How to Compete with Online Pharmacies

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Meet Your Consultant

Best known as the "Queen of Scripts," Wendy Myers knows the right words will lead clients to say yes to your medical recommendations, driving patient and practice health. As founder of Communication Solutions for Veterinarians, she teaches practical skills through online courses, onsite and virtual consulting, and conferences. Wendy's experience as a partner with eight veterinarians in an AAHA-accredited specialty and emergency hospital helped her understand issues that practice owners and managers face. A certified veterinary journalist, she has authored six books and has monthly columns in *Veterinary Practice News* and *dvm360* magazines, ensuring her industry knowledge is relevant for today's veterinary teams. Learn how Wendy can train your team at csvetscourses.com.

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What you'll learn:
- Why you need to drop everything and secure your hospital's pharmacy
- The #1 pharmacy operation mistake that costs you thousands
- Whether you should match prices
- Drive pharmacy sales with a combination of in-clinic sales, curbside pickup, and online pharmacy
- Get templates for text, app, and email messages to promote refills and auto shipments

BONUS: Facilitator's guide to implement the training

Why you need to drop everything and secure your hospital's pharmacy

During the pandemic, 31% of Americans bought drugs from internet pharmacies for the first time.[1] Online pet retailer Chewy added more than 5 million customers during 2020 and net sales grew 45%.[2] While internet pharmacies boomed during COVID, veterinary hospitals had to pivot to curbside care. They saw drops in client traffic, operating hours, staffing, and revenue, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) study, COVID-19: Veterinary Impacts and Responses.[3] Although veterinarians account for 71% of pet medications sales, online retailers are aggressively chasing the market, according to Packaged Fact's *Pet Medications in the U.S.*, 8th ed.[4]

The 2023 annual report for 1800PetMeds shows it earned 91% of its $257 million in sales from refills.[5] One of the original online pharmacies founded in 1996, PetMeds uses online marketing, television advertising, direct mail, email marketing, live web chat, refill reminders, and a mobile app with ask-the-vet feature.[6] Focusing on refills generated $233 million of its $257 million in sales.

Amazon dipped its toes in pharmacy waters when it acquired prescription delivery service PillPack for $793 million in 2018.[7] In 2019, Amazon launched its own line of over-the-counte drugs including 60 products ranging from ibuprofen to hair regrowth treatment.[8] Stocks of CVS, Walgreens, and RiteAid immediately declined. The pandemic had Amazon jump in with both feet, launching Amazon Pharmacy in November 2020. Amazon Pharmacy accepts insurance co-pays, offers free two-day delivery to Prime members, and provides 6-month prescriptions for as little as $6.

Amazon leads online sales of pet products, accounting for 59% of all U.S. transactions.[9] According to Packaged Facts, the online platform is followed by Chewy (41%) and Walmart (33%). Amazon already sells OTC flea/tick preventives. With Amazon Pharmacy, pet medications are its next logical addition.

COMMUNICATION SOLUTIONS™ FOR VETERINARIANS

The #1 pharmacy operation mistake that costs you thousands

Dr. Wilson loathes the hours he spends reviewing and approving outside pharmacy requests. Faxes and emails from outside pharmacies steal time away from revenue-generating patient care every day. Veterinary teams average three hours a day processing prescription requests from outside pharmacies.[10] Like many colleagues, Dr. Wilson is making the No. 1 mistake in pharmacy operation: Failure to remind clients to reorder medications and food. An online poll of 400 hospital managers and veterinarians found 86% don't send refill reminders.[11]

Relying on clients remember to reorder is a horrible business strategy. Pharmacy represents 25% to 30% of revenue in companion animal practices.[12] Dr. Wilson could secure and grow his pharmacy with one simple strategy: Turn on refill reminders.

Missing refills is costing your hospital thousands. Only 55% of dogs get year-round heartworm preventives, according to an AAHA compliance study.[13] In a two-doctor practice that sees 2,160 canine patients annually, 1,188 dogs are getting year-round preventives while 972 dogs are unprotected. Undispensed doses for these non-compliant pet owners represent potential income of $116,640 to $291,600 annually ($10 to $25 per dose depending on brand). If you increase refills from 55% to 75%, your hospital could gain an additional $5,400 to $13,500 in heartworm preventive sales. Because pets need a lifetime of protection, preventives are recurring income.

