

VICTORIA STILWELL POSITIVELY DOG TRAINING



**LICENSEE
MARKETING PRIMER**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION... PG. # 4-5

WELCOME FROM DOG*TEC... PG. #6

MARKETING BASICS... PG. # 7-11

MARKETING PROJECTS... PG. # 12-18

ADS—PRINT, RADIO, TV... 12-13

ARTICLES... 13

BUSINESS CARDS, BROCHURES, FLIERS... 13-14

EVENTS... 14-15

FOLDERS—ADOPTION & BEHAVIORAL WELLNESS... 15

LECTURES... 15-16

VICTORIA'S LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION... 16

LOGO CLOTHING... 16-17

NEWSLETTER... 17

PRESS RELEASE... 17

PROMOTIONAL ITEMS... 18

STAFF TRAINING... 18

TIP SHEETS... 18-19

VET REPORTS... 19

WORD OF MOUTH... 19

ONLINE MARKETING... PG. # 20-29

ONLINE ADVERTISING... 21-22

REFERRAL SITES... 23

SOCIAL MEDIA... 24-27

WEBSITE... 28-29

MARKETING MATERIALS... PG. # 30

APPENDIX: NEWSLETTER TIPS... PG. # 31-34

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on joining Victoria Stilwell Positively Dog Training - the world's first truly global network of professional dog trainers dedicated to providing the public with a humane, positive reinforcement-based option in dog training under Victoria's personal brand. Becoming a part of this network is a significant step towards realizing your full potential as a small business owner and valued member of your local community.

By aligning yourself professionally with Victoria, you have further signified to your local community that you are serious about your business, that you have all the skills and experience required to help change lives positively, and that you are indeed one of the most accomplished and experienced positive reinforcement dog trainers in the world. This Marketing Primer will describe the ways in which being a member of Victoria Stilwell Positively Dog Training will help your business grow.

Running your own small business as a dog trainer poses unique, imposing, and sometimes seemingly contradictory challenges. As members of an intensely personal profession, our clients come to us with dog behavior problems often rooted in deeply personal, intimate human issues, and we are expected not only to help the dog overcome its issues, but also to help guide the frequently aimless owner towards a place of calm, empathetic understanding. In order to effectively diagnose, address and treat these issues, we must first ensure that the owner is prepared to accept our constructive criticisms and is willing to tackle the problem head-on. Often, this can involve some relatively intense psychological introspection, which can lead to a significant and noteworthy bond between trainer and human. Despite this bond and the resulting relationships we develop, we must also remind the client that we are running a business for profit as dog trainers. This can sometimes be a jarring and awkward realization for the client, but as dog trainers we must be comfortable in the knowledge that while our business is indeed helping dogs and humans live in better harmony, we also must be paid accordingly for our expertise and should feel no hesitation in charging our clients a premium for the expert advice and care they receive.

Being a member of Victoria Stilwell Positively Dog Training will further cement your reputation among the client base in your local community as a preeminent source for training advice and a force for change away from dominance-based ideologies and toward humane, science-based positive reinforcement methodologies. This network has been created so that you can utilize the full power of Victoria's brand in your local community in an effort to increase the productivity, awareness and reputation of your business as well as continue to move the needle in the debate over dog training methods worldwide.

While we offer you the tools which can help you achieve your fullest potential as a businessperson, the ultimate responsibility lies with you to effectively harness the power of Victoria's brand and actively pursue all that being a member of Victoria Stilwell Positively Dog Training can provide you and your business.

The development and implementation of a sophisticated, coherent marketing strategy is the most important prerequisite to ensuring that your dog training business is running at its optimal level of efficiency and profitability. As dog trainers, the personal and emotional nature of our day-to-day activities often does not lend itself naturally to viewing the profession as a business, so we must make an extra effort to remind ourselves that we are running a business that relies on profit in order to continue to make a difference in our community.

Fortunately, once the decision has been made to devote the necessary time, energy and capital to a marketing strategy, there are many advertising and marketing outlets available which lend themselves extremely well to the business of dog training. Obviously, your operating budget will determine much of what you are able to achieve in terms of marketing, but even with limited resources, there is much you can do to ensure that your business grows and that you are able to reach the goals you have set for yourself.

Toward this end, we've asked the folks at [dog*tec](#), the dog industry's leading business consultancy, to share their marketing expertise with VSPDT members. In this marketing primer they've laid out concepts and ideas to help you make the most of your membership, including use of the Positively resources and materials exclusive to VSPDTs.

Again, welcome to the team. We look forward to working with you to help make the world a better place for people and their dogs... Positively!

WELCOME FROM DOG*TEC

It's a regular mantra for us at dog*tec: You have to work ON your business, not just IN it. And no aspect of working on your business is more important than marketing. Because without marketing, there may not be a business to work on *or* in.

If your stomach tightens when you think about marketing, we hope to put your mind at ease with this primer. Marketing doesn't have to be the expensive and stressful activity it is often believed to be. Whatever your budget—moderate, shoestring, or downright tight—there are marketing projects here for you. And whether you're a sales natural or a sales wallflower you'll find projects that fit your skills and personality. Because effective marketing isn't just about money—it's about time, strategy, and choosing the projects that are the best fit for you and your business.

Your choice to become a VSPDT was not only a great decision for the positive reinforcement education movement—it was a great choice for your business, too. We hope this Marketing Primer helps you take full advantage of your status as a Victoria Stilwell Positively Dog Trainer.

-- *Veronica Boutelle & Gina Phairas*
*dog*tec*

MARKETING BASICS

Let's begin with an overview of the types of marketing and why and how they work:

ADVERTISING

Most likely when you think about marketing you're thinking about traditional forms of advertising—things like print, radio, and TV ads, direct mail, online ads, brochures and fliers, etc. This form of marketing is about paying money to build awareness of your business and brand. Unfortunately this style of marketing is expensive and generally sees low returns on investment. For one thing, it is difficult to target your specific market. And even careful targeting—taking out an ad in a dog-centric neighborhood newspaper or running a spot on a local radio pet show, for example—does not solve the problem of your message becoming part of the great, big advertising noise. Modern consumers barely notice advertising anymore, and little wonder. Surveys show Americans are exposed to thousands of commercial messages every day.

Larger companies get around these issues by throwing ever larger marketing budgets at the problem, rendering their brand impossible to ignore despite consumers' best efforts. That's hard for a small training company to do, and typically at dog*tec we discourage the use of traditional advertising as a waste of whatever marketing budget may be available. But you aren't typical; you're a VSPDT.

Your affiliation with the Positively brand can make your advertising dollars go quite a bit farther because it allows you to tap into an already nationally-established brand. Careful and deliberate use of the VSPDT brand, either by itself or in conjunction with your personal brand, can increase the effectiveness of all your advertising efforts. A number of the marketing projects suggested in this primer are based on this concept, and on taking advantage of the VSPDT-branded materials and marketing resources afforded you by your VSPDT membership.

COMMUNITY MARKETING

Community marketing uses education, information, and entertainment to expose potential customers to your business. Projects like newsletters, lectures, article writing, event organizing, humane education programs, a content-rich website, etc., give people a window into your expertise and what you can do for them. Whereas advertising *tells* your potential audience how great you are, community marketing projects *shows* them and exposes them to the benefits you can provide.

