

Getting a Check Up on Veterinarians



*A closer look at the current world of
Veterinary Medicine*

Market Highlight Report, Winter 2011

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General Overview

Veterinarians diagnose and treat diseases and dysfunctions of animals. Specifically, they care for the health of pets, livestock, and animals in zoos, racetracks, and laboratories. Most veterinarians diagnose animal health problems, vaccinate against diseases, medicate animals suffering from infections or illnesses, treat and dress wounds, set fractures, perform surgery, and advise owners about animal feeding, behavior, and breeding. Veterinarians who work with food animals or horses usually drive to farms or ranches to provide veterinary services for herds or individual animals. Others work in a variety of settings:

- Some veterinarians contribute to human as well as animal health. A number of veterinarians work with physicians and scientists as they research ways to prevent and treat various human health problems.
- Some veterinarians are involved in food safety and inspection. Veterinarians who are livestock inspectors, for example, check animals for transmissible diseases such as *E. coli*, advise owners on the treatment of their animals, and may quarantine animals.
- More veterinarians are finding opportunities in food security as they ensure that the Nation has abundant and safe food supplies. Veterinarians involved in food security often work along the country's borders as animal and plant health inspectors, where they examine imports and exports of animal products to prevent disease in the U.S. and in foreign countries.

Key Facts

- According to the American Medical Veterinary Association, 77% of veterinarians who work in private medical practices treat pets. These practitioners usually care for dogs and cats but also treat birds, reptiles, rabbits, ferrets, and other animals that can be kept as pets. About 6% of veterinarians work exclusively with horses.
- Only about 16% of veterinarians work in what is known as "private mixed and food animal practices," where they see pigs, goats, cattle, sheep, and some wild animals in addition to farm animals.
- Veterinarians held about 59,700 jobs in 2008. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, nearly 80% of veterinarians, or 48,000, were self-employed in a solo or group practice.
- The Federal Government employed about 1,300 civilian veterinarians, chiefly in the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's Center for Veterinary Medicine.
- There is a substantial financial investment in equipment, office space, and staff for those vets who seek to own their own practice.

Source: Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 26 November 2010 <<http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos076.htm>>.

Licensing/Certification

Prospective veterinarians must graduate with a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M. or V.M.D.) degree from a 4-year program at an accredited college of veterinary medicine. There are 28 colleges in 26 States that meet accreditation standards set by the Council on Education of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). Admission to veterinary school is competitive. The number of accredited veterinary colleges has remained largely the same since 1983, but the number of applicants has risen significantly. Only about 1 in 3 applicants was accepted in 2007.

Many new graduates choose to enter a 1-year internship. Interns receive a small salary but often find that their internship experience leads to better paying opportunities later, relative to those of other veterinarians. Veterinarians who then seek board certification also must complete a 3-year to 4-year residency program that provides intensive training in one of the 39 AVMA-recognized veterinary.

Source: Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 26 November 2010 <<http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos076.htm>>.

Growth

Employment of veterinarians is expected to increase 33% over the 2008–18 decade, much faster than the average for all occupations. Recent trends indicate particularly strong interest in cats as pets. Faster growth of the cat population is expected to increase the demand for feline medicine and veterinary services, while demand for veterinary care for dogs should continue to grow at a more modest pace.

Excellent job opportunities are expected because there are only 28 accredited schools of veterinary medicine in the United States, resulting in a limited number of graduates—about 2,500—each year. Continued support for public health and food and animal safety, national disease control programs, and biomedical research on human health problems will contribute to the demand for veterinarians, although the number of positions in these areas is smaller than the number in private practice.

Source: Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 26 November 2010 <<http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos076.htm>>

The table below breaks down important statistics about veterinarians:

	Total Number of Veterinarians	Male	Female		
	87,998	43,196	44,802		
	Total as of December 31, 2009^{1,2}	Percent of Total	Male %	Female %	2007 Earnings Median Professional Income Before Taxes³
	No.				\$
Private Clinical Practice					
Food animal exclusive	1103	1.8%	82.5%	17.5%	109,000
Food animal predominant	3937	6.5%	81.4%	18.6%	91,000

Mixed animal	4328	7.1%	63.9%	36.1%	91,000
Companion animal predominant	6001	9.9%	59.6%	40.1%	97,000
Companion animal exclusive	41117	67.5%	44.7%	55.3%	91,000
Equine	3699	6.1%	54.5%	45.5%	91,000
Other	710	1.2%	36.2%	63.8%	91,000
Total Private Practice	60895	100%	51.1%	48.9%	91,000
Public & Corporate Employment					
College or university	6356	41.9%	50.6%	49.4%	103,000
Federal government	1753	11.5%	64.9%	35.1%	97,000
State or local government	1118	7.4%	60.0%	40.0%	94,000
Uniformed services	688	4.5%	53.9%	46.1%	79,000
Industry	3235	21.3%	62.0%	38.0%	148,000
Other Public & Corporate	2029	13.4%	39.9%	60.1%	97,000
Total Public & Corporate Employment Unknown	15179	100%	54.1%	45.9%	103,000
Not Listed Above	1881				

Definitions for the species categories under the heading “Private Clinical Practice” can be found in the source link below.