Here's how to set up refill reminders for preventives and get recurring revenue:

1) Identify top-selling drugs. Run a pharmacy sales report in your practice-management software. Sort data from highest to lowest dollars to prioritize the order of setting up refill reminders. Parasiticides represent the largest market share of pet medications with 59% of sales.[9]

Start with refill reminders for the top three drug categories:
1. Flea/tick preventives
2. Heartworm preventives
3. Long-term drugs for chronic conditions

2) Create refill reminder templates. Write a reminder for each brand so you may promote rebate and reward programs. Write text/app and email templates in your practice-management software, which will sync with your third-party reminder service. Clients will choose their preferred communication method for reminders (text, app, or email).

Refill reminders should include:
- Drug name and purpose
- When refill is due
- Promote instant rebates and autoship savings
- Link to your online pharmacy
- Option to pick up at your hospital
- Drive clients to click (not call) to order

When to send refill reminders for flea/tick and heartworm preventives

Reminder notice	Days from expected refill date	Reminder method
1st reminder	30	Text, app, or email
2nd reminder	14	Text, app, or email
3rd reminder	7	Text, app, or email
4th reminder	0	Call

Which communication methods to use
Send texts because they have a 98% open rate and 45% response rate.[14] Most clients will see your messages and nearly half will respond right away. Research shows 90% of people will respond to texts within 30 minutes.[15]

Hospital managers should monitor reminder response rates quarterly and get more clients to opt-in for text or app reminders. Each quarter, run a report of clients who have not opted in for texts. Send them emails about faster scheduling and refills through text. Include a link for clients to opt-in and choose texts as their preferred communication method. Your third-party reminder service may have pre-written email campaigns. Put a quarterly alert on your calendar to run reports and email clients about texting.

By comparison, email benchmarks for healthcare services show average open rates of 24%.[16] Clients may need multiple reminders if emails get overlooked or buried in their inboxes. Call clients once refill dates are overdue because prescriptions are now expired.

Text and Email Refill Reminder Templates

Use action words in reminders such as:
- "Needs" indicates the medication is medically necessary.
- "Click here" or "order now" is a call to action.
- "Instant rebate" lets clients know they don't have to wait for a check or reward voucher in the mail.
- "XX days" is a countdown timer, letting clients know the prescription is about to run out or expire.
- Use ALL CAPS to increase urgency.

1st Preventive text reminder:
Heartworm preventive: <Pet name> needs a refill of _____ for heartworm protection before <date>. Click here to refill in our online pharmacy with home delivery or reply Y to get curbside pickup at our hospital. Get $___ instant rebate when you buy _____ and _____ together.

Flea/tick preventive: <Pet name> needs a refill of _____ for flea/tick protection before <date>. Click here to refill in our online pharmacy with home delivery or reply Y to get curbside pickup at our hospital. Get $__ instant rebate when you buy _____ and _____together.

2nd Preventive text reminder:
Heartworm preventive: <Pet name> needs a refill of _____ for heartworm protection in 14 days. Order now through our online pharmacy with home delivery or reply Y to get curbside pickup at our hospital. Get $__ instant rebate when you buy _____and _____ together.

Flea/tick preventive: <Pet name> needs a refill of _____ for flea/tick protection in 14 days. Order now through our online pharmacy with home delivery or reply Y to get curbside pickup at our hospital. Get $__ instant rebate when you buy _____ and _____ together.

3rd Preventive text reminder:
Heartworm preventive: <Pet name> needs a refill of _____for heartworm protection in 7 days. Don't miss the next dose! ORDER NOW through our online pharmacy with home delivery or reply Y to get curbside pickup at our hospital. Get $__ instant rebate when you buy _____and _____ together.

Flea/tick preventive: <Pet name> needs a refill of _____for flea/tick protection in 7 days. Don't miss the next dose! ORDER NOW through our online pharmacy with home delivery or reply Y to get curbside pickup at our hospital. Get $__ instant rebate when you buy _____and _____together.