Community marketing has proven very effective for dog training businesses. Having an experience of you and your business (through your writing, your website, or a strong referral from a trusted vet or other source, for example) creates brand loyalty, trust, confidence. Potential clients are more likely to pull the trigger when they've come into contact with your content in some way, and when they do contact you the sale will be easier for it.

This approach to marketing is considerably less expensive than traditional forms of advertising, but is generally more time-intensive. Think of your community marketing budget in terms of hours rather than dollars. And though time can be as scarce a commodity for a dog trainer as money, setting aside regular time to carry out your marketing is critical to the success of your business.

And as a VSPDT you can take particular advantage of community marketing. To be chosen for the program you had to demonstrate a high degree of expertise and experience—exactly the key ingredients you’ll need.

BALANCED MARKETING

Usually when we think about marketing we focus on potential clients. But you actually have three distinct audiences to market to, and part of good marketing strategy is to balance your marketing efforts between them:

1. **Referral Sources**
This category includes veterinarians, pet stores, shelters and rescues, and other dog pros – groomers, walkers, sitters, daycares.
2. **The Public**
This category is what we usually think of when we think about marketing audience—they are your potential clients-to-be.
3. **Current and Past Clients**
This category is too often overlooked, to a business’ detriment.

All of these audiences are important to the long-term health of your business. It’s not enough to focus on just one; you need a marketing plan that balances all three. Let’s look at each in some detail:

REFERRAL SOURCES

Why

A well-cared for relationship with the right referral source will send you far more business than traditional forms of paid advertising. These sources have direct relationships with the very people most likely to use your service. The first thing new puppy owners do is take their puppy to the vet, and often people seek the advice of their vet first for behavior problems. Dog walkers and daycares see dogs every day, putting them in the position to notice and bring behavior problems to their clients’ attention. And rescues and shelters adopt out dogs that often need at least some training to help them meet with success in their new homes.

Marketing to referral sources such as these allows you to target marketing directly to the people most likely to be potential clients. And potential clients who seek you out based on a strong referral are more likely to convert into business: They come to you already at least partially sold because someone they trust or see as an expert told them you can help.

Developing relationships with referral sources is the key to business longevity. A few key referral sources can provide a large portion of your business. Their steady stream of potential clients can be the lifeblood of a training business. It’s what keeps you going.

And you have a particular advantage in marketing to referral sources—your connection to Victoria. As referral sources such as veterinarians strive to choose between all the trainers asking them for referrals, emphasizing your VSPDT status helps you to stand above the rest.

How

Given the importance of referral sources to your business, let's look at how to effectively market to them.

When you think about approaching referral sources, start by asking yourself two questions: "What do they need and how can I help?" Typically we approach referral sources with what we need in mind. We take in our business cards or brochures, hoping they'll display them and become a loyal cheerleader for us. But asking someone you don't know very well to do you a favor usually results in an awkward moment for everyone involved. Many a trainer finds the whole experience so aversive they leave in a cold sweat and never go back. (Or spend weeks psyching themselves up to go there in the first place!)

If this is you, here's some good news: There's a better way. It's far better to offer something to a referral source than to ask for help. They'll be more receptive and you won't dread it so much. So let's think about what they need.

Most referral sources need someone to refer problems to. Vets need to give be able to give behavior band-aids quickly. Vets and shelters may need someone to train their staff or volunteers how to handle fearful dogs. Groomers need ways to help their dog clients relax while being groomed. And all businesses need more business.

Your referral-based marketing projects should provide a way to solve these problems. Projects that do so allow you to show your expertise, which is a much better way to get vets and other referral sources to refer to you. The more they trust and respect you, the more often they'll send clients your way.

As you review the marketing projects listed in the next section of this Marketing Primer, look in particular at these: Folders (Adoption and Behavioral Wellness), Lectures, Letter of Recommendation, Staff Training, Vet Reports.

THE PUBLIC

Marketing to the general public of potential clients provides the widest exposure for your brand—and your connection to Victoria's. While not as targeted as referral marketing, this area of your marketing plan is about building brand awareness.

The key to effective public marketing is repetition. You can achieve this by choosing projects with a repetitive or cyclical nature (such as newsletters, for example), and by executing multiple projects. We are bombarded by thousands of marketing messages as we go about our days; the only way to make yours stick is to ensure that people encounter it repeatedly. The more marketing you do, the more likely a potential client is to encounter your business at the moment she needs you.

Repetition also ensures future business. This is an aspect of marketing rarely understood—that today's marketing is largely about getting tomorrow's clients. Dog training is a service any given dog guardian is likely to only need at very finite moments. This means that the vast majority of your marketing is encountered when your services aren't needed. But if you do enough marketing to create long-term brand awareness and loyalty, that won't matter. Because when a dog guardian who has been reading your

newsletter over the last months—or even years—finally needs a trainer, he'll know exactly who to call. He won't have to depend on a referral source or a web search—he'll know to go straight to you.

For this to work, repetition must be backed by consistency. Brand awareness is lost quickly, so avoid gaps in your marketing. It may be tempting to lay off marketing when business is strong, but if today's marketing means tomorrow's clients, doing so will mean a dip in business tomorrow, so avoid that temptation.

How

Just as with referral marketing, your public efforts should be directed by asking yourself what dog guardians need and how you can help. All dog guardians can benefit from good advice, and many need a problem solved or to feel some relief from guilt or anxiety about their dog's behavior or needs. And we all enjoy a bit of dog-related entertainment. This is where community marketing comes in. Choose projects for the public that allow you to show off your expertise and build brand loyalty by sharing some good advice. When they need a problem solved they'll know who to reach out to. And don't be shy about simply entertaining people as well. We all enjoy a cute puppy picture, funny dog story, or a dog video that makes us gasp and ask, "How did they train that??" Marketing is about engagement. Offering a mix of useful tips and enjoyable material keeps potential clients interested in your brand. Many of the marketing projects in the next section incorporate this concept, and it's a large part of social media marketing strategy as well.

As you review the marketing projects in the following section of your Marketing Primer, pay particular attention to these: Articles, Events, Folders, Lectures, Newsletter, and Tip Sheets.

CURRENT AND PAST CLIENTS

Why

It's not enough to market to gain potential clients. It's imperative to also take care of the ones you have. Retention marketing is the area that dog trainers neglect most. It's easy to get so focused on finding new clients that we forget to talk with the ones we already have.

But according to research from the Bain & Co. Research for The Institute of Customer Service, retaining just 5% more of your clients could mean anywhere from a 25 to 125% boost in your revenue. Or to look at it another way, retaining as little as 2% more of your clients has the same effect as cutting your costs by 10%. Whichever way you look at it, that's a nice pay raise.

Retention is a key ingredient to longevity. Everyone longs for that magical and elusive goal we call word-of-mouth. This is how to achieve it. Satisfied clients spread the word to 4 or 5 other people and they do a better job of selling your services than you ever could. So keeping them means the opportunity to gain new clients as well. And it just makes sense. You spend so much time and energy getting clients, why not spend a bit more to increase your return on that investment?

The trick is to keep in front of clients once you are no longer actively working with them. They may have had a wonderful experience with you, but like the rest of us they are busy and their minds are full. They are much more likely to think to refer to you—or to come back for a tune-up or next class—if you've recently reminded them you're there. So just like in marketing to the public realm, repetition is key.

