

Veterinarian Technology – Helping or Overwhelming?

Veterinary tech holds undeniable promise in helping pets live longer, making healthcare more affordable and strengthening the relationship between veterinarian and pet owner. It represents a chance to learn more, share insight and spend more time on care, rather than 'admin.' But there's no linear journey to 'doing tech,' in a clinical and operationally complex business. And organisations that make the change need to drive comprehensive adoption to ensure the returns on new technologies are worth the initial investment.

Veterinarians have scientific brains and compassionate hearts. They save lives and solve problems every day. As caring professionals, issues of organisational planning, technological adoption, change management and employee communication are not areas where thought patterns typically start, nor have they traditionally been a focus for training and education.

And that's important, because adoption of tech is as much about the culture of a clinic as it is about the tool itself. New systems are only as effective as the commitment of the people using them and without the right onboarding processes to ensure each and every user across a clinic can capably use and understand a tool, new tech can quickly become wasted investment. And worse, feed into a cycle of wariness and apathy.

To find out more, we spoke to 100+ veterinarians across the US to understand the motivations and potential barriers when it comes to tech in the clinic.

Key Findings

- 86% of respondents agree that investing in technology would improve their practice.

- 68% agree that investing in connected systems would improve their practice.
- 31% believe AI to be the trend which will have the most significant impact on clinics.
- 64% see staffing and staff training as the biggest priority or area of need in their practice.
- 42% say lack of awareness of new technological tools is the biggest barrier to adoption.

Vets are struggling with very human issues. Finding, retaining and training staff being chief among them. At the same time, awareness is relatively low when it comes to new tools and technologies, which could very well help alleviate some of these concerns.

With 86% of vets agreeing that investment in technology would improve their practice, it's clearly seen as an important tool to lessen in-clinic burdens and help improve care. Independent clinics are more likely to prioritise technology than their corporate counterparts, perhaps more keenly feeling the pinch of online retail competition and wanting to find ways to optimise revenue.

Cost, lack of awareness and the need to invest in training are the biggest barriers vets face. Unsurprisingly, cost is more of a barrier for independent clinics than their corporate counterparts. For C&S, the biggest barrier to technology is the associated need for investment in training – unsurprising, given their operational scale and perhaps an opportunity for independent clinics to increase competition.

In Two Minds About AI

When asked about the biggest trends impacting the sector in the next five years, 31% of respondents (unprompted) mentioned AI and its ability to have the most significant impact in-clinic – the majority of mentions were positive or neutral in nature. Patient communications are perhaps the most straightforward area of a practice in which to introduce

Vets want new innovation, with connected systems & AI top of mind.

86%

Think innovative technology can improve their practice

68%

Agreed connected systems would have a big impact

Almost

33%

Said AI could significantly impact their clinic

But they're too distracted by the barriers to take action.

From training implications and cost, to the impact of tech on clinical reasoning—they don't know where to start.



Almost half don't know which tech to use



Over a third can't grasp use cases

technology. Whether that's through automated appointment reminders, AI-powered triage or personalised comms and disease-specific education.

Qualitatively, vets cited concerns about the potential for AI to replace critical thinking. It's true that in many cases, treatment protocol recommendations lag behind what AI can already do. And there's a need for education at college level and ongoing training to define and mature the role of clinical reasoning and critical thinking, hand in hand with technology.

'I'm not sure how I feel about (AI). It seems promising for some areas like practice management, but I'm concerned about it removing the critical thinking component of veterinary medicine, especially among newer graduates.'

When it comes to the more practical aspects of running a clinic, this is where vets feel more comfortable with the role of AI. Vets are overburdened and understaffed. And there's potential for AI to be put to work to ease this pressure. Streamlined workflows, better comms, faster results: all can combine to reduce the resource burden on practices.

Specific, clinic-tailored use cases are a clear tool for providers promoting AI-based technologies. By drilling down to specific, relatable, operational moments, we can ease the overwhelm of implementing such a huge and new technology – making it feel more tangible and applicable to the everyday.

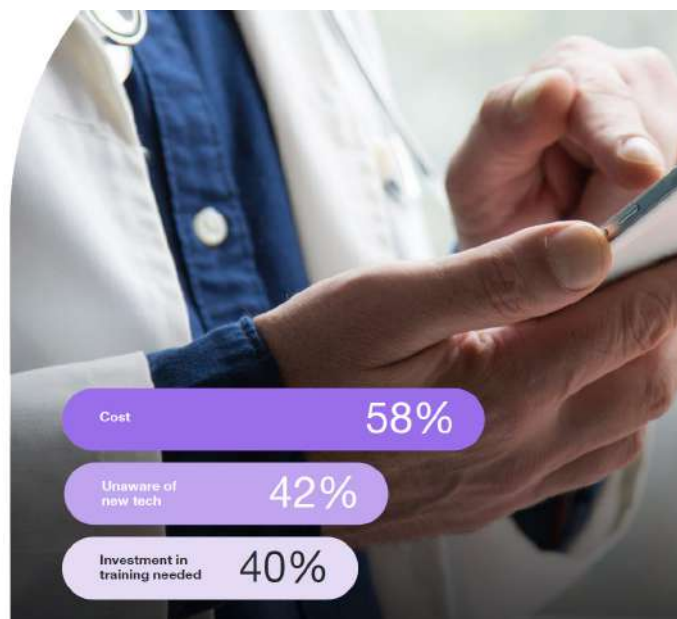
Areas of Excitement

86% of respondents agree that investing in technology would improve their practice. But they have specific opinions on the areas in which technology can be most impactful. Improved diagnostics and workflow are seen as the main opportunities for tech, with clear benefits on both patient care and revenue.

