



Alamance Veterinary Hospital Research Brief

Team Gallagher

Elon University | COM 404

12/10/2008

Research is a critical step of every successful campaign. Here are our findings and implications regarding Alamance Veterinary Hospital.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background.....	3
Why A Campaign?	3
Objective.....	3
Goals.....	3
Research Strategy	4
Methodology.....	4
Mall Intercept Survey	4
Detailed Findings.....	5
Average pets per household	5
Pet types	5
Pet Age Frequency Distribution.....	5
Current Vet Loyalty	6
Measuring vet distance	6
Identifying Vet Loyalty.....	6
Perceptions of pet care services	7
The economic turndown’s effects on Burlington pet health	8
Understanding pet owners’ relationship with technology	9
Key influencers of pet health info	9
Pet owner demographics	9
Implications	10
Identified Opportunities	13

BACKGROUND

Alamance Veterinary Hospital has been located in the Northeastern side of Burlington for almost 60 years. The small staff consists of three female doctors and treats all pets and some exotic animals, including birds. Services include general internal medicine, ultrasound, x-rays, boarding, general dentistry, education for clients, pharmacy, and drop off service for well animal visits. The practice was accredited by the American Animal Hospital Association in 2000.

WHY A CAMPAIGN?

Alamance Veterinary Hospital is seeking a marketing campaign to increase clientele. The hospital's Northeast location is in "old Burlington" while a newer, wealthier Burlington has moved West with new housing developments, Elon University expansion, and the creation of commercial areas, including the Alamance Crossing and University Commons shopping complexes. Northeastern Burlington is a lower/middle class section of town with a strong Latino population. As Burlington has moved west, numerous veterinarian clinics closer to newer developments have left Alamance Veterinary Hospital with a shrinking client base.

Essentially, Alamance Veterinary Hospital needs to generate awareness to build a new clientele base within Northeast Burlington or reach clients who have moved West.

OBJECTIVE

Increase business by 40 new clients per month for a total of 160 new clients

- The veterinarian industry standard is 30 new clients per vet per month.

GOALS

- Raise Alamance Veterinary Hospital awareness by targeting 50 percent of Alamance County Pet Owners (in East and West districts) by May 2009 through news (TV, print and web) outlets.
- Increase general vet and specialty services understanding/awareness by achieving a subscription/attendance rate of at least 50 pet owners in Alamance County to a blog or education classes sponsored by the organization by May 2009.
- Attain a minimum 10 percent of Bark Bucks holders redeem coupons at Alamance Veterinary Hospital by May 2009.

TEAM GALLAGHER



RESEARCH STRATEGY

Before we can craft a campaign blueprint, Team Gallagher must understand the fundamentals of our master target – Burlington pet owners. We identified several key questions:

- Who are Burlington pet owners? What are their key demographics? Are these people likely to integrate social media into their everyday lives?
- What are the values pet owners look for in a new vet?
- What are the key influencers (cost, location, reputation, etc.,) that affect a pet owner's vet choice
 - What value is most important? Least important?
 - Do these values change among different types of pet owners?
- To what degree is the economic turndown affecting Burlington pet owner's willingness/ability to spend money on pet health?
- Where do pet owners receive information about pet health and local veterinarians?
- How much are pet owners typically paying for services? Is Alamance Veterinary Hospital competitive?

METHODOLOGY

MALL INTERCEPT SURVEY

For the most efficient method to obtain our data, we conducted a mall intercept survey. By asking individual pet owners survey questions face-to-face, Team Gallagher gained a first-hand perspective of the Burlington pet owner demographic.

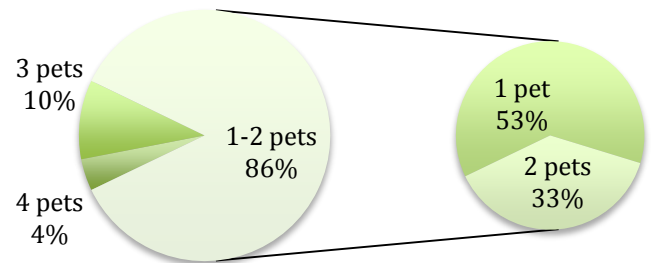
To gather responses from the previously identified two primary lead groups (pet owners in East and West Burlington) we conducted the survey at three strategic locations:

1. Elon K-9 Corner in West Burlington
2. The City Dog Park in East Burlington
3. The Burlington Pet Adoption Agency (located in East Burlington, but where many Western Burlington residents frequent for pet adoption)

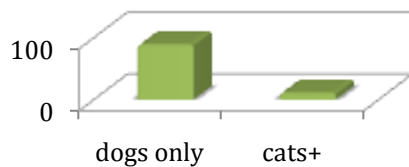
DETAILED FINDINGS

AVERAGE PETS PER HOUSEHOLD

- Pet owners typically have one or two pets.
- More than half (53 percent) of all survey respondents had one pet.
- 85 percent of all respondents had one or two pets.
- No respondents admitted to having five or more pets.