How

So what can we do for clients to keep them coming back and to encourage them to share their positive experience with friends and family? They need all the same things they did back when they were in the Public category. So choose marketing projects that keep the good advice coming, that offer solutions to problems (or remind people that you can help). Also keep past clients informed of new opportunities—new services or additional classes, for example. And don't forget to entertain them—this is what will keep them looking at what you send their way.

As you make your way through the specific marketing projects in the next section, keep Newsletters in particular mind.

Also think about your clients as you read about social media in the Online Marketing section, as social media for dog professionals is primarily in the beginning about maintaining brand loyalty among those that already know you.

MARKETING PROJECTS

Keep the basic marketing concepts from the previous section in mind as you consider this collection of potential marketing projects. Listed here in alphabetical order you'll find a wide range of marketing projects. You'll notice that some are advertising-based and some are community marketing approaches. And there are projects here focused on all three of your marketing audiences—referral sources, the public pool of potential new clients, and your current and past clients. Some even do double-duty, serving as both referral and public projects, for example.

As you pick and choose, remember:

1. Choose projects for each of your three marketing audiences (referral sources, the public, or current and past clients).
2. Include as many community-based projects as possible to support your advertising efforts.
3. Choose projects you feel most comfortable tackling. Choosing projects that are a good match for your skills will increase their success—and your likelihood of completing them.

Some projects have opportunities for short cuts—either provided by Victoria as part of your VSPDT membership, or available through dog*tec as part of our suite of marketing and business tools. We've noted these short cuts where they exist.

ADS—PRINT, RADIO, TV

Print Ads

You'll have the best return on investment by choosing smaller local papers to advertise in. Look for papers serving a particular neighborhood you wish to target, or that are geared toward a sub-culture group. For example, you might place an ad in a local magazine about green living, or one that targets the gay and lesbian community or church goers or expectant and new parents. The idea is to get around our proclivity to ignore ads. When we read publications specific to a particular interest or aspect of who we are, we're more likely to choose deliberately to look at advertisements. If I'm interested in green living, I want to know which businesses support my same ideals. If I'm reading a magazine written for new parents and I am one, I might look at ads to find services and products to make my life with a baby a little easier.

Use your VSPDT affiliation prominently in any print advertising you do. Include the Positively logo and a VSPDT-supplied image of Victoria. Victoria's image holds particularly strong recognition value, so include this wherever possible. And when you get the chance, take a picture with Victoria to use in your marketing. If you have your own logo and business name, use them in conjunction with the VSPDT logo and Victoria's image so that the Positively brand helps to build your own. Finally, don't be shy about telling people what it means to be a VSPDT—make a point of declaring your hand-picked status.

If you are selecting papers specific to a neighborhood or sub-culture or interest, include something in your ad that speaks to that issue if at all possible. For example, mention your green facility in the local green living newspaper, or that you've served XYZ neighborhood dogs for over 10 years.

Television

In some markets, it's possible to buy advertising time from a local cable TV provider. Work with the advertising department of the provider to ensure that your ad is running on an appropriate channel at an optimal time. Check the Positively web site to find out when *It's Me or the Dog* is airing in your area and inquire about buying ad space at that time. Take advantage of Victoria's willingness to assist in the creation of your ad by providing you with a personalized video clip recommending your services to your community which you can use in your ad. Contact VSPDT for information on how to obtain such a clip.

Radio

Choose radio stations that cater to your core client base demographic to achieve a greater return on your investment. Note that the majority of decisions about household pets are made by the females in the household, and therefore you should choose radio stations that have high female listening audiences (religious stations, talk radio, etc). You can find out the demographics of each station's listening audience by contacting their sales department. Upon request, Victoria can provide a personalized audio clip recommending your services to your local community. Contact VSPDT for information on how to obtain such a clip.

ARTICLE / COLUMN

Nothing says "local expert" like your name in print. Writing a regular training tips or ask the trainer column gets you in front of potential clients repeatedly over time, creating brand recognition and loyalty. When I find myself in need of a dog trainer, why would I choose anyone other than the trainer whose local column I read each month?

Choose a smaller local paper; the editors will be easier to approach and they'll likely be hungry for free content. Be sure to keep your content related to dog training and behavior so that readers are treated to your knowledge and come to understand what it is you do for people.

Include your business name, website and email addresses, and that you have been hand-chosen as a Victoria Stilwell Positively partner trainer in the short author blurb that follows each of your articles.

BUSINESS CARDS/ FLIERS/ BROCHURES

There was a time when print materials like business cards and brochures constituted the typical dog trainer's marketing plan. Alas, these days competition is much heavier and requires a more comprehensive approach to marketing. Still, cards and brochures have a role to play, particularly for VSPDT members, as they provide an easy way to visually display your association with Victoria and the Positively brand. The VSPDT Private Print Shop gives you an easy way to take advantage.

PRIVATE PRINT SHOP (PPS)

In partnership with PrintingForLess.com, VSPDT has created a Private Print Shop (PPS) which is available exclusively to VSPDT members. The creation of the PPS ensures that all VSPDT members have access to the latest printed product designs and all printed marketing materials in one place at reduced rates. Using the PPS ensures continuity and consistent quality throughout the VSPDT network and reduces the burden on you to come up with your own designs and find and obtain quotes from high quality printing companies.

You can personalize all PPS products, including adding your own logo to the VSPDT logo, personalized text and even (if you like) images of yourself.

Refer to the Member Guidebook for details on accessing and using the Private Print Shop.

DEVELOPING YOUR OWN MATERIALS

Should you wish to design your own print materials, be sure to include the Positively brand and an image of Victoria, if possible. Included in your VSPDT Welcome Package you will find a CD-ROM with all applicable VSPDT brand materials. This disk includes logos, fonts, color palettes and press photos of Victoria (in various resolutions, some of which are 'clipped' with the background already removed) which can be used to develop your own marketing materials. A digital package including all of the same files on the CD-ROM is available to download as well. It can be found at <ftp://transfer.positively.com>. The username for access to the folders on the site is **positive1**. Please contact VSPDT at (404) 946-8081 or vspdt@positively.com to obtain the password. Click the link for "VSPDT Logos".

Please note that all member-created materials using Victoria's name and/or likeness or the VSPDT name or logo must be approved by VSPDT in advance. Digital proofs or photos should be sent to vspdt@positively.com for approval.

EVENTS

Event marketing can include participating in others' events or creating your own.

Keep an eye on local calendars to watch for local festivals, dog shows, and other events. To find events early enough to be assured of participation, contact your Chamber of Commerce and other local business organizations. Consider renting a stall, sponsoring an event, donating your time and expertise as a prize, or helping to organize the event. If you participate at the event itself, look for ways to give people an interactive experience with your company and expertise. Brochures on a table don't generally go far. Try staging demos, short drop-in classes, contests, etc. If your community does not have many such events, consider organizing a dog-related event of your own. The dog-owning population loves the opportunity to bring their dogs out in public, and these events are a great way to raise your business' profile within the community.

You can also create smaller opportunities to gain a public audience. For example, stage public demos with some of your students or clients. Have everyone wear logo clothing, and bring along an assistant who can pass out information to people who stop to watch your clients and their dogs go through their paces.

