Number 1 in a series of 3:

WEAVING THE RIGHT WEBSITE MESSAGE
By Linda Wasche

The best veterinary websites go beyond basics to help build a distinguishable identity for the practice. Many veterinary websites share similar descriptions of facilities, staff credentials and services. The more effective sites become a "platform" for the practice.

Answer the following to plan or enhance your website.

1. **What are you trying to achieve?**

A website alone is not a client attraction tool. But it can help a veterinary practice:

- Build credibility
- Educate and inform
- Define and position

Identify website objectives for each audience. (See "target audiences" below.) Websites that convey practice character and beliefs help create a distinctive identity.   On the other hand, change the name of the practice on many sites and you would never know the difference!

2. **Who is your target audience?**

Tailor website content and graphics to *types* of audience:

- Current clients (education, cross selling of services)
- Seeking a vet (new to area or unhappy with current vet)
- Other vets (referrals)
- Info seekers (could produce clients)

What information, programs and features will resonate with each? Further tailor website content to appeal to specific interests based on:

- Demographic groups (seniors, families, singles)
- Pet demographics (puppy/kitten, geriatric, breed-specific)
- Special interests (travelers, outdoor enthusiasts)

3. **What perceptions do you want to create?**

Many practice websites tell the visitor what the practice wants them to know. The best websites show them!

How you look and talk is often more important that what you say. Instead of saying that your practice emphasizes preventive care, offer information on pet nutrition and wellness. Instead of stating that you honor the human-animal bond, develop a special quiz for understanding your pet's personality or create a memorial to deceased pets. Pay attention to your choice of:

- Photos/illustrations (lighthearted or serious, species of animal?)
- Terminology (pet owner or pet guardian; pet or companion?)
- Tone (friendly, serious, approachable?)

While clients want to know about your practice's qualifications, they also want to know what it will *feel like* to have you as their vet. Clients assume technical competence. Use your website to show them how wonderful it will be to have you take care of their pet!

Next month: Tips for getting the most from your website as a marketing tool.