

by Christine Woodford, DVM

Twists and Turns... *sometimes Wavy Road* to Success

I am writing this article to thank everyone for their support over past years. I cannot believe that it has been two years since I started my own practice, Veterinary Integrative Performance Services. It has been a very rewarding experience with lots of ups and downs, and twists and turns. I would like to share my experience with you.

As many of you know my background, after ten years in college and three degrees, I worked in regular equine veterinary practice for six years. While working in practice, I pursued advanced training in animal chiropractic and veterinary acupuncture. It was that point in my career for me to choose either to buy into the practice where I was employed at, or start my own practice.

When I was thinking about starting my own practice, I approached SCORE, "Counselors to America's Small Business" a service offered by the Small Business Development Center and was assigned a business counselor. My business counselor, Jim Williams, told me to write a business plan. This was a "painful" yet very important process and one of the key tools that contributed to the success of my new company.

After working through the start-up worksheets provided by SCORE, I realized that I could start my own veterinary practice specializing in chiropractic and acupuncture for small animals and horses. I left on good terms with my employer and was able to retain my existing chiropractic and acupuncture clients.

Since I offer very specialized services, I knew that I would have to cover a wide area to reach my clients. I travel to different areas of the state each month to provide my services. That first year I traveled a great deal. Managing my travels and work schedule throughout the state was the toughest part during the first year in business. Thank you to my wonderful

husband for his support! After the first year, I started renting office space at Crystal Creek Equine Center. This is a premiere horse facility in Marion, conveniently located 1/4 mile north of highway 151. The location allows me to work on small animals safely in a climate controlled office. It also has a large indoor arena and an area where I can work on horses. Currently, I see patients two to three days a week at my office, and travel to other areas of the state the remaining days in a given week.

The biggest surprise of running my own business was the amount of time it takes to "manage" and the need for consistent/constant marketing, accounting practices, and time management. Someone told me that "starting your own business is like taking care of a newborn child—it takes constant care and attention."

Marketing has been an important factor in the success of Veterinary Integrative Performance Services. As my counselor stated "marketing is announcing who you are and what you do." I reach people through direct mail. About two weeks before I plan to be in a certain area, I send out post cards to my existing contacts. Even if that client's animal is doing fine and does not need to be treated that month, the reminder postcards generate a tremendous amount of "word of mouth advertising," and I generate referrals from satisfied clients.

Writing educational articles for this magazine and other local publications has been a very important way to communicate to new and existing clients. I also have given educational talks and demonstrations to animal enthusiasts on various topics. In addition, I added a website, www.VIPsvet.net created by a competent web designer where I compile my written material so that my clients have access to important animal care resources. I have my logo and contact information on the sides of my

vehicle which I call my "mobile billboard!" I have been stopped at various places such as the bank, coffee shops, and animal events by people inquiring about my services after seeing the logo and information on my vehicle.

With the help of a creative photographer, I have also created a tri-fold informational brochure that explains my services. I have contacted other veterinarians, human chiropractors, human acupuncturists, and pet groomers, boarders, and trainers to also help spread the word. They have been displaying my business cards and brochures at their place of business. Recently I joined Linn County Le Tip, a local networking group of business professionals. We meet once a week over the lunch hour to discuss important business topics, exchange ideas, and business referrals.

In addition to my highly specialized services, there are other important distinguishing characteristics of my business that have contributed to my success. All of my appointments are scheduled, payment is due at the time of service, and my overhead is very low. I have a well thought out business plan, including a detailed marketing plan and the continued support of my SCORE mentor.

The greatest satisfaction of owning my own my own business is helping animals feel better and providing hope to animal cases when traditional veterinary medicine has left them with a poor prognosis. With my veterinary background, I can offer my clients a healthcare plan that can integrate various therapies to improve the quality of life and performance of their animals. Thank you for all of your support. Please call or e-mail me if you would like to learn more about my services and we can set up a time to help your animal (small or large) feel better.