VICTORIA'S PUBLIC APPEARANCES

Occasionally, Victoria performs in live touring events promoting VSP, VSPDT, *It's Me or the Dog* and positive reinforcement methods. In the event that a live tour event is scheduled in your market, VSPDT will contact you in advance and offer you the opportunity of appearing on stage with Victoria in order to promote your business on a larger scale to your local community. If you're aware of a local event such as a pet expo in your area, be sure to forward VSPDT's contact information to the event organizers so they can explore whether they are able to host Victoria at the event. If so, she'll be able to help promote you and your business in person to a target-rich audience.

FOLDERS—ADOPTION OR BEHAVIORAL WELLNESS

Adoption or Behavioral Wellness Folders are a great project for building rapport with and referrals from vet clinics, shelters, rescue organizations, breeders, and pet supply stores. Providing sharp-looking, branded folders with useful information to adoption sources and the businesses new dog parents turn to first (vets and pet supply stores) gives these referral sources a value-added product to offer each new client, as well as existing clients struggling with training or behavior issues.

And these folders are a serious endorsement from the referral source. Much more powerful than a business card, the folders have substantive content and aren't likely to be tossed out or misplaced, as happens with so many cards and brochures. When a frustrated dog guardian decides six months down the road that they need assistance, they are going to go looking for the folder their vet or the shelter handed them when they took Fido home.

Folders should be branded, as should all the materials inside. Include information about you and your business, and then a collection of useful handouts to help new puppy and dog owners get a good start with their new charge. If you specialize in behavior issues, also consider creating a behavior-focused folder that veterinarians can hand to clients who have come in complaining of behavioral problems.

Include the Positively logo on all materials, in addition to your own if you have one. Emphasize your VSPDT status on the bio sheet.

If you're looking for a shortcut, the dog*tec Referral Marketing Toolkit includes this project already designed; all you have to do is add the VSPDT logo and your own.

LECTURES

Public talks are a great way to expose people to your expertise. They can also be a great networking opportunity with referral sources. For example, you can use your talks to raise money for a local shelter or rescue group, bring potential new clientele into a dog daycare whose space you use for the talks, or drive traffic to a local pet supply store by recommending particular products and where to obtain them. In return, ask anyone you aim to benefit by your talk to help promote it.

Choose topics of general interest to dog lovers (body language and how to read it, for example), and/or topics specific to a niche (getting ready for baby, dog-dog aggression, etc.).

Whenever possible promote a lecture series rather than a single talk, as repetition increases the effectiveness of any marketing project. Emphasize your affiliation to VSPDT and the Positively brand in all marketing done to promote the lecture.

FREE MEMBERSHIP IN DOGGONE SAFE

VSPDT has partnered with Doggone Safe, a non-profit organization whose mission is promote education initiatives for the purpose of dog bite prevention and increased child safety around dogs, and is offering a year's free membership to VSPDT members. As a member you receive a ready-made talk on child and dog safety to give to your community.

To take advantage of this free membership, visit http://doggonesafe.com/member_application and select 'Individual Full Member'. After entering your personal information, enter the discount code POSITIVELY at the bottom of the page to receive a 100% discount from the first year's annual fee. Subsequent years can be renewed at the regular rate.

VICTORIA'S LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

Intro Letters provide a brief first contact, quickly imparting the most pertinent information about you and your business. They help to prepare the way for larger projects by making potential referral sources aware of you and thus more receptive to your next advances.

Your VSDPT Welcome Package includes a personalized letter of introduction from Victoria to provide to local business professionals in order to introduce your public association with Victoria and her brand. This endorsement can be very powerful, as Victoria's relationship with the major veterinary bodies is very strong and can be harnessed to open more doors for you.

In all communications with veterinarians and other businesses, be clear that you practice positive reinforcement training methods and offer to discuss why you feel this is an important distinction.

Your letter of introduction is best used in conjunction with other community marketing projects. You can, for example, deliver the letter in person with baked goods or dog treats and free copies of your Behavioral Wellness or Adoption Folders, Newsletter (see below), or Tip Sheets (see below).

LOGO CLOTHING

Wearing logo clothing while you work is free advertising. Logo clothing is also good community marketing. Remember that community marketing seeks to give people some sort of experience with your expertise and professionalism. Watching you work with a dog or work with clients certainly does that.

As a VSPDT member, you have exclusive access to purchase VSPDT-branded apparel for your business use. To order VSPDT polo shirts and/or fleeces, visit the VSPDT apparel store via Lands End at <http://ces.landsend.com/vspdt>. Use the password 'puppi3s' to access the store. VSPDT apparel is not available for resale to the public, but general Victoria Stilwell Positively branded material is available at wholesale prices to resell to the general public and VSPDT clients. You can also upload your own logo to Lands End and use both logos side by side on items in the online store. Go to <http://ocs.landsend.com> and click 'Submit Artwork.' Once you've added your logo to the Lands End site, let VSPDT know and they'll notify Lands End that you're eligible to combine the logos on individual items.

As a VSPDT member, you also have exclusive access to purchase personalized VSPDT name badges (magnetic or pin) for use in your everyday work and to wear at promotional events and conferences. For instructions on how to order your VSPDT name badge, visit <http://vspdtmembers.positively.com/resources>.

NEWSLETTER

Printed newsletters are a very powerful tool for building brand recognition and loyalty. A quarterly newsletter full of useful tips and fun dog-related information distributed in dog businesses and other shops throughout your service area is a great way to build your reputation as the go-to trainer in your community. If a potential client has been reading your newsletter, why would they choose anyone else when they find themselves in need of a trainer?

Email newsletters become increasingly valuable as you build your business, providing a way to keep in touch with and reinforce brand loyalty among current and past clients. Keeping in regular contact increases repeat business and referrals to friends and family.

If you'd like the benefits of a newsletter without having to write one, the dog*tec Newsletter Service provides a fully written, branded newsletter ready for printing and distribution. VSPDT members can choose between a Positively-branded design or one that incorporates their own brand with the VSPDT logo.

CUSTOMIZED VSPDT ONLINE NEWSLETTER TEMPLATE

To make your newsletter work harder for you, also email it to all current and past clients as a retention marketing project. Upon request and for an additional fee from JLoop, VSPDT members can be provided with a customized online client newsletter template to use in delivering their newsletter content. Visit www.mailman.jloop.com for more info and then contact VSPDT to discuss how to get started with this feature. dog*tec Newsletter Service content can be used in conjunction with your email newsletter template.

Get more newsletter tips in the Newsletter Tips Appendix on page # 30.

PRESS RELEASE

VSPDT provides you with an editable press release. Use your press release to declare your VSPDT relationship to local newspapers, radio stations, and TV stations. Also issue a press release anytime you have some newsworthy to share. For example, the launch of an unusual service (Reactive Rover class, Nosework, day training, etc.) or an upcoming event such as a lecture series.

Issuing press releases can help identify you to local newspaper, radio, and TV reporters as a local expert they can turn to for interviews and quotes when dog-related news breaks.

PROMOTIONAL ITEMS

You may choose to use branded promotional items as a way to thank clients and referral sources for their referrals, and also as part of your services for clients. VSPDT members can also purchase Victoria Stilwell Positively-branded materials (including exclusive “I’ve been trained... Positively” bandannas) and books at wholesale for the purpose of reselling to clients and the general public.

For a full list of available products and pricing options as well as instructions on how to order Victoria’s books at discounted wholesale prices, visit <http://vspdtmembers.positively.com/resources>.

Canine Noise Phobia Series products may also be available for wholesale purchase – contact the VSPDT office for more details and availability.

