If you would like to meet a successful veterinarian, attend a local meeting of the Heart Association, United Way or Junior Chamber of Commerce. Successful veterinarians know that giving of their time freely to charitable and civic associations is an excellent way to be of service to the community, and to help build the practice. In building a successful practice, it is not so much what your abilities are—it is assumed that you are fully competent as a practicing veterinarian. The important thing is getting known throughout your community, and getting known among your peer group within the profession. By volunteering your services and assisting civic and charitable organizations, people come to know you as a person, and then feel comfortable utilizing your services for their pets, or referring others to you.

PUBLICATIONS
Have you ever submitted a publication to a veterinarian journal in an effort to reach a wide audience and establish yourself as an expert in the field? There are several directories that list many of the veterinarian journals and publications in the country, including Bacon’s Publicity Checker, The Working Press of the Nation, and Writer’s Digest. Other sources include general veterinarians journals and well known association based journals such as the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Journal of the American Animal Association and Laboratory Animal Science published by the Argonne National Laboratory. It is extremely valuable to be published in a journal, and it can be as simple as documenting an important finding, a case history with which you may be familiar, or something of general interest to pet owners or the “pet health” reading public. If you do get published, be sure to order multiple copies, and distribute them to friends and associates.

NEWS RELEASES TO MEDIA
Do you know that you can submit a news release, that is, information about yourself, to newspapers and radio at no cost, and obtain free publicity? Some of the items that make good press releases include the hiring of new personnel, addition of new partners, reception of awards, relocation of offices, and expansion of facilities or services. Each of these items is sufficient information to make a good news release. Read your local newspaper this evening and you will probably spot two or three news releases about other doctors or veterinarians in your area. While the news release might concern someone in a different type of medical practice than yours, it will state the name of the doctor(s), the location, what they do and possibly a quote. All that is required to have that information published in the newspaper is to type a one or two page article and submit it to the city editor with details regarding who to contact if follow-up information is desired.

SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS
Do you know that many local organizations like the League of Women Voters, adult or continuing education centers, and other clubs, (e.g. the Lion’s Club, DAR, Rotary, to name a few) are actively seeking speakers? Why not volunteer your services and speak about some aspect of pet or community health that you can interestingly present. You can be as simple as documenting an important finding, a case history with which you may be familiar, or something of general interest to pet owners or the “pet health” reading public. If you do get published, be sure to order multiple copies, and distribute them to friends and associates.

* Mr. Davidson is a manager with the Energy, Management and Marketing Division of the IMR Corporation in Washington, D.C. IMR is a management consulting firm serving government agencies and all-sized businesses throughout the country.
might relate your experience as a veterinarian in regard to some particular topic of concern to the group. If you give a good presentation and are, in fact, able to influence the audience, you can literally expect at least a few new clients as a result of your presentation.

INFORMATION BOOKLETS

Publish and distribute an information booklet. A possible title could be: “How to Keep Your Pet Healthy” or “Better Pet Health Through Exercise,” or other literature of general interest to the public. In no way does this have to be a comprehensive dissertation. However, as owners become knowledgeable about pet health matters, they also realize that is is best to seek a competent professional. Hence, you can distribute a small information booklet that will be read and will prompt pet owners to call you. This has been done successfully by general practitioners and other specialists in medicine. Dentists have also distributed “facts on” booklets of this nature, as have optometrists, and the booklets generate business.

REFERRALS

Let us not forget that the referral system has been, and continues to be, one of the most effective ways of obtaining new clients. Do you know that everybody knows at least three pet owners that are probably in need of your services? Do you realize that even if every person you meet is not a potential client, they do know three other potential patients. Many times you do not even introduce yourself. Nothing promotes your practice as effectively as a referral from someone who knows you. As a matter of fact, this type of referral is worth its weight in gold and can not be purchased at any price.

Periodically review the file. Is it time for a check-up for certain pets? Did others want you to contact them to discuss a new diet plan for their pet? Are there new health or medical discoveries of which owners should be cognizant? It’s worth it to keep in touch.

RECIPIROCAL PROFESSIONAL REFERRALS

This is an important network that is usually well-established in successful practices. What is involved is establishing your credentials with other doctors, veterinarians and health service professionals. Begin to meet the other medical professionals in your community, and you will discover that a strong reciprocal professional referral system can be generated.

It is also extremely important to introduce yourself to pet shop owners. In fact, one’s entire practice could literally be built on the successful relationships cultivated with pet shop owners and managers.

YOUTH FIELD TRIPS

As a public service, and for the fun of it, you may wish to invite schools to allow classes to visit your office on field trips. You could explain the uses of the instruments and equipment in your office and what is required to become a veterinarian.

A by-product of your offer is that you build good community relations with participating schools, and you become known to students, teachers and school officials.

BE INTERESTED IN YOUR CLIENTS

While the techniques previously discussed will enable you to benefit from the exposure to a wide variety of people who may ultimately utilize your services, the best way to retain clients is to show interest in them and in their pets. Often, after seeing 8 to 20 owners and their pets each day for several months or years, it’s hard to remember that each owner is unique with their own set of likes, dislikes, pains, fears, joys, etc. And, of course, the pets themselves can display a wide range of behavior.

Show genuine interest in your clients, and they’ll like you. More than likely, the single greatest reason why an owner retains the same veterinarian over time, is that they like that veterinarian!

Not all of the promotion techniques outlined above may apply to you and your practice. The techniques that do apply should be used on a continuing basis. Develop the habit of releasing a news release at least quarterly. Also, attend civic and charitable association events. Seek referrals (albeit subtly) and continually meet with professionals in the larger community. These are the ways to build your practice day after day, year in and year out. If you follow these methods, in a short time you will realize that your appointment calendar will be full.