Pet Types (in percentage)

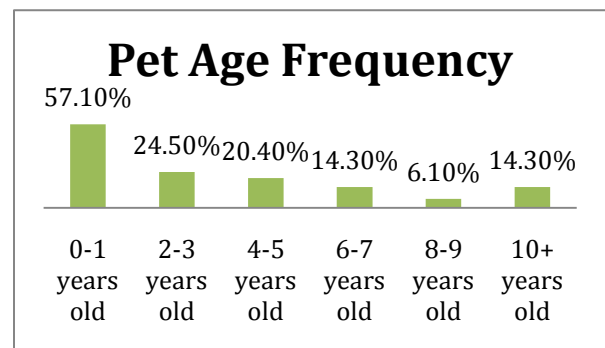


PET TYPES

- 89 percent of the respondents were exclusively dog owners. This figure is biased due to the fact that most of the surveying was conducted at the Beth Schmidt and East Burlington dog parks.

PET AGE FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION

- Almost 82 percent of the respondents indicated their pets were less than three years old.
- More than 57 percent of the respondents indicated their pets were less than one year old.
- Similar pet age frequency declined beginning at the 2-3 years old mark and ending at the 7-8 years old mark.
- Pets aged 9 years and older ended this trend, with a slight rise in frequency.



TEAM GALLAGHER



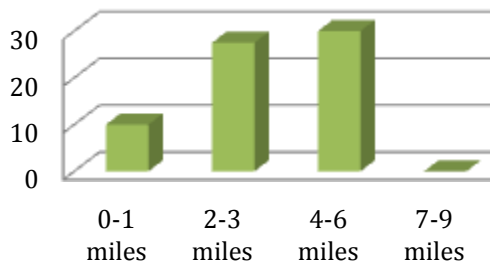
CURRENT VET LOYALTY

- Almost 78 percent of the respondents had a vet. However, several respondents could not identify their vet.
- About 22 percent of respondents did not have a vet.

Do You Have A Vet?



Home-Vet Distance (percentage)



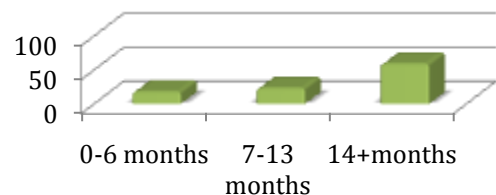
MEASURING VET DISTANCE

- Ten percent of respondents lived within one mile of their vet.
- 27.5 percent lived within 2-3 miles of their vet. The majority of respondents (30 percent) lived within 4-6 miles of their vet.
- Almost a third, (32.5 percent), of respondents commuted 10 or more miles to their vet's office, including 15 percent which commuted 13 or more miles to their vets office.

IDENTIFYING VET LOYALTY

- 59 percent of pet owners with vets have seen a pet health care provider for 14+ months.
- 23.1 percent have been with a current vet for 7-13 months.
- 17.9 percent have been with their vet for 0-6 months.
- 77.5 percent say they see a vet 4 times per year or less, 5 percent indicate they see a vet 5-6 times a year, and 17.5 percent indicate they see a vet 7 or more times per year.

How Long Have You Been With Your Vet?