Email reminders
Because 62% of emails are opened on mobile devices, you need short and captivating subject lines.[17] To fit the subject line on a mobile device, you have 30 to 40 characters. Emoji can save space and increase

open rates by 56%.[18] Get free emojis at https://getemoji.com. Copy and paste emojis of dogs, cats, mosquitoes, hearts, pawprints, pills, stethoscopes, and more.

The email subject line has four components:
1. Put the pet's name in the email subject line to increase open rates. The data field will grab the pet's name from your practice-management software to customize email communication.
2. Explain which drug needs to be refilled and its purpose.
3. Share the refill due date.
4. Have a call to action such as "click to order."

Email messages between 50 and 125 words have the best response rates of 50% or higher.[19] People are skimming and scrolling, often not reading. Use bullets or numbered lists to improve readability. Hyperlinks let clients click and act. Use call-to-action buttons. Buttons will stand out to email skimmers who may overlook a hyperlink.

1st Preventive email reminder:
Heartworm preventive:
Subject line: <Pet name> needs a refill of heartworm preventives before <date> 🦟 Click to order
Email message: <Pet name> needs a refill of _____ for heartworm and intestinal parasite protection before <date>. Get a refill 3 easy ways:
1) Order online with home delivery. Instant rebates will be applied at checkout.
2) Pick up at our hospital. Reply to this email with "PICKUP" in the subject line. We will email you when your medication is ready, apply instant rebates, and send a link to pay.
3) Order through our app with home delivery or pickup at our hospital.

Get $__ instant rebate when you buy _____ and _____ together.

[**Order Online**]   [**Download App**]

Flea/tick preventive:
Subject line: <Pet name> needs a refill of flea/tick preventives before <date> 🐕 Click to order
Email message: <Pet name> needs a refill of _____ for flea and tick protection before <date>. Get a refill 3 easy ways:
1) Order online with home delivery. Instant rebates will be applied at checkout.
2) Pick up at our hospital. Reply to this email with "PICKUP" in the subject line. We will email you when your medication is ready, apply instant rebates, and send a link to pay.
3) Order through our app with home delivery or pickup at our hospital.

Get $__ instant rebate when you buy _____ and _____ together.

[**Order Online**]   [**Download App**]

2nd Preventive email reminder:
Heartworm preventive:
Subject line: Don't miss <pet name>'s next dose of heartworm preventives 🐾 Refill Now
Email message: <Pet name> needs a refill of _____ for heartworm protection. You have 14 days left before the next dose on <date>. Get a refill 3 easy ways:
1) Order online with home delivery. Instant rebates will be applied at checkout.
2) Pick up at our hospital. Reply to this email with "PICKUP" in the subject line. We will email you when your medication is ready, apply instant rebates, and send a link to pay.
3) Order through our app with home delivery or pickup at our hospital.

Get $__ instant rebate when you buy _____ and _____ together.

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Flea/tick preventive:
Subject line: Don't miss <pet name>'s next dose of flea/tick preventives 🐾 Refill Now
Email message: <Pet name> needs a refill of _____ for flea and tick protection. You have 14 days left before the next dose on <date>. Get a refill 3 easy ways:
1) <u>Order online</u> with home delivery. Instant rebates will be applied at checkout.
2) Pick up at our hospital. Reply to this email with "PICKUP" in the subject line. We will email you when your medication is ready, apply instant rebates, and send a link to pay.
3) <u>Order through our app</u> with home delivery or pickup at our hospital.

Get $__ instant rebate when you buy _____ and _____ together.

Order Online   **Download App**

3rd Preventive email reminder:
Heartworm preventive:
Subject line: Final days before heartworm preventives are due for <pet name> ❤️ Refill Now
Email message: <Pet name> needs a refill of _____ for heartworm protection. You have 7 days left before the next dose on <date>. Let's keep <pet name> protected! Get a refill 3 easy ways:
1) <u>Order online</u> with home delivery. Instant rebates will be applied at checkout.
2) Pick up at our hospital. Reply to this email with "PICKUP" in the subject line. We will email you when your medication is ready, apply instant rebates, and send a link to pay.
3) <u>Order through our app</u> with home delivery or pickup at our hospital.

Get $__ instant rebate when you buy _____ and _____ together.

