



The PROFESSIONAL practice of canine rehab: Self-assessment questionnaire PART 2

Now is the time to look at your canine rehab business. Have you started yet? Do you need some help there? Do you have a marketing plan? How savvy are you with your management knowledge (and this topic is extremely vast in the sorts of things you need to manage!)? Are you paying attention to client satisfaction? How can you improve your customer service? What are you doing to stay motivated and committed?

Ask yourself these questions now!

The BUSINESS of Canine Rehabilitation

1. GETTING STARTED

No successful business was created without a little (actually 'a lot') of hard work, planning, thinking, long hours, and trial & error. How are you going to make this happen?

- a. How will you practice? Will you be employed in a small veterinary practice? Perhaps employed in a large vet practice or referral hospital? Are you the owner of such a practice? Will you contract your services out to one or multiple vet clinics? Will you be mobile? Will you be owning, building, or working in a stand-alone rehab clinic? Will you be a sole-proprietor, partner, or corporation?
- b. Does your practice need a name?
- c. What do you need to get started? List out all of your needed tools (to DO the rehab/physio work) and all of the office supplies you will need.
- d. Do you need to seek expert assistance (i.e. lawyers, accountants, etc)?
- e. How will you become not only competent but GREAT at canine rehab? How do you plan to consciously schedule out and plan time to practice your new skills and test your new knowledge? If you are a vet in a regular practice, to become proficient, will you set up specific times, days, or types of appointments where you can do a full 'rehab' evaluation on rehab patients? What is your learning strategy to reinforce and continue your learning journey?

- f. Have you analyzed your area? What do you know about your potential customers? What do you know about your competition?
- g. SWOT: Have you done a SWOT analysis to look at your own situation and come up with an action plan? S = your strengths, W = your weaknesses, O = external opportunities, T = external threats. When you go through the process to list out these things in relation to your goal (i.e. To start a canine rehab business). Can you utilize your strengths and opportunities to address the weaknesses and threats? OR, what is it you need to learn or do to address these? AND, how can you capitalize on your strengths and opportunities?
- h. Action plan: Give yourself some goals and deadlines to get yourself started (i.e. Assess 5 shoulders FULLY with my new rehab assessment knowledge this month; Create a marketing package; Meet with at least 2 local vets). Make a list of at least 3 things that you will plan to do each month for the next 6 months (or more)! Post your list where you will see it and make it happen!

2. MARKETING

I think that the marketing of an animal rehab business is imperative to success, and you will want to make a marketing plan. Starting and practicing is not like opening a coffee franchise like Starbucks where everybody knows what you do and what you serve. Animal rehab / physiotherapy is still 'new', and as such, we need to educate our referrals sources about this service, and educate the public about what can be offered and gained by choosing canine rehab services. Basically, you can divide your efforts and strategies to catch the attention of your two biggest target markets – referring veterinarians and the dog-owning public.

TARGET MARKET - VETERINARIANS

- a. Meet and greet: Get to know your referring veterinarians. Let them know who you are, and how you practice. Assure them that you will be professional in all of your interactions. Explain to them your services, and offer to do a demo or provide a free service for a 'test case'.
- b. Communication: Within all of the intra-professional and inter-professional collaboration literature, there is a common theme. That is that effective communication is key to successful collaboration, and that poor communication is the root of failed collaborative attempts. So, write up assessment notes, progress notes, and discharge notes, and don't be afraid to pick up the phone to call! While you're at it, be professional and respectful in all of your correspondence and conversations.
- c. Send 'thank you notes' for referrals and/or give away promotional materials to keep your referral community thinking about you!
- d. Give talks, and make them practical. How does rehab help? When will rehab help? Why refer? Anticipate their questions and be proactive and forthright in providing the answers.