Source: Market Research Statistics 2009. January 2010. American Veterinary Medical Association. 14 December 2010 <<http://www.avma.org/reference/marketstats/usvets.asp>>.

Veterinarians in Today’s Economy

The veterinary medical industry is said to be recession proof, a reputation earned from minimal damage suffered in past economic downturns. However, depending on their location in the U.S., veterinarians report either troubling times or business as usual. Practices that offer grooming, nail trimming or pet supplies are seeing a drop in revenue. Those that focus on vaccinations, spay/neuters or high-cost specialty services have similar issues, with specialty and emergency care being affected more than primary care practices.

The fact that many veterinary practices operate on a cash basis, and in general spend conservatively even in good economic times, puts the industry ahead of the curve. Despite the positive forecast, some veterinarians are uneasy about their finances. Even before the nation’s economic decline, a shift began in client purchases of products such as flea control and heartworm preventives. Clients willing to provide such products for their pets are finding Internet prices that vets can’t compete with. Additionally, Veterinaries are finding that clients will euthanize a pet rather than spending thousands of dollars on costly procedures like they had in the past.

Source: Tremayne, Jessica. “Surviving Recession”. Veterinary Practice News. 14 December 2010. <<http://www.veterinarypracticenews.com/vet-cover-stories/surviving-recession.aspx>>.

Key Issues

There is a concern for the growing shortage of veterinarians nationwide, particularly of veterinarians who care for animals raised for food, serve in rural communities, and have training in public health. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has projected a need for an additional 22,000 veterinarians by 2016. The leading cause of the shortage is lack of capacity at U.S. veterinary medical colleges, where applicants outnumber seats by over three to one.

To address this issue, The Veterinary Public Health Workforce and Education Act was passed in September 2010. This act enhances and increases the number of veterinarians trained in veterinary public health. This legislation is the first direct federal infrastructure support for veterinary medicine schools in over 30 years.

Sources: "Critical Shortage of Veterinarians Requires Congressional Investment". 11 March 2010. Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges. 5 December 2010
<<http://www.marketwire.com/press-release/Critical-Shortage-of-Veterinarians-Requires-Congressional-Investment-1130311.htm>>.

The American Veterinary Medical Association. 2010. [Amva.com](http://www.avma.com). 5 December 2010
<http://www.avma.org/advocacy/federal/legislative/veterinary_education.asp>.

Salaries for Veterinarians

According to an annual survey conducted by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), the average starting salary among all employer types was \$48,684 in 2009. Average starting salaries in the private sector, excluding those for equine practices, ranged from a low of \$63,172 for food animal predominant positions to a high of \$72,318 for food animal exclusive positions.

Graduates entering equine practice, continued to earn less than their counterparts in other types of private practice, with equine practices offering an average starting salary of \$37,854 in 2009, a decrease of 9.1 percent from last year's starting salaries in the equine field. In contrast, the average starting salary in companion animal exclusive practices was \$69,154, which was second highest only to food animal exclusive starting salaries.

The pay gap between men and women in the field is significant. Females in private veterinary practice earn 66% of what men do. The only practice types that bucked the trend of men having a higher annual growth rate were the species categories of "companion-animal exclusive" and equine practitioners. Women in companion-animal exclusive practice saw a growth rate of 6.4% from 2005 to 2007, compared to 3.8% for men. Women in equine practices saw a 5.4 growth rate compared to 2.3% for men.

Two key factors contribute to veterinary income — ownership status and years of experience:

- The average salary of a male owner is \$158,910, while the average salary of a female owner is \$115,678, or 27% less.
- Male associates are earning \$102,672 compared to female associates who bring in \$83,106, or 19.1% less.
- While the wage gap increases with level of experience, starting salaries are much closer.
 - Males in companion-animal-exclusive practice started out earning \$66,266 in 2008, compared to females who started at \$64,318.