Order Online   **Download App**

Flea/tick preventive:
Subject line: Final days before flea/tick preventives are due for <pet name> ❤️ Refill Now
Email message: <Pet name> needs a refill of _____ for flea and tick protection. You have 7 days left before the next dose on <date>. Let's keep <pet name> protected! Get a refill 3 easy ways:
1) <u>Order online</u> with home delivery. Instant rebates will be applied at checkout.
2) Pick up at our hospital. Reply to this email with "PICKUP" in the subject line. We will email you when your medication is ready, apply instant rebates, and send a link to pay.
3) <u>Order through our app</u> with home delivery or pickup at our hospital.

Get $__ instant rebate when you buy _____ and _____ together.

Order Online   **Download App**

4th Preventive call script:
Tip: If you get voicemail, leave a message, and send a text as backup communication. Research shows 67% don't listen to voicemails.[20] Use the doctor's name to bring authority to the call. Use the yes-or-yes technique to lead the client to refill now.

Heartworm preventive:
If you talk to the client: *"Dr. <Name> asked me to call you because <pet name>'s prescription for _____ for heartworm prevention is now overdue. We don't want <pet name> to be at risk for heartworms and intestinal parasites. Dr. <Name> has approved your refill. Do you want us to refill the medication for pickup at our hospital, or shall I text you a link to order through our online pharmacy with home delivery?"*

If you get voicemail: *"Dr. <Name> asked me to call you because <pet name>'s prescription for _____ for heartworm prevention is now overdue. We don't want <pet name> to be at risk for*

heartworms and intestinal parasites. Dr. <Name> has approved your refill. I am sending you a text now. Let us know if we should refill the medication, and you will pick it up at our hospital. The text will include a link to our online pharmacy if you prefer home delivery. If you have questions, text or call us at 555-555-5555.”

Backup text: We left you a voicemail because <pet name>'s prescription for _____for heartworm prevention is now overdue. Dr. <Name> has approved your refill. <u>ORDER NOW</u> through our online pharmacy with home delivery or reply Y to get curbside pickup at our hospital. Get $__ instant rebate when you buy _____ and _____together. Text or call with questions.

Flea/tick preventive:
If you talk to the client: *"Dr. <Name> asked me to call you because <pet name>'s prescription of _____ for flea and tick protection is now overdue. We don't want <pet name> to be at risk for flea bites, tapeworms, and Lyme and other tick-borne diseases. Dr. <Name> has approved your refill. Do you want us to refill the medication for pickup at our hospital, or shall I text you a link to order through our online pharmacy with home delivery?”*

If you get voicemail: *"Dr. <Name> asked me to call you because <pet name>'s prescription for _____for flea and tick protection is now overdue. We don't want <pet name> to be at risk for flea bites, tapeworms, and Lyme and other tick-borne diseases. Dr. <Name> has approved your refill. I am sending you a text now. Let us know if we should refill the medication, and you will pick it up at our hospital. The text will include a link to our online pharmacy if you prefer home delivery. If you have questions, text or call us at 555-555-5555.”*

Backup text: We left you a voicemail because <pet name>'s prescription of _____ for flea and tick protection is now overdue. Dr. <Name> has approved your refill. <u>ORDER NOW</u> through our online pharmacy with home delivery or reply Y to get curbside pickup at our hospital. Get $__ instant rebate when you buy _____and _____ together. Text or call with questions.

<mark>Get more refill reminder templates and appointment and procedure confirmations in my eBook on *Everything You Need to Know About Reminders* at https://csvets.com/reminders/.</mark>

3) Promote refills through your website.
At Shackleford Road Veterinary Clinic in Little Rock, Arkansas, clients can request refills through its online form (www.shacklefordvetclinic.com/request-a-refill/). The online form explains that a pharmacy technician will contact clients when refills are ready or if there is a question about the request. Print on prescription labels, "Refill this medication through our website at <URL>, app, or text 555-555-5555.”

4) Send lab reminders for applicable drug-monitoring tests.
Rather than have confrontational conversations that you can't refill pets' medications because lab tests are due or overdue, remind for recurring lab tests for patients taking chronic medications that require drug monitoring. To educate clients that testing is medically necessary, use the term "recurring" in place of "routine testing." If a client's dog takes a NSAID and needs testing every six months, set the lab reminder for five months, allowing ample time for the client to schedule a technician appointment for the sample collection.