TEAM GALLAGHER

PERCEPTIONS OF PET CARE SERVICES

- 93.1 percent of respondents indicated they see a vet for necessary shots; 82.6 percent of survey respondents indicated they see the vet for routine checkups
- 45.7 percent reported they would take their pet to the vet specifically for specialty services indicating their preference for more general procedures.
- 74.4 percent said they would consider going to the vet for spaying and neutering while 62.8 percent said they would consider dental care. Behavior care was the least considered vet service considered with 34.9 percent. Grooming and boarding were considered by slightly more than half of those surveyed.
- 57 percent said they would change vets yet reasons for doing so were largely hypothetical.
- 53.5 percent said they did not ask about other pet owners about their current pet care provider prior to becoming a customer.
- Half of those surveyed at the dog parks said they found their vet through a friend referral. The “other” category made up for the majority of the other half of respondents. Two respondents said location was the primary factor in choosing a vet.
- 83.8 percent ranked customer service as very important when choosing a vet. The appearance of the facility was also very important (61.5 percent ranked appearance as very important). More than half identified services offered and reputation as very important. The distribution for cost being a factor in choosing a vet was evenly distributed. Some felt very strongly that price was not an option and they would do anything for their pet. Others said “a pet is a pet.” Most were on the fence.
- 80 percent of respondents said their vets were very knowledgeable while 15 percent think their vets are somewhat knowledgeable.
- Influential factors on one’s decision to choose a vet include:
 - cleanliness
 - hours of operation
 - location
 - physically attractive vets
 - personable nature
 - good experiences in the past
 - attentive care for older animals.

- The majority of pet owners indicated the cost pet care procedure was “somewhat important” (about 45 percent).
 - These responses also indicated the percentage of pet owners that consider pets “part of the family” (about 25 percent said cost was no factor) and the percentage of pet owners who consider “a pet just a pet” (30 percent).
- We have learned that other factors are more important than price in choosing a vet or vet procedures of pet owners in Burlington.

45% - percentage of respondents who indicated the costs associated with pet health care were **“somewhat important”**

25% - percentage of respondents who indicated the costs associated with pet health care were **“not a factor”**

30% - percentage of respondents who indicated a family animal was **“just a pet”**

THE ECONOMIC TURNDOWN’S EFFECTS ON BURLINGTON PET HEALTH

The current economic downturn is driving 1 in 6 clients away from the vet. This tells us that paying vet prices is not a financial priority for some Burlington pet owners; however, it does not tell us that they are getting rid of their animals. Pet owners are seeking pet information from other (less expensive sources than veterinarians).



1 in every 6 respondents are going to the vet less frequently due to the economic turndown

UNDERSTANDING PET OWNERS' RELATIONSHIP WITH TECHNOLOGY

- Our findings show that a majority of our participants view the internet as very important in their lives (61 percent), another 29 percent believe it to be somewhat important. 54 percent of respondents say that they use the internet to find a local service provider often.
- Almost three-fourths of respondents have never seen their vet's website and 42.6 percent said that it was not likely that they browse online pet reviews when choosing a vet.
- 64 percent visit websites and almost a third visit blogs or message boards and forums. 44 percent consult TV shows and TV news. 33 percent rely on social events to gain pet health information.



KEY INFLUENCERS OF PET HEALTH INFO

We asked a question of our participants to determine which people or institutions are key influencers about their pet care decisions. 57 percent trust pet celebrities like the Dog Whisperer. 51 percent consult with pet store employees, followed by 38 percent who trust organizations like AAHA. Other, more insignificant numbers look to pet magazines and books.

PET OWNER DEMOGRAPHICS

The typical Burlington pet owner is:

- Married
- living in West Burlington,
- 18-29 years-old
- earning an annual income between \$25,001-50,000

TEAM GALLAGHER



IMPLICATIONS

- Pet owners typically have one or two pets, therefore, the organization must reach its growth potential through a surge in pet owners, not simply in the number of new pets it sees. Along with the proportionately high number of single, retired, or otherwise “empty nesters,” we infer that many pet owners view their pets as extremely strong companions.
- Most respondents were exclusively dog owners, therefore, further information about exclusive cat and other animal pet owners is needed to gain the perceptions of veterinarians and pet health. We are not sure if exclusive cat and other animal pet owners feel similarly about the costs and distances of veterinary care, nor their perceptions of the internet and its relationship to their pets.
- The majority of respondents indicated their pets were less than three years old, therefore, we suggest a strategy in which the “new” or recent pet owner is directly targeted and attracted to the organization through potential “puppy packages.” Additionally, we propose a strategy to target the high-frequency of older pets.
- Several respondents could not identify their vet and about 22 percent of respondents did not have a vet, therefore, **the organization has an opportunity to strengthen its brand. Brand recognition is low across all veterinarians in Alamance County.**
- Pet owners need a substantial reason for switching to another vet. Most have frequented the same vet for many years, yet vet location is sometimes a prominent key influencer in pet health.
 - We suggest crafting campaign strategies that respond to this key influencer by targeting East Burlington residents with the facility’s convenience, while highlighting the facility’s AAHA accreditation along with other features and benefits in West Burlington strategies.
- Word-of-Mouth referrals were the most significant key influencer for choosing a pet health provider. Word-of-mouth marketing is extremely efficient.
 - We suggest leveraging the equity in Alamance Veterinary Hospital’s existing clientele to initiate a boom in viral marketing. Dynamic tactics should provide the current clients with a motive for making referrals.