Payscale reports the average salary of a veterinarian is \$58,375 - \$81,558. The highest paying cities for Veterinarians are ranked by Payscale, with California holding five of the top ten spots. Not surprisingly, the longer a Veterinarian has been practicing, the larger the salary reaching over \$100,000 annually.

1. Huntington Beach, California
2. San Jose, California
3. Las Vegas, Nevada
4. New York, New York
5. Port Washington, New York
6. Phoenix, Arizona
7. Sacramento, California
8. Berkeley, California
9. Fairfax, Virginia
10. San Francisco, California

Sources: Kirkpatrick, David. "AVMA survey indicates most starting salaries are up for new veterinarians" 1 September 2009. AVMA News. 5 December 2010<
http://www.avma.org/press/releases/090901_starting_salaries_survey.asp>.
Macejko, Christina. "AVMA salary survey shows DVMs earning more". 1 January 2009. DMV Magazine. 14 December 2010
<<http://veterinarynews.dvm360.com/dvm/Veterinary+news/AVMA-salary-survey-shows-DVMs-earning-more/ArticleStandard/Article/detail/574366>>.
Payscale. 2010. Payscale.com. 5 December 2010.
<http://www.payscale.com/research/US/Job=Veterinarian/Salary/by_Years_Experience>.

Debt incurred by Veterinarians

According to an annual survey conducted by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), 88.6% of students had debt at the time of their graduation from veterinary school. Average debt increased 8.5% between 2008 and 2009, with student debt averaging \$129,976 in 2009, compared with \$119,803 in 2008. Nearly a third of the students had an average debt above \$150,000.

Source: Kirkpatrick, David. "AVMA survey indicates most starting salaries are up for new veterinarians" 1 September 2009. AVMA News. 5 December 2010<
http://www.avma.org/press/releases/090901_starting_salaries_survey.asp>.

Market Challenge

Veterinarians have a lot to think about. If they're in the first 10 or 15 years of their practice, they may be highly focused on paying off their substantial college debt, as related earlier. They could also be trying to pay off substantial loans from the purchase of a private practice or maybe saving to start their own practice one day. In addition to these pressures, they most likely have a family to support and malpractice insurance and equipment to buy. What's more, they need to be savvy business people. Veterinarians need to be able to hire, train and manage staff. They must also market their practices effectively and typically that means servicing patients competently along with bringing in dozens of new pet owners per month as new clients. Finally, they need to be able to keep up with the latest in veterinary medicine and technology.

The publication "Tax Tips for Veterinarians," put out by the State of California is a helpful guide to understanding the many considerations a veterinarian needs to think about while financing,

investing and maintaining the financial operations of his or her practice: [Tax Tips for Veterinarians](#).

Networking with Veterinarians

When prospecting to vets, you'll want them to know that, as an entrepreneur yourself, you uniquely understand the many pressures that they are under to build or maintain a thriving practice.

Veterinarians need to have a great reputation and be visible in their communities to build their practices. Increasingly, like other business owners, they're under pressure to invest in websites, advertising and the like. If you are targeting a certain group of vets, take the time to find out what kind of presence they may have on the web. You may learn a lot about them from their biographies. Make a point to remember the names of any pets they may have themselves. Set up a "google alert" that will notify you of what is happening within the veterinarian community in your town and pay attention to where the vets on your list went to veterinarian school as it maybe a topic that they like to discuss.

Also, try to find out, not only what they do on their precious days off, but where they may worship and what charities they support. There are international veterinarian groups such as www.worldvet.org but, perhaps, there are local organizations where vets in your community do some volunteering as well. Finding out which vets in your community support these kinds of initiatives will give you a chance to, not only commend them on their work, but to possibly make a donation as an acknowledgement of their service.

For those that put weight on information that can be gained from personality tests, it turns out, according to the [Myers-Briggs](#) or [Keirsey](#) personality theorists, most veterinarians have traditionally fallen under the ISTJ/ESTJ categories. A larger majority are [ISTJs](#), who tend to be introverted, data-loving, logical decision-making, list-checkers. There might be an occasional [ESTJ](#) – an outgoing, data-loving, logical decision-making, list checker. The ESTJs tend to be more comfortable in the exam room with clients and buddying up to the team while the more introverted ISTJ might prefer to unwind in the peace and quiet of the surgery suite. Recent studies show that the fundamental personality of veterinarians is shifting significantly to [ESFJ/ISFJ](#).

For more, view the following link: <http://waggingtail.banfield.net/2010/07/20/personality-shifts-in-veterinarians/>.

Source: Arnold, Katie. "Personality Shifts in Veterinarians." The Wagging Tail. 20 July 2010. <http://waggingtail.banfield.net/2010/07/20/personality-shifts-in-veterinarians/>.

