



Keeping Their Bite White

Coupons give practices and clients a reason to smile.

by Jen Reeder

Each February, National Pet Dental Health Month shines a spotlight on an issue that we all know pet owners often overlook: the importance of dental care for their animals. According to the American Veterinary Dental Society, 80% of dogs and 70% of cats show signs of oral disease by 3 years of age.

National Pet Dental Health Month also presents an opportunity to generate more business—some animal hospitals have found that offering coupons and discounts on dental services during this month has generated such an increase in business that they have extended the offers beyond February and, in some cases, year-round.

Jessica Koziupa, hospital manager at AAHA-accredited East Maryland Animal Hospital in Phoenix, Ariz., said the practice offered 20% discounts for dental cleanings during National Pet Dental Health Month in 2010 as an incentive for clients to stop putting off their pets' oral care.

The promotion was very successful, and the hospital was "slammed" with dental appointments. But when it became clear that many clients were postponing dental care until the dental month discount, the practice decided to extend the discount so that pets would receive treatment as soon as they needed it.

"We didn't feel that was in the best interest of pets' health [to wait until February], so we decided to extend it



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—Jessica Koziupa

all year," Koziupa said. "We decided to give clients some incentive for scheduling it right away, so if they come in for an appointment and the doctor recommends a dental cleaning for their pet, if they schedule a cleaning within 30 days, they get 20% off."

As a result, she said the animal hospital has seen an increase in dental visits throughout the year.

"The whole industry has shied away from coupons, but in this economy, you kind of have to offer them," she said.

Elizabeth Lindquist, DVM and owner of AAHA-accredited Little Apple Veterinary Hospital in Manhattan, Kan., has offered discounts during National Pet Dental Health Month for the past 10 years. Offering 10% off all dental services, including pain medication, blood work,

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extractions and cleaning, has proven very successful. Her staff even places a basket of dental products, like toothbrushes and toothpaste, next to the register and offers those at a 10% discount, too.

“We don’t want owners to be frustrated that it’s not all 10% off,” Lindquist said. “It makes people take action when they know that there’s a discount. Otherwise, they tend to put it off.”

The discount brought in so much additional business initially that Lindquist now extends the National Pet Dental Health Month promotion through March.

“It would be a little stressful [holding the discounts only in February] because we’d have more [business] than we could get done and end up trying to rush,” she said.

Marketing discounts

Customers at Lindquist’s practice don’t need to clip out the coupon; they just mention that they saw it. The coupon typically appears on the practice’s website, sign, radio ads, newsletter or special postcard mailing. It’s also mentioned on any annual exam reminder cards that go out during January, February and March.

Postcards are more economical than newsletters because of lower postage and printing costs, and are less labor-intensive because of fewer restrictions imposed by the U.S. Postal Service, such as where tape needs to be placed, Lindquist said.

“It’s pretty labor-intensive when we have easily 3,000 to 4,000 [pieces] going out,” she said.

Her staff staggers the mailings, so that a third are sent in January announcing the February special, a third go out in February reminding customers of the National Pet Dental Health Month discount and a final third in March announcing the

extension of the discount through the end of March.

“My advice would be to spread out mailings, because if people are going to respond, they’ll do it in the first week or so,” Lindquist said. “We’ve found any time we send a mailing, whether there’s a coupon or not, we have a large increase in business.”

Coupons popular in recession

Dental coupons and discounts aren’t guaranteed to be successful for all practices, however. Stephanie Romm, DVM and owner of AAHA-accredited Blue Sky Animal Clinic in Loveland, Colo., gave away coupons for free dental exams at a local pet expo and in newspaper ads several years ago—before the recession—and had no response.

“I can’t even remember one that’s come back to us,” Romm said. “The best thing we do is start talking about dental disease from the puppy exam. We talk about it with clients from the very beginning, from day one.”

Only recently have Romm and her associates considered trying dental coupons again. The practice is typically very busy, but has started slowing down during the recession.

“We’ve been talking about it recently because we’re finally slower,” she said. “We’re usually booked out two months for dentistry.”

Another practice found success offering discounts in the midst of the recession. Kay Harkema, practice manager at AAHA-accredited Woodlake Veterinary Hospital in Richfield, Minn., said the practice began offering \$15 off dental cleanings in February and March 2010, as well as a free 5-pound bag of Hill’s Prescription Diet t/d for dogs and cats—and had double the amount of dental

Coupon Templates Copy or adapt these coupons to use in your practice

Dental Special

If your pet has gingivitis (red gums), plaque/tartar, bad breath or difficulty in chewing, then they may need their teeth cleaned.

In this newsletter, we are offering a _____% off Coupon for dental cleanings and dental products. No need to clip this out; to receive your discount, just be sure to mention the special when you make your appointment or before you check out.

Please help your pet to have the dental care it deserves, and call _____ for an appointment now!

(Offer ends _____)

February is National Pet Dental Health Month!

Oral disease in pets is no laughing matter: 80% of dogs and 70% of cats show signs of oral disease by 3 years of age.

Because we care about the health and well-being of your pet, we are offering a _____% discount through _____ on dental cleanings. Make an appointment today! Expires _____

Your Practice Name _____

Authorized by _____

Here's a Reason to Smile!

Dental care is extremely important for pets, since the mouth is the gateway to the body.

In honor of National Pet Dental Health Month, we are offering a special the entire month of February: \$15 off any and all dental services! Just present this to the receptionist as you check out to receive your discount. (Offer good through February).

Your Practice Name _____

Authorized by _____

Dental Discount

Oral disease is the most frequently diagnosed health problem for pets, and begins with a buildup of bacteria in your pet's mouth.

Even if you regularly brush your pet's teeth at home, annual dental exams are an important part of keeping your pet healthy. So we are offering a _____% discount on dental cleanings, services and products during the entire month of February. Just mention this special when you make your appointment to receive your discount. Expires _____.

Your Practice Name _____

Authorized by _____



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Woodlake Veterinary Hospital offered \$15 off dental cleanings in February and March 2010 and had double the amount of dental appointments in those months than in the previous year.

appointments in those months than in the previous year.

“Everybody loves a coupon,” Harkema said.

The practice decided on a flat \$15 off instead of a percentage to “keep it simple” and avoid any confusion about what was covered. The coupon, which has an expiration date for the end of March, is printed in a newsletter mailed to clients and placed on the hospital’s website.

Because there was such an increase in dental appointments in the months when the discount was offered, Woodlake Veterinary Hospital decided to extend the discount to clients if, during a visit, the veterinarian recommends a dental cleaning and they schedule it that day. (However, the hospital’s deal with Hill’s dental food is only in effect during the National Pet Dental Health Month promotion.)

“[Extending the discount to clients who schedule a cleaning the day of their visit] is going over well, too: We’re seeing an increase in dentals from the previous year,” Harkema said.

Ultimately, increased business from National Pet Dental Health Month discounts means an increase in the overall health of pets because of more proactive owners.

“It gets the staff focused on dental care, too, so you’re educating the client on how important dental care is,” Harkema said. “It’s added value.” ■

Freelance journalist Jen Reeder says her dog, Rio, doesn’t mind having his teeth brushed as long as she uses chicken-flavored toothpaste.



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