TEXT/APP THIS: <Pet name> is due for a drug-monitoring test, which is required before the next medication refill on <date>. We will collect a blood sample during a nurse appointment. Click here to schedule online, download our app at <link>, or call us at 555-555-5555.

EMAIL THIS:
Subject line: <Pet name> needs a lab test before next medication refill on <date> 📝 Click to schedule

Body: <Pet name> is due for a drug-monitoring test, which is required before the next refill on <date>. During a nurse appointment, we will collect a blood sample and run the test.

Schedule 3 easy ways:
1. Book online.
2. Download our app.
3. Call 555-555-5555.

We want to provide timely testing and refills for <pet name>.

Book Online   **Download App**

Use "Blood work required before next refill" stickers.

Bloodwork required before next refill This bright-colored sticker will prompt clients to act before the last pills are gone. When client pick up medications, lead them to forward book nurse appointments for drug-monitoring tests.

SAY THIS: *"This is your last refill before a drug-monitoring test will be due. Let's schedule a 15-minute technician appointment for the blood sample collection. I have an appointment available <date, time 1> or <date, time 2>. Which do you prefer?"*

This yes-or-yes technique guides the client to forward book and gets stronger results (and revenue) compared to the yes-or-no choice of "Do you want to schedule a nurse appointment?"

5) Dedicate a pharmacy phone line. Your hospital gets 50 or more calls daily for prescription refills. Print the pharmacy phone number on prescription labels, your website homepage, and include the direct-dial number in refill reminders. If your main line has an auto-attendant greeting, instruct clients to "Press X" for prescription refills, which will connect the call to the pharmacy extension. If a technician or assistant is working in the pharmacy and the phone rings, he or she will take the prescription refill request. If unavailable, voicemail will instruct the client what information to leave: "You've reached <Your Veterinary Hospital>'s pharmacy line. Please leave your name, your pet's name, the prescription you need to be refilled, dosage, and phone number. Leave your cell number and let us know if you prefer a text response. We will review messages at 10 a.m., 12 p.m., 2 p.m., and 4 p.m. Thank you!"

Whether you should match prices

Cost and convenience are the top two reasons clients shop elsewhere.[21] Yet 71% of dog and cat owners agree that medical advice from veterinarians is the most important consideration when buying pet medications.[2]

Strategically price drugs. Pet owners typically price-shop three drug categories:
1) Flea/tick preventives
2) Heartworm preventives
3) Long-term drugs for conditions such as allergies, diabetes, and thyroid disease

Clients are most likely to ask you to match prices in these categories. Few pet owners would question prices for one-time dispensed drugs such as antibiotics or anti-diarrheal medications.

Old pricing strategies of "just double it" has failed veterinarians. Competition has forced veterinarians and managers to rethink markups. The *AAHA Veterinary Fee Reference*, 11th ed., reports average markups:[22]

Product	Markup
Prescription medications	107%
Retail products (collars, leashes)	82%
Non-prescription grooming items (shampoo, ear cleaner)	80%
Heartworm preventives	65%
Flea/tick preventives	65%
Therapeutic diets	39%
Wellness diets	37%

To stay competitive, don't charge a dispensing fee for boxed products such as flea/tick and heartworm preventives. The *AAHA Veterinary Fee Reference*, 11th ed., reports an average dispensing fee of $11.23.[23] Charge the dispensing fee when your technician counts pills or staff labor is involved. Save time and improve accuracy with the Pill Eye app (iPhone: https://apps.apple.com/app/mediscount-counting-pills/id1537039316?l or Android: https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.rocateer.mediscount&hl=en_US&gl=US).

Use instant rebates. While providing onsite training and consulting at a hospital, I shadowed client service representatives (CSRs) at the checkout desk. A client approached to pay and shoved her phone at the CSR to show Chewy's price. "I need refills on my flea/tick and heartworm medications. Will you price match Chewy?" the client demanded. The CSR leaned back in surprise. I smiled at the CSR and whispered, "We got this." I asked the client if we could see her phone with the prices. The client handed me her phone, and I asked the CSR to look up the hospital's prices and to apply the instant rebate. The hospital beat Chewy's price by $30. The client smiled and replied, "Wow, I will always buy my pets' medications from your hospital." After the client pulled out of the parking lot, we did a victory dance!

