which don't necessarily have the facilities, equipment, or specialized skills to treat pets that require complicated surgery or intensive care— so these smaller hospitals refer their cases to the larger hospitals which can provide such intensive care. The objective of this newsletter is to convince smaller hospitals that this larger hospital is equipped with such doctors, facilities and equipment to do complicated procedures and to provide intensive care. Written and mailed monthly, this newsletter also acts as a reminder of the larger hospital's existence, and updates smaller hospitals about its staff changes, new equipment, new services, new



phone numbers, etc. But even larger hospitals refer their cases to smaller hospitals because smaller hospitals might have a unique specialist or internist on staff who can treat the pet better.

**4) INTERNAL EMPLOYEE NEWSLETTER.** This newsletter is for staff employees. Not many veterinary hospitals have an internal employee newsletter; even the larger hospitals lack them. Usually an internal employee newsletter contains information on staff changes, highlights of recent meetings, upcoming workshops and seminars, etc. I have never been commissioned to write an internal employee newsletter. Most, if not all, internal employee newsletters are written by the employees themselves, then photocopied for distribution, usually piggybacking employees' paychecks.

**6) WEBSITES/BLOGS.** I don't know much about building web sites — so I outsource the work myself. I have a web site designer create the web site and then I bill the client under one invoice. I make arrangements with the hospital owner to pay me a monthly fee to update

his web site with materials that he faxes to my office, or whenever he wants me to "adapt" existing print materials to the digital world. Since I know how to embed text and photos into the HTML code, I do this part of the work myself. One unique feature I make sure every veterinary hospital's web site has is a Guestbook, which allows pet owners to leave brief messages and testimonials in regards to the great care doctors have given their pets. I then use these TLC testimonials in the hospital's printed newsletters and brochures. Veterinary hospital owners love this Guestbook feature.

**7) BROCHURES.** Sometimes hospital owners want you to write about a specific topic. I've written brochures on "Help Your Pet Survive A Disaster," "Aging Pets Need Special Care," "Neutering Your Dog or Cat," "Flea Prevention: How to Conquer These Evil Little Rascals," and so on. Twice I was commissioned to write a brochure showcasing the chemotherapy clinic and the doctors who operate it. My TLC copy highlighted the special needs of cancer-carrying pets and how this

hospital meets these needs as well as the loving doctors who administer the treatment. The brochures which I'm commissioned to write are usually a one sheet, four-panel brochure.

**8) PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITIES.** Working off of a monthly retainer, I pitch articles on preventing diseases and how to take better care of house pets to local newspapers, local monthly magazines and tabloids, and occasionally, national trade publications. Frequently, these 200-300 word, short and concise articles are published and generate extra publicity for the hospital. Often I interview staff doctors to accentuate the content with quotes — and I link the experience of these doctors with the hospital at which they are employed. Also don't overlook local TV stations which like to do candid pieces on pet care and disease prevention.

**9) ADS.** Veterinary hospitals regularly advertise in local newspapers. Here is where you can put your advertising copywriting skills to work. The downside to writing ads for veterinary hospitals is that don't often

change their ads. Write an ad for them at the beginning of the year, and they'll use the ad for the remainder of the year.

**10) EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK.** Five years into writing for one hospital, I was commissioned to rewrite its employee handbook because it was so outdated and no one had the time to do it. At 32 pages in length, it contained a mecca of information, from dress codes, to handling stray kittens, to logging controlled substances, to operating certain equipment, to listing OSHA regulations, to highlighting special procedures in case of a disaster. This is an excellent project if you want to educate yourself with the special protocols veterinary hospitals often abide by to ensure safety for their employees and for the pets they treat.

**11) ARTICLE WRITING.** You can extend your writing services to include writing for specialized trade publications, such as Cats Magazine, Dog Fancy or Pets Magazine, in your free time. And you can use staff doctors at the hospitals you write for as sources of quotes and interviews.