Any additional member-generated VSPDT-branded promotional items (clickers, notepads, etc.) must be approved by VSPDT.

STAFF TRAINING

Once you’ve begun to establish a relationship with a referral source, build on that budding relationship by offering to give short training presentations during staff meetings on topics of interest and usefulness to each business. For example, techs and office personnel at a vet clinic or staff at a daycare might benefit from a talk on reading body language and recognizing early warning signals. Shelter staff could no doubt use the insights about how dogs learn. And a primer on puzzle toys and their uses, or head halters and how to fit them, would be perfect for pet supply store staff.

Sharing a presentation allows everyone to become more closely acquainted with you and your knowledge, and thus more likely to remember to hand out your marketing materials and actively refer people your way.

For a shortcut, the dog*tec Referral Marketing Toolkit includes two Power Point talks with speaking notes, ready to brand with the Positively logo and your own.

TIP SHEETS

Tip sheets are the Ferrari of fliers. Instead of a simple flier announcing your service, show off what you know and help educate dog guardians in the process. Create a series of tip sheets on various cues (sit, stay, come when called, etc.), training and behavior topics (how dogs learn, debunking dominance, etc.), and problem solving and prevention (house training, crate training, socialization, etc.). Brand your tip sheets with the Positively logo and your own, and include your website address. Offer a collection of these with a small literature rack to local vet offices, pet supply stores, and shelters. Rotate the topics every couple of months so there’s always something fresh for dog lovers to pick up.

For a quick start to this project, the dog*tec Homework CD has over 50 R+ tip sheets ready for your logo, and VSPDT members have the option of purchasing the Homework CD at a significant discount, subsidized by VSPDT. Your CD will come with the Positively logo already placed on all the handouts—you just add yours to it if you have one.

VET REPORTS

For this project, ask your clients' permission first, then send a copy of your written report and recommendations to each client's veterinarian as a professional courtesy. If they are already referring to you, they have all the more reason to continue, and this has proven to be a terrific project for particularly reticent vets. If you don't yet have a relationship with a particular vet, he or she will gain familiarity with your expertise and professionalism through these reports, making it easier for you to bring your marketing materials in to the office. You may even find that in some cases veterinarians will contact you for referral materials once they see the kind of work you do.

The first time you send a report, pair it with your Letter of Recommendation from Victoria.

Try faxing your reports, as most vet offices still use the fax machine as a dominant mode of communication.

WORD OF MOUTH

The emphasis on advertising and marketing notwithstanding, positive word of mouth buzz and personal recommendations by satisfied past clients matter. Be sure to provide each client with access to the online VSPDT Client Survey or a VSPDT Client Feedback Form at your last session with them. This provides the client with an outlet through which to express their gratitude, appreciation and/or criticism of your services. Not only will you then be able to find out your strengths and weaknesses as a trainer, you will also be building up a cache of valuable content that can be used in your marketing efforts through other outlets.

Make sure to gently remind your clients to recommend you to their friends and neighbors, and be sure that they know how to find your business on the web so that they can easily share it with others.

ONLINE MARKETING

This section of your Marketing Primer addresses use of online advertising, referral websites, and social media, and your most important marketing tool—your website.

Keep in mind that without community marketing any online work you do will see limited results. A website without on-the-ground efforts to drive traffic its way is only half the engine it should be. And even the top social media marketing gurus will tell you that it's a mistake to rely on online marketing alone—it is most powerful as an adjunct to your community marketing efforts.

With that in mind, however, online marketing done well is well worth doing. The following pages contain a number of tips for doing just that.

ONLINE ADVERTISING

ADWORDS

No doubt you know and use the major search engines such as Google, Bing, and Yahoo. How often do you check the second and third page of the search results? Not a lot, right? Which is why it is so important to position your website to rank high on search engines. One way to do that is through search engine marketing.

Google and the other major search engines all have programs that will highlight your web site when someone types in a word or phrase that you have registered with the search engine. Buying such “ad-words” or “keywords” is relatively easy to do on your own. However, you need to know what potential clients might type into a search engine to find your type of dog business. Search engine marketing programs will highlight your site for a potential client who searches using words or a phrase you choose, i.e. “dog trainer (your town).” You then pay a fee (Pay-per-click) to the search engine every time a customer clicks directly on your site from the highlighted search engine listing.

Search ads are rarely necessary for dog pros who operate in a small market with few competitors—an informative website should do well on most search engines in this case. In fact, as these ads have grown more common consumers are finding them easier to ignore, and we’re finding that more and more trainers are not having as much success with them.

They can, however, be a good idea in large and highly competitive markets. Let’s take the case of dog walkers located in New York City. If someone types “dog walkers new york city” on Google, page after page of results are shown, making it hard for your site to be found. But a closer look reveals that the search engine produces three types of results. Sponsored results, at the very top of the page and in the right-hand margin, are generated through AdWords. Google Local results, the seven businesses listed next to a map, are also keyword related and are generated from Google’s free business directory, called Google Local or Google Maps. Finally, there are the “natural” search results. To be among the first few pages of those, your website has to be well optimized for search engines.

As for the sponsored Google AdWords, mathematical algorithms determine which ads are displayed when the right keywords are typed in, but given the sheer volume of search activity on Google, and the fact that AdWords also appear on hundreds of thousands of partner websites from Ask.com to The New York Times, chances of being displayed are fair. Plus, Google’s contextual targeting means your ad is more likely to show up next to articles or news items about dogs. While you pay for click-throughs from sponsored ads, you can limit the amounts you will be charged over certain time periods. And it is easy to add or remove keywords.

However, click-throughs are only valuable if they translate into more business. What is more, the way Google makes money on this service is by presenting business owners with a mile-long list of individually priced keywords (called “keyword chains”) all of which seem equally important. They are not—usually a select few will do. If you try out AdWords, spend some time learning the intricacies of keyword advertising before you jump in. Most importantly, monitor the results and your spending. We recommend limiting usage to relatively short marketing pushes, like just before launching a business or new service, during puppy season, etc. Otherwise the ongoing expense quickly balloons.

If you use online marketing efforts such as AdWords, direct your online advertising initiatives towards your Positively.com site – the association with Victoria will be further cemented in the minds of

prospective clients. There are several valuable tools that can be used to increase your business' online profile. One of the most valuable aspects of joining the Victoria Stilwell Positively Dog Training team is the exclusive right to host your business' online presence on the Positively.com platform.

BANNER ADS

Banner ads—the advertisements that appear across the top or along the side of other businesses' websites—are not usually effective for small, local dog trainers. However, as a VSPDT you may find they work better for you, as they tie your small, local brand into Victoria's national one. If you try banner ads choose their location wisely, looking for related local sites (such as a dog daycare), and feature your connection to Victoria and the Positively brand prominently.

REFERRAL SITES

There has been a steep rise over the last few years in the launch of directory and referral websites focused on helping people to find local dog pros. These websites feature built-in referral databases for people trying to find dog trainers in their area. Some are large, general, and exclusive directory sites you have to apply to. Others are referral sites focused on a particular kind of service, such as dog training or walking. Dog guardians land on these sites and then can search for a dog pro in their local area. It's like 1-800-DENTIST for the 21st century. Getting listed on most of these sites is free; a few come with low annual fees that are generally worthwhile. What's a \$50 marketing expense if it gains you even one dog training client?