Greenline® Pet is used to manage rebates and coupons (www.greenlinepet.com, 866-608-9038). Your hospital will set up a Greenline® Pet account to apply instant rebates and coupons. Instant rebates may be applied to in-clinic and online pharmacy purchases through your hospital. Your practice will receive reimbursement checks weekly for rebates and coupons that have been submitted through the Greenline® portal. Instant rebates on Greenline's platform save clients an average of $8,000 per hospital.[24]

Help clients understand marketing promotions. Pet owners may ask you to match Chewy's price of 35% off the first order. A word of caution: This promotion requires pet owners to sign up for auto-ship subscriptions and has a maximum discount of $20. For example, a $98 12 pack of heartworm preventives with 35% off is savings of $34.30 but Chewy's discount taps out at $20. All future shipments will be 5% off (not 35%). Chewy designates which products are eligible for the discount. Chewy offers free access to real-time chat with licensed veterinarians for these customers, too.[25] If you match the one-time offer, the client also will need to sign up for auto shipments through your hospital.

The veterinary distributor that hosts your hospital's online pharmacy can provide marketing support, including instant rebates, honor manufacturers' coupons, auto shipments, refill reminders, and promote manufacturer rebate and reward programs. Online pharmacies hosted by your veterinary distributor keep products competitively priced based on monthly consumer pricing indexes.

Drive pharmacy sales with a combination of in-clinic sales, curbside pickup, and online pharmacy

1) In-clinic sales
During checkups, your medical team will educate clients about the best flea/tick and heartworm preventives for each patient based on its breed and lifestyle. You teach clients how to use preventives and how they work. If clients have questions before, during, or after the sale, your team has answers.

Here are steps to drive in-clinic sales:

Check purchase history before beginning exams. Review the electronic medical record to see when preventives were last purchased, how many doses were sold, and whether the pet owner is "sharing" a box between multiple dogs. Check for other medications that may need refills. If a few doses remain, lead clients to refill now.

Tell, don't ask. It's a common mistake. I hear client service representatives (CSRs) and technicians frequently ask the wrong way: "Do you need any refills while you're here?" Clients can easily get confused between which product provides flea/tick or heartworm prevention and may not remember supply levels at home. Say, *"Max has one dose left of <brand> for heartworm prevention. Let me tell you about our rebates so you may save the most."*

Look for other pets in the family that also need refills. Save clients return trips and improve compliance.

Set up dosing reminders during exams. To help busy clients remember to give timely medications, text them monthly dosing reminders.

TEXT THIS: Give <pet name> <brand> today to protect from heartworms. We will remind you again next month. To make changes to this reminder, click here. Thanks for taking good care of <pet name>!

Why this works:
- Ensures consistent dosing.
- Uses the pet's name for a personalized message.
- Allows the client to change the reminder through your app or patient portal on your clinic website.
- Praises the client for being a responsible pet owner.

2) Curbside pickup
For all its hassles, COVID-19 gave us a few good habits. Hospitals embraced technology and curbside care that will continue in the decades ahead. AVMA's COVID study found 59% of practices added contactless payments.[3] Curbside care became the norm for more than a year.

Curbside service will stay, especially for these clients:
- Clients who care for elderly or at-risk family and want to limit interactions.
- Clients who have health risks. While undergoing chemotherapy and having a compromised immune system, a client may temporarily seek curbside care.
- Clients with young children. Imagine you're a mother with a baby and need medication refills for your dog. Getting a sleeping baby out of a car seat and into your lobby could take 10 or more minutes. Checkout at the counter happens quickly but the mother has another 10 minutes to secure the child for travel. Medication pickup could take up to 30 minutes. A mother will appreciate the convenience of replying to your refill text, paying through an app, and having a smiling employee meet her curbside. You turned a 30-minute hassle into a 5-minute pick up.

