

---

# Food for thought for Food animal veterinarians

## Receiving animal health product representatives with respect and courtesy

**I**n a recent visit to a veterinarian's office, I heard the receptionist say, "Doc, it's just another salesperson. Do you want to see him?" I have been witness to such situations time and time again when visiting veterinary practices. Do veterinarians want to see salespeople, or should they have their secretaries or veterinary technicians purchase all pharmaceuticals and biologics? A great number of salespeople call on veterinarians, and it's true that visits with them can consume precious time. In one month, a food animal practitioner friend of mine counted 18 salespeople calling on him. In many practices, veterinarians never spend time with the animal health product representative.

Numerous surveys have been conducted to determine why veterinarians buy certain pharmaceuticals and biologics. It's not always price or the efficacy of products that determine purchase decisions. The salesperson's personality, the salesperson's skills in handling veterinarians, and the friendships and mutual trust created are the reasons related by many veterinarians for purchasing animal health products from specific salespeople. One distributor representative spends one day a month golfing with a veterinarian to get

---

Prepared by John B. Herrick, DVM, 7807 N Calle Caballeros, Paradise Valley, AZ 85253. Others are welcome to contribute to this feature. Please contact the editor-in-chief for details.

his business. Are they good friends or equally poor golfers?

During my career, I have attended many meetings for sales representatives wherein the major thrust was a detailed description of the intricacies of a new product. Some companies have training schools for new salespeople, and all companies have periodic training or refresher courses. A lot of money and time is spent in these training procedures. The day of the salesperson relying on wining and dining to sell products has long been over. The contact by a salesperson can be one of the best forms of continuing education for the food animal practitioner. It's true that not all salespeople are the type that please certain veterinarians, but it has been my observation that poor salespeople don't last long.

Many salespeople are thoroughly trained in merchandising animal health products. Their knowledge of inventory procedures, mark-ups, cash flow, and other aspects of business could profit many veterinarians. These side benefits alone can be of great assistance in marketing for the practitioner.

It is amazing to observe how many veterinarians abuse salespeople. Curt statements, insults, and discourteous mannerisms are not uncommon. The guff salespeople have to take from some veterinarians is not worth much discussion here. Suffice it to say, how-

ever, the veterinarian who so positions himself often has a limited practice, with facilities that are far from what clients expect of veterinarians, and a personal appearance not fitting a professional. Recently, I was astounded to hear a 1960 graduate in veterinary medicine tell a well-informed salesperson who was detailing a new product, "You don't need to tell me how a product should be used; I have had 7 years of college training." In contrast, it has been my observation that the busy, well-informed practitioner spends considerable time with a salesperson, obtaining all the information available on a product or procedure.

I am not so naive that I think all salespeople are the greatest. Some prefer to be called "reps", whereas others think of themselves as "detail personnel." Whatever their status or label, they are out on the road to call on veterinarians to make a living. Companies frequently invest from \$50,000 to \$75,000 a year to keep a salesperson on the road. Thus, the sales personnel have to sell, directly or indirectly.

Most companies with which I am familiar have two sale policies. One is the so-called ethical policy; that is, they have sales personnel calling only on veterinarians. The same company will have salespeople calling on OTC accounts. In some cases, the

same person may have both duties. A high percentage of all animal products are sold to the producer or distributed by sales other than from a veterinarian. Time and time again I have observed a veterinarian viciously attack a company rep because the company had two sales outlets, ethical and OTC. It is company policy, not the sales rep's program. Veterinarians should try to understand this and vent their emotions on the golf course or at the physical fitness center.

There is no law or regulation that determines when, where, or how veterinarians buy animal health supplies, but their patients should be foremost in their minds. Safety, efficacy, withholding periods, and methods of administration should be the criteria for product selection. However, some veterinarians buy products solely on the basis of price, which is not the criterion by which animal health products should be purchased. Supposedly, there is no one more

knowledgeable than the veterinarian in the use of animal health products, but representatives from the manufacturers or distributors of these products can be and are of inestimable value to the veterinarian.

Company representatives like to prearrange their meetings with veterinarians. A meeting may be short and sweet, and support material may be left for consideration at the veterinarian's convenience. Both parties adhering to a schedule saves time for all. Veterinarians should accord the rep the same courtesy they would expect if they were marketing animal health products.

Yes, there are order takers, high- and low-pressure salespeople, detail experts, and some mighty nice people on the road calling on veterinarians. Veterinarians should try to arrange a time to meet these people that is mutually beneficial. If that is not possible, they should explain in a

business and professional manner why they don't want to see them. "Hey, Doc, that salesperson is here again," is not appropriate. On the other hand, some manufacturer of distributor representatives, because of personality or lack of people skills, need to "sharpen up" to gain a veterinarian's respect.

In general, animal health product representatives and veterinarians should have open dialogue in a straight, eyeball-to-eyeball professional fashion relative to the sale/purchase of animal health products. Manufacturers and distributors can enhance this relationship by proper selection of sales personnel and continuing training thereafter.

The bottom line is this: if manufacturers and distributors go an extra mile to train sales personnel to make effective presentations, the least the veterinarian can do is receive them with respect and courtesy.

## Business Sessions of the 1991 Annual AVMA Meeting at Seattle Available on Request

I am an AVMA member. Please send me a copy of the Business Sessions for 1991.

Name: Dr. \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

AVMA Business Sessions, 1931 N. Meacham Rd., Suite 100, Schaumburg, IL 60173-4360