Not everyone looking for something on the internet will do a specific, logical search that includes their geographic location. When potential clients simply tell Google to look for "dog training" there's a good chance they'll end up on one of these referral sites. If they do, they'll find you—if you're listed. And having large sites with lots of traffic linked to yours can also boost your website's search rankings, helping you to appear higher on the page of search results.

Here is a sampling of referral sites to take a look at:

Private national referral sites:

www.dogtrainersdirectory.com

www.wooftown.com

www.dogasaur.com

<http://www.dognewsdailyervicesdirectory.com>

Professional national referral sites:

www.apdt.com

www.iaabc.org

Local referral sites:

Similar to national referral sites, but focused on a particular city or area, these sites often come up at the top of local internet searches—so you should be sure to be on them. Some are run by local dog enthusiasts, but more often it's a group of dog pros who have come together informally for marketing support, or as a formal professional organization. You might have a regional group of dog trainers, for example. And if you don't, consider teaming with local colleagues to start one.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media can be a powerful way to stay in touch with your clients. It allows you to keep them up-to-date on new classes and services you are offering and lets you share valuable information about dogs and training that they might share with others. Just remember your social media efforts should be focused on what your audience needs and what you can give them. That means while a post about a new class once in a while is fine, the majority of what you do on social media should be about providing information or entertainment. Links to training video tips or articles, fun dog pics, alerting your audience to doggie events in your area or running contests or giveaways should be the focus of your social media, not just what services you are offering. If people feel you are using social media to “sell” to them, they will un-follow, un-friend or just ignore you.

Social media can be an excellent complement to your existing marketing strategy, but it shouldn't replace on-the-ground community-based efforts. Newer dog trainers in particular, or those whose businesses have not yet caught on, will find better results from projects like newsletters, networking, lectures, and a well-designed business website. But if you already have some projects in place and are looking for ways to expand your marketing plan, social media may be a good next step. Just a word of caution: Social media can be very time consuming so you need to schedule the time you will spend on social media as well as scheduling time to plan it.

As the term implies, social media deals with human interaction. Think of it as a network, built on relationships, that takes time and attention to flourish. If you're completely turned off by the internet, or unable to set aside a few hours a week to invest in social media, other tasks will easily take priority, your online profiles will grow quiet, and your audience will move on.

As we address various social media platforms, think of your website as the home base around which all other activity revolves, where the most curious potential clients will go, seeking out information about your background and services.

BLOGGING

Blogs are an excellent tool for growing your brand by sharing your training expertise. Many domain hosts make blogging easy, featuring one-step installations of blogging software like WordPress, Tumblr, or Blogger – software that takes care of the programming for you; just write a quick post, then hit Publish. WordPress includes a sophisticated set of plug-ins, or tools, that can improve your SEO, tag your posts with relevant keywords, and keep track of your number of visitors. Blogs with frequent updates attract the most visitors, so consider budgeting a couple of hours a week to blogging. Let diversity work for you; include links to helpful articles by respected peers in your industry, photos of daycare staff members, seasonal deals, case studies, or success stories of dogs you've trained. Let your writing reflect your own speaking style; with so much free and forgettable advice available on the internet, a casual, personable writing voice can attract loyal readers and potential clients.

POSITIVELY EXPERT BLOG

VSPDT trainers are invited to guest blog on the Positively Expert Blog. This wonderful opportunity not only helps establish you as an expert in your field, it also creates a powerful link back to your Positively.com or business website, providing yet another way for potential clients to find you. For information about how to submit articles to the Positively Expert Blog, contact the VSPDT office.

FACEBOOK

Facebook is the current king of social media sites, with a network of hundreds of millions of users. Create a fan page for your business, and use it to share updates or information that others might find helpful or entertaining. Keep in mind the “social” of social media; unlike more traditional marketing methods, the businesses most successful at social media rely less on constant self-promotion, and concentrate on building relationships. The focus shifts to the consumer, and solving her problems. Provide the occasional free article on chew training, point out a fellow dog pro’s service, or answer a question about your facility hours or dog behavior.

GOOGLE +

Google’s answer to Facebook, Google + is growing fast. It’s hard to say for sure as this goes to print just where Google + will go, but if the company’s track record is any indication, it’s probably not a bad idea to jump on this bandwagon. All the same guidelines apply as they do to Facebook—be social and share useful and entertaining information.

TWITTER

Twitter is the social network for short attention spans, a running stream of tweets (posts) of 140 characters or less. Other users can choose to follow your tweets, which will show up on their stream. Social media is better at strengthening existing relationships than attracting new ones, and Twitter makes it easy to open dialogues, both public and private, with clients and other dog pros. Again, we suggest limiting self-promotion to about 25% of your overall posts, or you run the risk of getting tuned out. Answer a FAQ, tell a joke, post a quick free training tip, or solicit feedback for future public classes. Follow and comment on the tweets of peers in the dog professions, check up on current and former clients, and you’ll strengthen those connections most likely to give you the best word of mouth.

LINKEDIN

LinkedIn focuses on professional networking. Users create profiles that resemble employment resumes, and link to friends, co-workers, and employers, both current and past. Link to your trainer peers, the owner of your favorite daycare facility, or fellow VSPDT trainers. If you prefer to work with small dogs, establish ties with that trainer who’s got a soft spot for pit bulls, and send each other clients.

YOUTUBE

YouTube can be a terrific resource for introducing your business to potential clients. Google now gives more weight to videos than websites when returning search results, so videos are a critical search engine optimization tool, allowing you to come up high in search results even if your website itself does not. YouTube videos run the full spectrum of production values, and with the popularity of video editing software, you can throw together your own short video on your computer in a few hours. Share a training session from your puppy class, or a montage of your client dogs’ tricks. Never underestimate the appeal of cute dogs; videos that go viral (i.e. insanely popular, widely linked to and distributed by fans online) often feature animals. Create a profile with a link to your business site, and embed your videos on your blog or Facebook fan page. Also be sure to keyword your videos to help them be found when local dog guardians search for a trainer in your area or for information about a training topic your video covers. In addition to your own videos and channels, be sure to link to and feature Victoria’s series of training videos on the eHow Pets YouTube channel (<http://youtube.com/ehowpets>).

YELP, CITYSEARCH, KUDZU, ANGIE’S LIST, AND GOOGLE PLACES

Yelp, Citysearch, Kudzu, Angie’s List, and Google Places offer customer rankings and reviews of local businesses within categories like “Restaurants” or “Pets.” Because of its focus on the customer’s

experience, and because angry customers often feel more motivated to leave feedback than satisfied customers, stories of nasty grudge matches on Yelp have emerged. If you get negative feedback, avoid a tit-for-tat, and instead use it as an opportunity to turn the situation around. Offer a refund or discount, if appropriate. Own up to any mistake, reach out to the offended, and you might just get a loyal client (and a revised review) as thanks.

FOURSQUARE

Foursquare is a location-based social network, a web and mobile application that allows users to connect with friends and update their location. Users can check in at your facility, and can post their check-ins on their Twitter or Facebook accounts, exposing your business name (and implying a personal recommendation) to their network of friends. Be sure to reinforce those clients who check-in at your business.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGY

BE A BUSINESS, IT IS ALLOWED

Social media gurus are quick to point out that businesses hoping to use social media for marketing must learn that it's all about conversation. Personal connection. Collaborative opportunity. True, nobody signs up for Twitter or creates a Facebook page hoping to be sold to. But just as with Community Marketing, which showcases your expertise and services through non-intrusive, value-adding projects like newsletters, lectures, and articles in local papers, a be-of-use approach allows businesses to interact with individuals through social media well beyond small talk.