TEAM GALLAGHER



- As we cannot change the facility appearance, we should focus our campaign on promoting customer service, services and reputation. How you and your pet are treated is very important to current and future clients. To maintain a positive reputation in the community our campaign should push the AAHA accreditation to stand out amidst competitors in the market.
- Price is not as important of a factor when people chose a vet; therefore we should not stress low prices to the community who might connect low prices with low quality customer service. However, the economy is taking almost 20 percent of pet owners away from vets.
 - We suggest establishing some sort of loyalty driver system such as “Doggy Dollars,” “Kitty Cash” or “Bark Bucks” – a concept that rewards return visits and alleviates pet health costs
- Pet owners are generally in consensus that their vets are knowledgeable about modern medicine. It is reasonable to expect your vet to be qualified in vet care and people can easily come to this conclusion. Therefore, we do not need to promote the qualifications of our veterinarians to the community as they will assume all vets are qualified for the jobs they perform or lack of professionalism.
- People choose a vet based on appearance, availability and location specifically; therefore, our campaign should incorporate convenience factors and other features and benefits that make Alamance Veterinary Hospital a unique pet health care provider.
- Almost a third of respondents commuted 10 or more miles to their vet’s office, including 15 percent which commuted 13 or more miles to their vets office. Therefore, it is clear pet owners in west Burlington are willing to make the longer commute to the organization’s site.
 - Only 10 percent of pet owners lived within a mile away from their vet’s office, implying that 90 percent of pet owners are willing to drive outside their neighborhoods for pet health care.
- Price is not the most important factor for choosing a vet or vet procedures in Burlington, therefore, our branding campaign should focus on the most important aspects (customer service, vet reputation) rather than low prices, which could possibly be misconstrued as “bargain vetting” with cut-corner procedures.

- Despite cost not being a significant key influencer, 20 percent of surveyed pet owners are visiting the vet less often in the current economic climate; therefore, we suggest educating local pet owners about the importance of vet visits. This initiative can be implemented into other strategies and will warm community relations.
- The internet is very important to a majority of pet owners. We can reasonably assume that this means they use the internet on a daily basis, and often to find local businesses. However, nearly 75 percent of pet owners haven't seen their vet's website and many haven't looked for vet reviews online. Therefore, any web component of the campaign must be different from other online pet health sources. We highly suggest integrating social media into our web elements. Creating a forum for pet owners to talk about their pets may be the key to unlocking the power of the web in this campaign.
- Pet owners seek out pet health information from a variety of sources. Among the most prevalent of these are the internet (website, blogs, etc.), TV programming and community events. Large scale TV tactics may not provide a worthy ROI, therefore we should utilize the web and community events for the bulk of our tactics and communication.
- Our research shows that a majority of pet owners are younger, married and making an average sized income. Therefore, since participants were fairly evenly split married or single, we can utilize a dual branded campaign that presents pets as both "just a part of the family" and as "a best friend and companion," encouraging people to go the extra mile for either one.

IDENTIFIED OPPORTUNITIES

Some factors to consider in our research are where we interviewed and whom we interviewed. The dog parks and adoption agency were great places to interact and gather information about pet owners, however, by choosing dog parks as our research focus the information is then biased towards people who take their dogs to these parks (as opposed to not taking them to parks) and biased against non-dog owners (compared to cat or bird owners for example).

Secondly, this information was gathered with the intent to make quantitative decisions about Burlington pet owners but by concentrating on dogs and owners who go to dog parks our sample may not be large enough or general enough to accurately represent the totality of Burlington pet owners. Team Gallagher does feel confident that this information, although not scientifically perfect, does provide the necessary information to achieve Alamance Veterinary Hospital's goal of increasing business.

We look forward to overcoming this challenge by exchanging our data with the other COM 404 groups assigned to Alamance Veterinary Hospital. We are aware that other groups obtained data via additional scientific methods.

Return to NathanAcosta.com