Designate a parking spot for product pick up. Just as restaurants have reserved parking for to-go orders, do the same for pet owners picking up medication and food. Choose the parking spot next to your handicapped parking, which is nearest your front door. You will minimize the number of steps that employees must take for curbside delivery. This parking spot also will have higher turnover with clients parking for 5 to 10 minutes compared to longer curbside care appointments. Clients will text/app you when they arrive for medication and food pick up.

Have clients pay through an app. Whether clients are picking up curbside or in your lobby, send them a request for payment through an app. You'll speed the checkout process. Many apps have a comment box when sending a request for payment. I teach CSRs to summarize services before stating totals during traditional front-desk checkout. Do the same when sending app payment requests. Type this in the comment box: "We have filled <brand> for Max's heartworm prevention. You received a $XX instant

rebate for purchasing 12 doses. Please pay through the app and get an immediate receipt. Park in our curbside pickup and message us when you arrive."

3) Promote your online pharmacy

Have clients place their first orders during today's appointment. Walk them through how to create an account in your hospital's online pharmacy, place their first order, and set the next autoship date. Explain the convenience for clients who will need refills of preventives, long-term drugs, and food.

Set up auto shipments. Autoship orders make up 73% of Chewy's sales.[26] Your hospital can use the same proven strategy for your online pharmacy. A VetSource study found medication and therapeutic diet compliance skyrocketed with auto shipments:[27]
- Average heartworm preventive dispensing went from 5 ½ to 11 doses.
- Average NSAID compliance went from 56 to 207 days.
- Average therapeutic diet purchases went from 1.8 to 10 bags.

Let's say the client buys six months of flea/tick preventives, and you hand her the box today. Walk the client through setting up auto shipments during appointments.

SAY THIS: *"Let's set up your next refill through our online pharmacy. In less than 2 minutes, you can create your account and set up auto shipment so future refills arrive at your doorstep. You'll never run out. Our hospital's online pharmacy also lets you get instant rebates."*

Encourage clients to set up these medications and products for auto shipments:
- **Prescriptions:** If a client buys six months of heartworm preventives, set up one autoship refill in five months when one dose will remain. This auto ship has only one refill, completing the 12 months of dispensing. After the 12-month period, the pet will be due for an exam, heartworm/tick test, prescription renewal, and other preventive services.
- **OTC products:** A flea/tick preventative could be auto shipped without expiring. When one dose remains, your reminder system would alert the client with a text or email: "Your auto refill of NexGard to protect your pet from fleas and ticks has been filled and is on the way."
- **Food:** Use feeding guides to calculate how many days it will take the pet to eat the bag or case of food. Set up the recurring shipment to arrive one week before food will run out. Food auto shipments also could have no expiration date.

Autoship single doses. Distributors offer monthly delivery of single doses of preventives with free shipping. Monthly dosing may help clients on limited budgets as well as multi-pet families where the client may not be able to buy 12 doses of preventives for six dogs at the same time. (This also breaks the habit of sharing a box of preventives between multiple pets.)

Compensating Veterinarians for Prescriptions

If your practice uses production pay for veterinarians, consider split-rate compensation, advises Denise L. Tumblin, CPA, of WTA Veterinary Consultants in Columbus, OH.[28] One percentage applies to medical service production and a different percentage pertains to product production.

Well-managed practices typically pay their doctors 22% to 26% for services and 4% and 8% for products. If heartworm preventives are sold during the checkup, the doctor is compensated for the medication. If the client picks up a refill without a doctor visit, no production is paid to the veterinarian. If a doctor must change a dosage or medication, he will receive production pay.

Which goals will you implement from this training?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Facilitator's Guide: How to Compete with Online Pharmacies

Choose a facilitator to lead your team's discussion. Create plans to implement goals you learned in this training program.

1. What is your hospital's markup by drug category?

Product	Our Markup	AAHA Markup
Prescription medications	%	107%
Retail products (collars, leashes)	%	82%
Non-prescription grooming items (shampoo, ear cleaner)	%	80%
Heartworm preventives	%	65%
Flea/tick preventives	%	65%
Therapeutic diets	%	39%
Wellness diets	%	37%

2. Which markups should you update to have competitively priced products?

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3. List medications and products that need refill reminders at your hospital.

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4. How will you respond when clients ask your hospital to match prices?

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