TARGET MARKET – DOG-OWNING PUBLIC

- e. Create a Website: To be taken as a serious, dedicated rehab provider, your website should be more than one page long and more than a listing of the modalities and services you offer (i.e. laser, underwater treadmill, exercise therapy, range of motion, etc). Nothing is less helpful and more of a turn-off! Instead, anticipate the questions of your potential customers and provide the answers, provide content (i.e. informative articles), and write from the 'you' perspective (i.e. Your dog will receive a thorough physical assessment... You will be provided with a home program to further our 'in-clinic' rehab efforts... Your vet will be informed of your dog's progress along the way...). Tell stories! A few success stories or testimonials can go a long way – people love to read these!
- f. Give talks to dog groups, and make the talks informative with great 'take away' information. I find subjects that empower the client to be very well received (i.e. How to assess your dog for tendon injuries; How to massage your own dog; Tips for keeping your geriatric dog mobile and pain free).
- g. Booths: Try having a booth at local dog shows and/or sporting events. This is a great target market, and these dog-owners are very committed to the health and well being of their animals.
- h. Social media: This is a great way to connect with your customers. Have pictures and stories of your patients, provide health tips, or just post some entertaining cartoons or heart-warming stories or pictures.

3. MANAGEMENT

This is another huge topic area! There are so many aspects to management. You'll need to think about the following.

- a. Financial Management: What will you charge, how will you collect money, how will you track the transactions, and who will do your bookkeeping?
- b. Time Management: How long will you spend in each rehab- appointment, how will you structure your appointments, and how might you utilize assistants to help you manage your time more effectively?
- c. Systems: What type of systems can you put in place to improve upon efficiency? For example: How you streamline your referral acquisition process? What data do you need to collect from the patient with every new assessment? What paperwork do you need to create? What reports do you need to consistently generate? What method will you utilize to ensure consistent and timely client and vet communication? Do you have a system for charting?
- d. Human Resources: How will you educate and inform your employees, employer, and/or co-workers about rehab, so that they will understand what the service is and be able to refer or promote your services? Will they be / are they a good representation of your business image? Do they need to be trained in this aspect? What are your expectations of employees? How might you deal with payroll?

- e. Scheduling: Do you have (or need) a practice software program to manage your schedule? How might you utilize your staff better in order to schedule more patients in the available time frame? If you are a vet in a general vet practice, will you have rehab-only hours / days?
- f. Banking: Do you need money to start? Would a line of credit be beneficial? Do you have a good relationship with your bank? Credit card capabilities? Deposits and purchases?
- g. Accounting: Get a business accountant. Period.

4. CLIENT SATISFACTION

Your clients have to be happy and satisfied if you want them to pay their bills and keep coming back.

- a. Create a feeling of family
- b. Send out a welcome letter, a thank you note, and/or an occasional reward. Make them think about you more often!
- c. Care calls: Life gets busy and sometimes clients drop off for no other reason than a period of time with a hectic schedule. A care call can re-activate some of those lost clients.
- d. Ease of doing business: How easy are you to do business with? Do you have convenient hours? Is your referral acquisition process streamlined? Do you answer phone calls or e-mails in a timely manner?
- e. Are you empathetic to what your clients are going through? A neurologic case might be common for you to see and treat, but could be devastating and overwhelming for a non-medical animal owner. Are you taking the time to explain and express an understanding of your clients' feelings and attitudes?
- f. Acceptance: Everyone wants to feel accepted and valued as a person, and to truly feel acceptance of your clients, their pets, and each of their personalities goes a long way to developing a strong patient-provider relationship. Many years ago, when working in human practice, I made it my goal to find something interesting about EVERY patient I treated. This made it so much easier to talk and visit with them during appointments – and to my delight, I did find that everyone has something truly interesting about them! I now utilize this strategy with my dog owners as well as with the dogs themselves!

5. MOTIVATION & COMMITMENT

How will you stay motivated, committed, and focused on your canine rehab business and growth of your canine rehab knowledge?

- a. Where will you seek mentorship and/or coaching?
- b. Can you join a mastermind group?
- c. Where and how will you continue to receive instruction?