

## **How to Be High Tech and High Touch**

Peter Weinstein, DVM, MBA

[PeterWeinsteinDVMMBA@gmail.com](mailto:PeterWeinsteinDVMMBA@gmail.com)

As we have progressed from an Agrarian Age (18<sup>th</sup> century) to the Industrial Age (19<sup>th</sup> century) to the Information Age (20<sup>th</sup> century) into what is being called the Experience Age (present), we have seen a depersonalization of much that surrounds us. Chat, texts, chatbots, email, apps, and other tools have replaced the phone and face to face. In a healthcare profession like veterinary medicine, technology has been a great asset from a diagnostic and treatment standpoint; has been a great resource from a data management standpoint; and has provided adjuncts to transfer of information from the experience standpoint. As the practice of veterinary medicine and the business of veterinary medicine have become more and more dependent upon high tech, we cannot lose the significant role that high touch plays in the client and patient experience.

The growth of technology in the clinical realm from MRI, CT, digital radiology, to wearables that can track patient health, will continue to contribute to our skills as diagnosticians and influence our treatment plans. This high tech allows us to be more highly in touch with our patients' conditions.

On the other hand, the last few years has seen an explosion of applications, resources, and programs to help us more closely 'connect' with clients on the service side of the ledger. Integrating practice information management software with the cloud allows access 24/7/365 to monitor cases and be in touch with clients with the most up to date laboratory and imaging results and status of hospitalized patients. Applications have also given our clients access to their pet's medical records for travelling or in the case of an emergency.

Online applications and websites allow clients to make appointments, fill and refill prescriptions, order food for home delivery, choose how they want to be communicated with (email, text, snail mail, carrier pigeon). Similarly, practices can keep their clients informed about their pets with texts or emails that can educate, inform, remind, and encourage better, more thorough, and more personalized care. And all of this can be automated with just a few keystrokes.

One of the more rapidly growing technologies is that of tele-health. This is truly using technology to communicate with clients and their pets. It makes distance a thing of the past and removes some barriers to communication by bringing (in some cases) the hospital and the pet virtually face to face. As we continue to see virtual care grow and its utilization expand, it opens new worlds for patient care and client experience. On the other hand, will this high tech (virtual means not physically existing) tool widen the gap between doctors and their desire to be high touch or will it provide more and new opportunities?

Because of the infectious nature of COVID, practices integrated more and more technology into the client experience. With more than 50% of pet owners being

millennials, this change was not only needed but expected by this generation. Much of the technology made life easier—online appointments, refilling prescriptions, online bill pay, client and patient information collection and history collection—all saved time and had a positive effect on the client experience and were a great example of high tech closing the high touch gap by streamlining otherwise inefficient processes.

Research demonstrates that increasing client customization and convenience and CONTROL increases client visits and client satisfaction. And in many cases, technology comes with a cost savings. What we have seen is that the limitations of technology encourage people to seek face to face service when automated services don't provide the answer. Service can be emotional. Technology cannot. And when you think about it, people still prefer people to help them solve problems ESPECIALLY healthcare problems for themselves and their pets.

With machine learning, AI (artificial intelligence not artificial insemination) and virtual reality becoming an actual reality, the future of technology is limitless, and the Experience Age already looks a lot different than the Knowledge Age. In veterinary medicine, we must be using all the technologies available to us to create the client experience that our client's want and to help automate tasks that will free up our team to provide better client and patient care when being in person is the only option.

What does it take to be high tech and high touch?

- Caring – about the client and patient first

- Communication-- about your plans to add technological options

- Understanding—the needs and desires of different generations

- Clarity—about where high tech works and where it doesn't with your team and clients

- Relationships—can't be impacted by too much technology

- Trust—still comes from a talk and a touch.

To clients it is still how much you care about them that will make them comfortable with your plans to be high tech.

Recently, KIA released a commercial for its EV6 featuring a dog-a robodog ([https://youtu.be/HoNMz\\_OV\\_dI](https://youtu.be/HoNMz_OV_dI)). Watching the commercial, you felt empathy for the dog as it pined for its owner and then did everything it could to track its owner only to see its battery die in route. Of course, the commercial had a happy ending as its owner (veterinarian?) plugged in both his electric car and the robodog bringing them both back to life. As a veterinarian, I wanted to hug the robodog and the owner. We need to keep this mind as we progress in our practice lives, that empathy and compassion relate to feelings. And that no matter how much we want to integrate and use technology, you can hug a pet and pet parent, but you can't get the same oxytocin releasing hugging a microchip.