**12) GHOSTWRITING.** When you have educated yourself in the operations and care of veterinary hospitals, you may take the next step and propose to ghostwrite articles for hospital owners. Specialized trade publications like Veterinary Economics, Journal of the American Hospital Association, and Veterinary Medicine, need high-quality specialized materials on running successful animal practices and how to care for pets better.

### **PITCH A NEWSLETTER TO FIRST TIME CLIENTS**

Writing newsletters for hospital owners tend to be first assignments for copywriters in this field. Pitch a newsletter to hospital owners to increase the chances of securing a first assignment. Show that producing a regular newsletter can:

1. Increase the hospital's sales by pushing products and services  
Create rapport and build trustworthiness with pet owners by

showcasing the exceptional pet care and treatment the hospital offers.

2. Constantly remind pet owners of the hospital's existence by writing information that's so useful and timely that pet owners take the newsletter home with them.
3. Turn first time customers into becoming repeat customers by showcasing the hospital as being more caring and more equipped than any other hospital.

### **WHEN WRITING ABOUT EQUIPMENT, FOCUS ON ITS BENEFITS AND HOW IT INCREASES PET CARE**

Profiling new or improved equipment the hospital has recently purchased is a frequent feature in many newsletters I'm commissioned to write. I never douse myself in the technical jargon as to how the

equipment works, but rather I stress the equipment's benefits and how the equipment increases pet care, such as performing faster and more accurate diagnoses of diseases.

# Chapter 11

## YOUR COPYWRITING GOALS

Whether you're commissioned to write newsletters, brochures, ads, create a Web site or perform PR activities, your copy should meet these three goals.

**GOAL #1:** Your copy must convey TLC. When you write about a doctor, you directly link this doctor's background, experience, and skills as to how they relate to giving better pet care. When you write about equipment, you write about the equipment's benefits and how these benefits directly relate to giving better pet care. When you write about the hospital's facilities, you write how these facilities directly relate to providing exceptional pet care. When you write about the hospital's services, you write about how each of these services provide better pet care.



**GOAL #2:** You must write client-expected copy. If the hospital owner wants you to write a brochure about the hospital's new chemotherapy outpatient clinic, that's what you will write about. The owner may request you to highlight a specific service of the chemotherapy clinic, and so you must do so, in addition to writing powerful TLC copy in relation to how these services and how the clinic provides exceptional pet care with pets that have unique needs.

**GOAL #3:** Your copy must aim at increasing sales or productivity. You don't necessarily have to pitch products and services to increase sales and productivity. Writing copy that builds rapport, trustworthiness, interest, compassion, etc. with the hospital's clients who read your materials will lure these clients to invest their money repeatedly in the hospital's services and products. One year I was commissioned to write a corporate-style brochure about the hospital, about its year of establishment, who the owners were, number of staff doctors and internists, its facilities and services. There was no content pushing

products or services, yet the brochure became an important piece of literature that convinced pet owners to trust the hospital because it has been around for so long and it's equipped with skillful doctors and quality equipment.

### **CHECKING YOUR COPY**

It doesn't matter if you're a terrific writer and a great researcher — you still need your copy glossed over by an experienced veterinary doctor. Besides having the hospital owner read over my copy, I also have a staff doctor look it over as well. Your copy must be 100% accurate — because any false, misleading or inaccurate information can mistakenly lead pet owners to harm their pets; the pet owners, in return, will gladly file a complaint or sue the hospital.

When you write successfully for one veterinary hospital, you can rest assure that other veterinary hospitals are sure to follow. Veterinary

hospitals — and the doctors who operate them — are closely networked together like one giant family, although they tend to be direct competitors. They'll recommend you to their fellow colleagues at other veterinary hospitals in a heartbeat. That's if, of course, you do a good job. And I'm sure you will. [ E N D ]

**Profiting on Puppy Love & Cat Care**  
*A Freelance Writer's Guide to Writing for Local  
Veterinary Hospitals*

by Brian Scott and Stanley Burkhardt  
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