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Out in front – new technologies in remote working

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ABSTRACT: With the ever-galloping pace of advancing technology, remote working is a reality for the modern veterinary practice. From improving work/life balance and increasing client service, to reducing the costs associated with travel and office resources, the benefits of remote working are vast. This article explores the ways in which remote office software can improve the running of a large animal/equine practice.

When vets are on the move, the complications of maintaining client and practice records, as well as the logistics of managing and uniting a remote team, need careful consideration.

A centralised server system is invaluable to a modern veterinary practice. It provides the perfect solution for the secure storage of clinical files, user folders, calendars, company policies and all other necessary practice documentation. Moreover, with remote office software, this information is accessible whenever and wherever from a PC, Mac, laptop, tablet or mobile device, via an internet connection.

So, whether clarifying a company policy, checking the symptoms of a suspected poison case, or sharing test results with a

colleague, immediate and secure access to the practice system is available through a remote office solution.

Saddle up

Remote office software enables data from a static PC to be copied to a remote server or 'cloud' (Figure 1).

Access to this information is then available via the internet from any web-enabled device – whether static, such as a desktop PC at a branch practice, or mobile, such as smart phone or tablet – whilst out in the field.

Similarly, any alterations made to files copied to the remote server and accessed from any device are immediate. Therefore, when viewing the file from

Figure 1. With the right computer software, staff can work productively anywhere, anytime



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Figure 2. Instant access to practice e-mail ensures communications are both received and responded to promptly by members of the practice team in the field

another device or location, the same version exists; rather than having multiple versions saved to multiple devices.

Hit the ground running

With the right technology, the visiting vet can work productively anywhere, anytime. Some remote office solutions provide remote access to the practice management system (PMS). Armed with a mobile device or laptop, vets no longer have to obtain hard copy patient files before site visits; rather, records can be accessed on site via a web-based service. All you need is access to the internet and for the software to link your remote device to the PMS to be installed.

Indeed, when visiting clients, it is more productive for the vet to work with real data, rather than a print out made the last time they were at the practice. Furthermore, any additions or changes to the client record can be entered immediately into the system, rather than being noted down for entry once they return to the practice, which may cause unnecessary delay and an increased risk of error.

Straight from the horse's mouth

The central storage of all practice data – protocols, procedures, calendars, staff handbook, intranet – and its accessibility online by all members of staff, reduces the stress of communication between

internal and external or main practice and branch surgery staff. Whether you're at the main practice, branch surgery, on a site visit or at home, it is possible to access the central server and connect to your team.

In addition to files, remote office software facilitates access to practice e-mail accounts; thereby connecting colleagues on the road to one another and to the practice manager (Figure 2).

“The return on investment from remote office software is significant. Remote working reduces the expense of – and demands on – central office resources”

Indeed, remote staff need to have access to the practice from anywhere; but at the same time, they need to be accessible by the practice manager anywhere. Remote access to practice e-mail ensures that communications are both received and responded to promptly by those away from the practice.

Similarly, increased and open communications improve the service provided to clients. Patient information – such as referral letters and accompanying files – can be e-mailed directly from the client's record to the referral practice; therefore, cases that require immediate attention can be dealt with promptly.

Odds on favourite

The return on investment from remote office software is significant. Remote working reduces the expense of – and demands on – central office resources.

A mobile desktop service allows any member of the practice team to access their personal desktop at any terminal in the practice.

Known as ‘hot desking’, this is ideal for vets whose busy schedule whisks them in and out of the surgery; with access to e-mail, personal files and essential practice documentation on the move, there is little need them to be restricted by a static PC, occupying valuable practice space.

Similarly, a web-based remote office means that vets are no longer waylaid by chasing hard copies of documents – such as client letters or practice forms – nor by making unnecessary telephone calls or trips to and from the practice, all of which are both time consuming and costly.

The bit between the teeth

Security is of paramount importance when accessing confidential information over the internet. Therefore, remote working with an online office should only be done through a secure service. Each member of staff should be set up with his or her own username and login details, and a multi-layered security system should be available. This security infrastructure goes beyond simple password protection.

Similarly, automated back-ups and synchronisation of data with the main practice network safeguard against the loss of information.

Win hands down

Remote working offers the potential to increase practice efficiency and profitability. With client records and practice documentation at their fingertips, vets are able to work further afield and visit more sites in a working day.

Furthermore, remote office software equips vets with the necessary tools to provide outstanding client service and an increased level of patient care; indeed, clients will be encouraged by the fact that their practice is backing technologies of the future. 