For a more formal and long-term approach to prospecting to veterinarians in your region, consider establishing a "Veterinarian's Financial Resource Network."

National Associations

The American Veterinary Medical Association

<http://www.avma.org/>

The AVMA established in 1863, is a not-for-profit association representing more than 80,000 veterinarians working in private and corporate practice, government, industry, academia, and uniformed services. AVMA also provides many important intangible benefits to its members, not the least of which include group insurance benefits and services. For more information on how best to network with the AVMA and the benefits of membership, please view the following link: http://www.avma.org/about_avma/default.asp

The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA)

<http://www.aahanet.org/about/mission.aspx>

AAHA focuses on promoting high-quality standards for the rapidly evolving sector of small animal private practice through accreditation and other initiatives. AAHA presently serves approximately 6,000 practice teams in the U.S. and Canada, and more than 40,000 veterinary care providers in North America and overseas. AAHA has acquired its own headquarters building, has a professional staff of 74, runs more than 20 meetings and seminars annually.

View the following link for information on sponsorships:

<http://www.aahanet.org/about/sponsors.aspx>.

Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges <http://www.aavmc.org>

The AAVMC provides leadership for and promotes excellence in academic veterinary medicine to prepare the veterinary workforce with the scientific knowledge and skills required to meet societal needs through the protection of animal health, the relief of animal suffering, the conservation of animal resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge.

The Association for Women Veterinarians Foundation

<http://www.vet.ksu.edu/AWV/index.htm>

The Association for Women Veterinarians Foundation was formed in 1947 to “further the mutual advancement of women veterinarians in the science of veterinary medicine by bringing them together to share knowledge, support and friendship.” This essence of the original purpose persists, as indicated by the current AWVF vision, “Advocating for women and promoting leadership in the veterinary profession.”

Learn more about Association marketing by reading [About Association Marketing](#) which includes tips for vetting an association, becoming a resource, and surveys for the association leadership and members.

Marketing Checklist

- Narrow niches within the market to a reasonable size and scope.
- Visit websites and flag the best ones for ongoing reference.
- “Follow” companies and associations of interest on LinkedIn.com and join market-related groups.
- Identify at least 15 individuals that would be good Centers of Influence in the market.
- Conduct informational interviews and/or networking appointments
 - with potential strategic alliances also active in the market.
 - ask for “personal introductions” to others in the market.
- Subscribe to market-related blogs and magazines, note calendar dates, editors names and sponsorship or advertising opportunities.
- Determine which association(s) is most worthwhile and attend networking events; obtain meeting with Association Director and be sure to “ask” more rather than “tell.”
- Determine a Unique Value Statement that appeals to the market and sets you apart from the competition.
- Announce your presence in the market through social media, letters, ads, and press releases.
- Obtain membership lists for cultivation and look into targeted list buying if needed.
- Organize a mix of cultivation pieces. For ex., avoid sending all email or all snail mail. Aim for a minimum of six to twelve touch-points per year.
- Explore what types of seminar topics and/or guest speakers are of interest to this market.
- Contact local business journals and find out if they plan on dedicating a special issue to the market where you can advertise and/or get an article published.

SAMPLE One Page 90-Day Strategic Planning Template
Target Market Focus: Veterinarians in (Region)

Three Year Vision: 40 veterinarian clients in database; Receive X number of leads per mo.; Conduct min. of 2 Workshops per year and 3 C of I Appreciation Events

One Year Vision: 10 new veterinarian-based clients in database with a min. of 5 who will provide ongoing introductions

90 Day Objectives/Tactics	Challenges	Action Items	Person	Date
1. Continue Research & Build Top 15 List		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obtain local research & dig deep into links in report; - define profile of best client. - Identify 5 C of I's who work w/ Veterinarians - Drill down to find out more about individuals and create a file. - Determine which associations to join or volunteer - Become active on LinkedIn.com. - Ask for introductions 		
2. Create Unique Value Proposition and Brand Statement		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Find out needs/wants - Come up with unique characteristics of product line and hone approach - Create brand statement; get approved by Compliance - Test out w/ Advisors 		
3. Build Cultivation Program		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Vet" communication materials - Select best approved pieces (2 or 3) - Create Approach letter - Get approved - Set up first mailing program 		
4. Conduct 5 Center of Influence Surveys; goal is min. of 5 per month.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Modify interview as appropriate - Send hand written thank you's & follow up on any tasks/requests - Get responses from surveys into database - Schedule more appts. 		
5. Set up database/admin. needs		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make sure database can manage cultivation process for follow up, etc. 		