

Vets and Drug Companies Survey 2010

An insight for pharmaceutical companies and other veterinary suppliers into what veterinary surgeons expect from them.

Carried out by Rachel Crowe BSc PhD ACIM
in association with VetSurgeon.org and Virbac Animal Health



Veterinary surgeons describe the perfect drug company

Arlo Guthrie, Editor, VetSurgeon.org. January 2012.

A survey of 161 veterinary professionals carried out by Rachel Crowe BSc PhD ACIM in association with VetSurgeon.org and Virbac Animal Health has provided a valuable insight to what is expected from pharmaceutical companies and suppliers by veterinary surgeons. The results are now being made available to all companies in the industry in order to help them better serve the profession.

When asked what things are important when dealing with a pharmaceutical company, the single most important thing was the company's products (efficacy: 99%; range: 96%; ease of use for the client: 95%; price: 86%; ease of use for the veterinary surgeon: 83% technical support: 82%). Close behind at 79% was that vets want to deal with companies they know to be ethical and trustworthy. 59% of vets cited the transparency of the company rebate scheme and an understanding of their business as important factors.

45% of those surveyed said that they see drug company representatives because they find the experience useful, another 13% because they like the rep and have a good working relationship, and 11% because they were afraid they might otherwise miss something.

There were certainly some important lessons for company representatives that came out of the survey. When asked whether it was important that they are educated to degree level, the majority of vets said it doesn't matter provided they are well trained and informed about their products. Nor was an AMTRA qualification¹ important: 60% of vets didn't know what the AMTRA qualification was.

Veterinary surgeons were reasonably relaxed about dress code, with 51% asking only that reps are clean and tidy. However 24% thought it was important for reps to wear smart trousers or a skirt and jacket, and 16% expect a suit and tie. When asked whether they expect reps to wear a badge or be otherwise easily identifiable, 45% said yes or that it would help.

An overwhelming 75% of veterinary surgeons expect drug company reps to make an appointment always, with only 19% saying drop-ins are OK if time allows.

When asked what was expected from reps, product knowledge came to the fore once more, with 99% of vets saying they expect them to know their own products; 86% to handle technical product queries; 76% to provide information about off-licence product usage (which is illegal unless the representative is also a veterinary surgeon) and 68% to know about and discuss comparative competitor products. However, it wasn't all about the drug company and its products: 81% of vets expect sales reps to have background information about their practice before they visit and 67% expect them to have practice sales figures to hand. Finally, probably due to how pressed everyone is for time, 61% of vets expect reps to have an agenda for the meeting and 55% to outline it at the start.

As for the topics for discussion during a meeting with a company rep, 95% said they expect to be updated about new products and new uses for products. 85% said they expect reps to educate their staff about relevant products; 73% to deliver lunchtime CPD; 67% to inform about current market trends; 46% to take orders; 34% to sell products or come in for a chat and a cup of tea and finally,

9% to pass on details about competitor practices. That latter one is an interesting one: presumably not the same people for whom dealing with an ethical and trustworthy company is important!

Participants in the survey were then asked what things are most important to them and their businesses. Reps came top of the pile, with 88% saying a 'positive relationship with their rep'; 82% a rep that understand their business; 80% personable reps and 71% reps that understand their business. Looks like the old adage that 'people do business with people' still holds true. Discounts and marketing support also figured highly (>62%).

Again, when asked what made a pharmaceutical company really stand out, it was knowledgeable, good/nice reps that scored the highest vote (19%), followed by a good range of quality products (13%) and business support (11%).

Bringing this altogether, we can now describe the perfect veterinary supplier. It's a company that above all offers efficacious products that both veterinary surgeons and clients find easy to use, backed with solid technical support. The company is ethical and trustworthy, with a transparent rebate scheme. The company's representatives are, above all, knowledgeable about their products. They also demonstrate knowledge about their clients' business. They are personable, presentable, easily identifiable and always make an appointment. The company offers discounts based on loyalty or value, regardless of practice size. It also offers marketing and business support.

For those companies that achieve these high ideals consistently, the rewards are plentiful. 84% of veterinary surgeons said that they would be more likely to recommend the company to others, 81% said it would increase their loyalty to the company and encourage them to think harder before moving to a different supplier, 80% said it would make them less likely to switch suppliers and 68% said it would prevent them from shopping around in the first place.

So are any companies already meeting veterinary surgeons' expectations? On this question, veterinary surgeons were pretty evenly split, with 47% saying yes and 53% saying no. Clearly there is room for improvement. Nevertheless, a round of applause to Virbac, which scored the highest overall approval rating of 17%, with Pfizer and Intervet Schering Plough (now MSD) close behind with 13%.

Chris Liggett, Marketing Director at Virbac UK said: "The findings of this survey offer a fascinating insight into the relationship between veterinary practices and their suppliers. In some ways they confirm what we should all already know – that the quality of a company's product range is paramount and that representatives play a key role as ambassadors for our businesses – but the growing importance to vet practices of working with drug companies that provide a complete package of products and services is worthy of note.

Virbac was founded by a veterinary surgeon so a culture of working in close partnership with the profession imbues the whole business. As we're celebrating our 25th anniversary in the UK this year, I'd like to think that we're getting some things right - but the findings do, of course, provide a salutary reminder of the need to continue to improve our performance in all areas, particularly in a market which is challenging for both suppliers and customers alike."

¹ The AMTRA qualification is now known as the NOAH Certificate of Animal Health