Two-way communication has always been an important part of being a good service provider, but so has the ability to direct the conversation.

FOCUS ON YOUR DESIRED AUDIENCE

Local dog owners are presumably at the top of the list. But maybe so are prominent writers and teachers in the industry, or local veterinarians and other referral sources, if networking and PR is high on your list of social media marketing goals.

ACT ACCORDINGLY

Much of the prevailing wisdom about how to present yourself and communicate on social media platforms is irrelevant to dog professionals. You are not a big, scary corporation whose blog posts need surgery to sound human rather than spewed out by a PR machine. You are not a reporter for CNN who can easily use her personal name on Twitter because everybody recognizes it.

As a local dog care service provider, professionalism matters as much as warmth, so a friendly but not overly casual tone is best. And more people will have a chance of finding you among the millions of accounts if your Twitter username is your business name, not your own name (unless of course your business name *is* your own name).

Keep your goals and desired audience in mind at all times: Everything you do and say online reflects on your brand.

HOOK WITH CONTENT

The content you choose to share (tweets, blog posts, status updates) is your targeting mechanism, your hook for attracting the right friends, followers, or blog subscribers. Again, usefulness is the litmus test.

BE BRUTAL ABOUT TIME MANAGEMENT

This cannot be stressed enough, especially if you are prone to aimless Web surfing in the first place. Social media provide infinite opportunities for time wasting.

USE YOUR VSPDT CONNECTION

Remember to link all social networking to your VSPDT website, and to use your association liberally. Prominently display the VSPDT logo along with your own in your social media efforts. Use Victoria's own social media content in your own by including links to Victoria's blog posts and re-tweeting her Twitter tweets. This will broadcast your connection to her and also cut down on the amount of original content you have to produce yourself. Post reminders about upcoming *It's Me Or The Dog* episodes on your Facebook and Google + pages, and on your Twitter stream. And then get on these same outlets and post during the episode. Follow up the next day with a longer commentary on the episode, mixing in your own expertise and success stories.

WEBSITE

The internet is now the number one way for pet owners to find dog pros. Internet users span every age and income level and the majority (81%) say that finding a service provider starts online. Referrals, as noted earlier, are a key factor in marketing and finding clients, but even with a verbal recommendation from a friend or veterinarian, people go online to learn more before deciding to call or email.

PERSONALIZED POSITIVELY.COM SITE

Your public association with Victoria and her VSPDT brand will have maximum impact by taking advantage of the unique opportunity to include your business as a part of the Positively.com online platform. As a full member of the VSPDT team, you are entitled to free hosting of a personalized website (“Subsite”) for your business on the Positively.com platform. Templates for each VSPDT member’s subsite have been expertly designed expressly to heighten the user’s awareness of the close nature of the relationship between the VSPDT member and Victoria, as both the parent site and the VSPDT subsites use the same general design principles and techniques.

Prior to the launch of your subsite, you will be given the necessary tools to be able to easily edit and maintain your site, including the ability to add and remove pages, create submission forms, add images and text, alter navigation, add and remove web links, and much more. The subsites have been designed so that you can easily and quickly edit the look and feel of your site, all while utilizing the built-in consistency of pre-designed page templates of the Positively.com platform.

We recommend creating a presence on the Positively.com site regardless of whether you have your own website. If you’re just getting your business started and aren’t ready to commit the funds to a brand new site of your own, your Positively site gives you an automatic web presence. And if you already have your own website, adding a Positively.com landing page—a quick summary of your services with a link to your own site—will help people find your site that much more easily.

USE YOUR VSPDT AFFILIATION TO BOOST YOUR OWN SITE

If you use a branded site of your own, link to the VSPDT site to help increase traffic to your own. Not only does the link from Positively.com help your Search Engine Optimization, it’s a terrific way for people to find you. And when they do, they’ll be primed to choose you based on your affiliation with Victoria.

When people find your site independently use these tips to maximize the effect of your VSPDT affiliation to help make the sale: Prominently display the Positively logo and ideally an image of Victoria—preferably alongside you. Include language about your affiliation with Victoria and what that entails. Call attention to this information by placing it in a pullout box or offsetting it with a soft background color. Use a header such as “Why Choose A Victoria Stilwell Trainer,” and then include your answers in short, easily-scanned bullet points (including that Victoria herself oversees the selection of all VSPDT trainers, that you share similar levels of training experience and knowledge with Victoria, and that you share her commitment to scientifically sound, positive training).

Don’t be shy about pointing out your affiliation with Victoria in multiple locations, including your home, private training, and about pages. You can also create a top navigation link on your site to a new page called ‘Victoria Stilwell’ where you discuss in more detail your affiliation with her and membership in VSPDT.

A WORD OF CAUTION: AVOID DIY

Never has it been more important to have a professional brand than today. We've seen an explosion in the dog training industry, which means most trainers are feeling the press of increased competition. Potential clients looking for a trainer in your area most likely have many choices. Your VSPDT status gives you an edge, but you can easily undermine that edge with a homemade logo and website. Your website is your most important marketing and sales tool and every penny spent on professional logo design, professionally written copy that focuses your marketing message and uses proper keywording and layout, a professionally designed website incorporating all the best practices regarding design, coding, and usability, and professional search engine optimization done by an expert in that esoteric field is money well spent. Your chances of growing a successful business are hampered by cutting corners here.

See the Member Guidebook for details on setting up your Positively.com site.

MARKETING MATERIALS

NO TIME FOR DIY

The note of caution about avoiding creating your own logo and website goes for your print materials, too. Though there are a plethora of software products and companies touting inexpensive templates for business cards, brochures, and other materials, there is no comparison to professionally branded materials. It's imperative to put your best foot forward in front of referral sources and potential clients. Don't allow homemade materials to undermine your status as an experienced professional dog trainer. You may save a bit up front, but it will cost you in slower business growth.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF PROFESSIONAL VSPDT MATERIALS

Your VSPDT membership allows you access to a range of professionally designed Positively branded print materials that you can add your business name and logo to (if you have one). Take advantage of these materials as you build your business; they'll help save design costs and broadcast your affiliation with Victoria.

See the Member Guidebook or visit <http://vspdtmembers.positively.com/resources> for Private Print Shop details.

APPENDIX: NEWSLETTER TIPS

WHY USE A NEWSLETTER?

Business and marketing experts everywhere tout the benefits of putting out a newsletter. A newsletter keeps you in touch with existing clients, markets you to prospects, strengthens your brand and perceived professionalism, and works to establish you as an expert in your field. Plus, a newsletter is dynamic and evolving, not static like a brochure, and is read happily by anyone interested in the newsletter's overall subject matter—upsides few marketing materials can claim.

WRITING YOUR NEWSLETTER

Strong newsletters give the reader a window into your company. In other words, readers can imagine their dog at your daycare or what it would be like to take a class with you by the tone you use and the subjects you choose to write about.