'Improved diagnostics and artificial intelligence go hand-in-hand. A more affordable, nearly instant answer for pet diagnostics is appealing to both client and veterinarian. Improved client communication is necessary with a technology-based world.'

The Appetite for Change: Diagnostics

'Providing quality preventative care and diagnostics will help my clinic to continue growing.'



When looking to the future of their businesses, vets see significant potential in improved diagnostics and preventative treatment, predicting they will have the biggest revenue impacts on their clinics within the next five years.

AI-powered diagnostics and imaging across radiology, pathology and cytology can vastly improve speed and accuracy. Traditional approaches involve extensive training to carry out in-house and delays faced in waiting for results on samples or scans sent externally. And while AI-powered solutions reduce human error and should increase diagnostic confidence, there's still that concern around critical thinking to consider.

As AI takes on more diagnostics and preventative care, clinical reasoning and critical thinking will need to evolve into higher-order decision-making and ethical judgment. In theory, this should allow time for more patient-centered, personalised care. AI can recognise patterns, but only vets can put results into the context of quality-of-life decisions.

The Appetite for Change: Patient Communications

'I feel like adding AI will revolutionise efficiency and communication.'

Patient communications are perhaps the most straightforward area of a practice in which to introduce technology. Whether that's through automated appointment reminders, AI-powered triage or personalised comms and disease-specific education.

These technologies, put to use most frequently by front desk staff, are more easily adopted. They don't necessarily require the intervention of a vet or vet tech, besides relaying the most critical information.

But there's a balance to be struck. While pet owners have come to expect the convenience of online booking and prescription ordering, for independent practices especially, the in-clinic experience needs to align seamlessly. That means consistent, collaborative work between front desk and clinical staff, so any notes or concerns from pet owners are front of mind for the person providing the first line of care.

The Appetite for Change: Clinic Operations

'[The biggest opportunity I see is] increased leveraging of technology to streamline work.'

To persuade vets, innovation needs to become more human.



- 74% agree that investing in workflow tools would improve their practice.
- 68% agree that investing in connected systems would improve their practice.

AI-powered practice management systems (PIMS) streamline record-keeping and scheduling, reducing the burden of admin for vets. But we know that for many vets, the promise of PIMS does not translate to operational reality. Some systems are clunky, the UI isn't intuitive and data and workflows are siloed across the practice, hindering efficiency and convenience in itself.

No two clinics are exactly alike. And again, we return to that issue of personalisation and training – putting new technology to work as an enabler, not creating a one size fits all approach.

A Closer Look at Audiences

What the survey has made very clear is the need to consider nuance, demographics and location when targeting clinics with new technology. We saw that, in the case of AI in particular, barriers to action grow with age. Again, consider segmenting messaging with this in mind. What about your offer will excite the innovators and where can you lean more into heritage and credibility to encourage a more hesitant older generation along on the journey?

Anecdotally, rural clinics within the respondent base called out the need for better in-clinic diagnostics to better serve their customers, while also emphasising that their 'less connected,' clients were a barrier to tech adoption.

This suggests that, alongside demographic and sentiment-based messaging, it would serve providers well

to understand the distinctions in how vets are looking for tech to help, according to their geography.

Reaching Vets Effectively

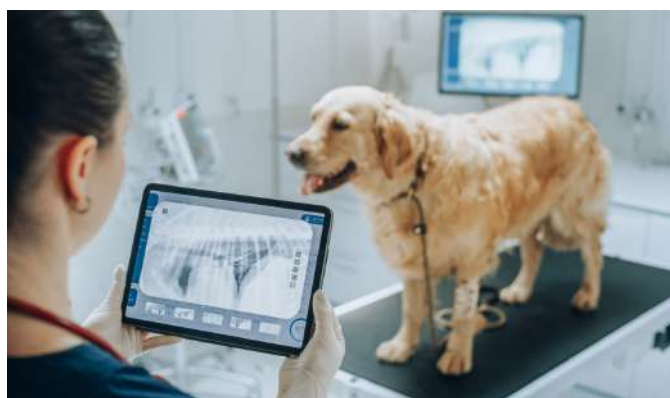
Vets are busy. They're overwhelmed. They're running unique businesses where care and commercials are intrinsically linked and totally distinct. It's a turbulent time for the industry, especially for independent vets, who are facing a perfect storm of increased competition, rising supply costs, increased staff turnover and increasingly informed customers.

To cut through this chaos and to best support them, information needs to be accessible, easy to digest and targeted. It needs to meet them where they are. A rural practice with a handful of staff and a 'captive,' customer base is more likely to be interested in bringing diagnostics in-house than transforming workflows and customer comms. Targeting with these nuances in mind can drive efficiency and engagement in your outreach.

Reaching Pet Owners Effectively

With more purchase options coming online and in store constantly, pet owners have more choice and control over pet care than ever. And because pets are part of the family now, they're more willing to spend on quality care. They expect deep levels of empathy from their vets, but expectations have shifted alongside consumer technology.

They're looking for convenience, transparency, data-informed decision making and increasingly personalised diagnostics. But the core interaction remains the connection between vet, pet and owner and that's something tech could never and should never replace.



Charlotte Forshaw

As the Co-Founder of FWD, Charlotte has more than 15 years' experience partnering with animal health organisations around the world to deliver results that transform their businesses. In her journey to create an agency built around more meaningful client engagements, she founded FWD People in 2019 and led the inception of FWD's first client, Zoetis, and subsequent partnerships with IPH, Covetrus, and Merck. She is a proud member of the Chief network.