Achieving great customer care

There are four focuses that can help a practice achieve excellence in customer care: train, measure, manage, inspire

Last December, I was invited to deliver a day’s Cx focus on the customer experience at the Finnish Veterinary Association’s annual congress. Stepping outside the UK market, talking with colleagues working with a different set of constraints and concerns, not only gave me a new perspective on Cx, but also proved that by focusing on four concepts (Train, Measure, Manage and Inspire), excellence is perfectly possible.

The customer experience is vital in attracting and retaining clients – if it’s poor, not only will your customers go elsewhere, they’ll stop others registering with you through negative word of mouth. Conversely, if the customer journey is smooth and engaging at every stage, clients will come back more often, spend more money and tell more people about you. Most practices get this general principle now, but what I see being missed time and time again is attention to detail and consistency.

Getting the customer experience right is a team game, and it’s crucial that everyone plays their part – if the receptionist is friendly and professional, but the owner is kept waiting for ages to see a vet who is so busy they keep leaving the room to collect equipment and test results, the good feeling is soon gone.

Creating a bond
Great customer care requires every single member of the practice team to understand not only what to do, but why it matters. Getting it right can be helped enormously by proven processes such as telephone customer care, and communication skills in the consult room. But processes alone don’t make for a great customer experience – it’s people and an inspiring, personal approach that really make the difference. There’s a wonderful quote from Maya Angelou that I use a lot when talking about customer experience: “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people never forget how you made them feel.”

The most powerful loyalty is driven by emotions. I collect lots of Avios points when travelling with work, so it makes sense to book flights with BA in order to use them. You might say that makes me loyal to BA, but my emotional loyalties lie with Emirates, who truly understand how to deliver a superior customer experience. I recommend Emirates, but I most often use BA.

Buying goods and services online or face-to-face (just as our clients do), I make choices shaped by how convenient and warm the whole experience is – I aspired to a Robert Thompson bread board, but the ordering process was so lengthy and difficult that I bought one from Ikea.

Emotional attachment to the practice is equally important for clients and team – your vets, nurses and customer care colleagues must live your practice values in everything they do, and clients should be able to see these in action in every communication and interaction with and from the practice.

Having values and a mission statement help focus everyone on the needs of the customer, bonding clients and colleagues to the practice and creating a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. How the practice ‘feels’ is a vital component in its success, or a cause of its failure.