There is one important caveat, though. A newsletter only works if you observe the implicit newsletter rule. Which is, in essence, that the content cannot solely herald you, your business, and the great importance of your particular service to the well-being of dogs everywhere. Yes, those topics belong in your newsletter. Of course. But unless you also include articles of general interest you break the unwritten agreement with your reader—you're not putting out a newsletter so much as a brochure. Soon, people will treat your newsletter as they would any other advertising material: Maybe a glance, then the trash.

Your end of the deal is to entertain and inform, not just sell your services. A safe rule of thumb is 85% content (education and entertainment) and 15% content related to your business in some way.

EDUCATION & ENTERTAINMENT CONTENT (ROUGHLY 85%)

Fill your newsletter with:

- Advice or tips columns (about exercise, behavior, training, canine health, seasonal issues, etc)
- Breed profiles
- Interesting or fun facts about dogs,
- Articles on unusual dog sports or activities
- News about canine-related events or happenings in your area (a new dog park, for example, or a canine fun-run or a dog contingent in the local Fourth of July parade, etc.)
- Cool new dog product reviews
- Reviews of books or movies that feature dogs

The point is to provide useful information and to entertain. This is what will make someone pick up your next newsletter after reading the current one.

Look for marketing opportunities while you consider content. For example, did a new boutique pet supply store just open up? Perhaps they'd like to be written up in the local news section of your newsletter. And I bet they'll carry your newsletter from then on, too. Or maybe there's a dog-friendly café with outdoor seating. Think about writing up a review, perhaps including a few training tips on a successful café meal with your dog. Again, I'm sure they'll be happy to keep your newsletter around for their patrons to enjoy.

BUSINESS CONTENT (ROUGHLY 15%)

To highlight your business and services using your newsletter, think Show instead of Tell. The point of a newsletter is to create brand loyalty by giving people a sense of you and your business that a brochure simply cannot. So provide some windows in to what makes you—your expertise, your professionalism, and the care you take with clients and dogs, the results you offer. You can do this through client profiles, training success stories, “day in the life” features (this is particularly suited to board & train), highlighting a new service, or sharing exciting business announcements.

In addition to this show approach, do also tell your readers about your services. The back page is a good spot to list your services and share your marketing message. And if you offer training classes include the days and times and start dates. That information helps people to make decisions and act on their interest.

GREAT PLACES TO PUT YOUR NEWSLETTER:

Put your newsletter in all the obvious dog places that aren’t in direct competition with you: dog daycares, boarding facilities, grooming shops, pet supply stores, veterinary offices, shelters, etc. But also remember that dog owners go places without their dogs, too. In fact, it’s sometimes easier to get their attention when their dogs aren’t with them.

Think outside the box: Where do doggie people hang out, what types of services do they use, what community partners might be a good match for your business? For example, cafes, hair salons, dentist offices, real estate offices (be the first one to get a newcomer’s attention!), etc. Have a friend who works at a nice high-end shop of some kind? Have her arrange to put your newsletter out there, too. In short, make it difficult for me to run errands without running into your newsletter.

E-NEWSLETTERS

Email marketing gets overshadowed by social media a lot these days, which is a great shame because email is a terrific marketing workhorse—free or low-cost, targeted, and much less time-intensive than social media. Here are four reasons you should put out an email newsletter:

1. Sell your services.
Being front-of-mind increases the likelihood of sales. Yes, existing clients know what you offer and can use your services whenever they need to. But so many things vie for time, attention, and resources these days it’s easy to be forgotten. Getting back on people’s radar can mean getting back on their priority list.
2. Get repeat business
Clients are a built-in audience for new services. Already loyal to you, they’re the most likely to try the latest thing you’ve added. Assuming they’ll find out through other channels is risky, and people are more likely to respond to a direct message from someone they know.
3. Build customer loyalty
People like to feel special. Checking in creates a sense of community and increases brand loyalty, which means you’re the one they come to when they need dog-related services.

4. Get referrals

The combination of brand loyalty and a gentle nudge that you are there makes it more likely clients will think to refer a fellow dog lover to you. If their experience with your company is buried in the past, referral opportunities are easily missed. Staying in your clients' consciousness keeps you on the tip of their tongues.

TIPS FOR YOUR EMAIL NEWSLETTER CONTENT

1. Give value

The same rules apply for email newsletter content that do for a printed version. If you don't offer education, information, and entertainment, people won't keep reading. If you talk too much about your business and services you're writing a glorified quarterly brochure, not a newsletter.

2. Sell

Though you want to avoid too much focus on your business, the purpose of the newsletter is to promote it. Don't make the mistake of not including information about your services—particularly their benefits. Make contact information—website, email, and phone—clearly visible. Don't hesitate to include a call to action. For example, "Fall classes are filling quickly—sign up now!" Or "The holidays are just around the corner—train now for a dog your company will envy."

3. Keep it short

If you email newsletters are too long, people will put off reading them, and that does you no good. Keep them to a length that someone could read in just a minute or two. One trick is to break your quarterly print newsletter material into chunks to spread it out for three monthly email newsletters. Email newsletters should be kept much shorter than printed ones, and this will keep you from having to generate extra material.

GETTING THE WORD OUT: DISTRIBUTING YOUR E-NEWSLETTER

First of all, have a prominently displayed sign-up field on your website. Also include a 'Forward to a Friend' button in the newsletter itself. Most e-mail marketing services (and you should always use a service) offer this option as standard.

Other than that, include a benefits-oriented call to sign up for your newsletter on all your materials, however mundane. Class sign-up sheets, handouts, brochures, postcards, rack cards, even business cards. Include it in your digital signature and on your stationary. If you write an article for a local paper, mention it in your bio blurb. If you are on Twitter, tweet about an interesting newsletter item and link to the sign-up box on your site. On Facebook, post the entire newsletter and include a sign-up box beside it (a free, downloadable application lets you do this). If a vet, groomer, or pet boutique refers to you, ask them to have a sign-up sheet on their counter or in their lobby. Include sign up information on your invoices. And don't forget to include it in your printed newsletters, too. In other words, never miss an opportunity.

As your list grows, engage your subscribers by including occasional content that encourages interaction. Contests, for example, where answering a trivia question gives the reader a chance to win a leash or a bag of dog treats. Other options are surveys (Google and SurveyMonkey offer free tools), a monthly 'cutest photo' client competition, or Ask The Expert-style items.

The majority of small business owners sign up with one of the big three services: Constant Contact

(300,000 customers), Vertical Response (70,000 customers), and iContact (50,000 customers). VSPDT also recommends Jloop's Mailman. All are good services. In the context of Web 2.0 businesses, being well established comes with both pros (dependability) and cons (less flexible and hungry for your business). But it's worth knowing that newcomers have made inroads into the market in the last few years with simpler, better dashboards (your control center) and snazzy features.

WHAT IF I'M NOT A WRITER, OR I DON'T HAVE TIME TO PRODUCE A NEWSLETTER?

A newsletter is too valuable a marketing tool to miss. And creating your own newsletter is the best way to achieve a truly personalized result. However, if writing is not your forte or you're just too strapped for time, the dog*tec Newsletter Service gives your business a newsletter without you having to write it. We design the newsletter to match your branding and then we do the writing for you each quarter, leaving room for a marketing announcement, space for your services, and a short article to tell a client success story, highlight a local dog business, or show off your expertise.

And as a VSPDT, you have the option of a fully Positively branded newsletter, or a newsletter that incorporates the Positively logo into your branded newsletter. See the Resources section for more information.