

Coping with information overload problem

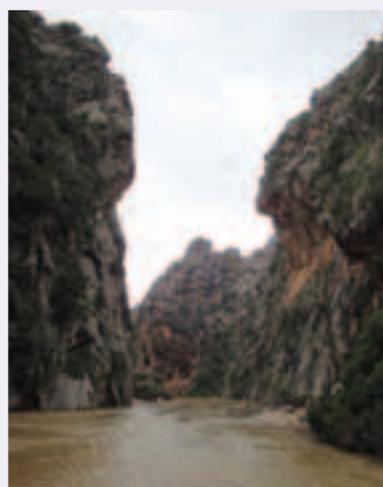
DESPITE my best efforts, the nagging feeling persisted that recent expeditions to conferences in Canada, Scotland and Austria (*Veterinary Practice* October-December 2008) had somehow failed to increase my clinical acumen.

Accordingly, when a colleague invited me to attend her book launch at the world's largest book fair in Frankfurt last October, I leapt at the chance. Surely, amongst thousands of books displayed by over 7,000 exhibitors from all corners of the globe, I could not fail to glean some pearls of clinical wisdom!

Attended by more than 286,000 visitors, the book fair easily dwarfed any veterinary, scientific or popular conference I'd ever been to. I wandered spellbound (or, in several cases, caught the shuttle bus) between various conference halls, usually the size of small city blocks, filled to bursting with books of every shape, size and language.

In the comic section (into which I strayed, purely by accident), hundreds of German youth had congregated, copiously adorned with black and purple make-up, torn fishnet stockings, and wielding a scary variety of weapons, among which grim reaper-style scythes featured prominently. Either the misanthropy of German youth exceeded that of any veterinary or other subculture I had yet encountered, or I was seriously out-of-date with comic superheroes.

Rumours of free organic soy-lattes led me to the spirituality section, where I discovered an amazingly detailed acupuncture and energy flow chart.



The Torrent de Pareis canyon outflow on Mallorca.

Andrew Knight, BVMS, MRCVS, who qualified from Murdoch University in Perth, Australia, in 2004, is the founder of the Extreme Vegan Sporting Association which, says he, is extremely good fun.

Unfortunately, canine and feline versions were lacking. To my great surprise, however, it was the business section into which the tidal flow of people inexorably delivered me, where I finally struck gold.

For years I had been perplexed by

ANDREW KNIGHT continues his series on achieving CPD the hard way!

the question of precisely how certain of my client practices managed to consistently run their businesses so badly.

In my vet locuming adventures to date I have encountered premises lacking basic emergency drugs and equipment, years

of accumulated grime beneath operating theatre tables, and clinical notes more similar to mysterious messages from lost civilisations, scrawled on fading paper cards with dust levels more akin to crumbling Egyptian tablets than to modern medical records.

Particularly disturbing was a piece of paper towel, framed and labelled



*Survival was defined as the composite endpoint of cardiac death, euthanasia due to heart failure or treatment failure. †Plus furosemide as required.

Reference 1. Häggström J *et al.* Effect of pimobendan or benazepril hydrochloride on survival times in dogs with congestive heart failure caused by naturally occurring myxomatous mitral valve disease: The QUEST Study. *J Vet Intern Med*;Vol22:5,2008. Vetmedin contains pimobendan. Prescription only medicine. Further information is available on request from Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica, Bracknell, RG12 8YS, UK. E-mail vetmedica.UK@boehringer-ingelheim.com. www.vetmedin.co.uk

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“endangered species - last of its kind”, on the noticeboard of a certain practice which had banned the use of such precious specimens to clean consult tables, in a desperate attempt to cut costs. Management presumably assumed the heavy breathing of stressed vets and nurses would be sufficient to adequately remove pus, blood and anal gland secretions, thereby preventing disease transmission between one animal and the next.

increasingly wondered whether such consistently appalling standards could result solely from ignorance, accident or carelessness, or whether they might, in fact, be the result of a rather more sinister plan, aimed at systematically pushing their veterinary personnel toward the brink of insanity.

The secret text...

At last, the answer was revealed to me at the Frankfurt Book Festival. There on the table to which the surging crowd

had so fortuitously delivered me was the secret text these practices had clearly been following: *The Business Book of Horror!*

This sinister tome was replete with true and grisly stories about unnerving, confounding colleagues who are resistant or impervious to change, and shocking examples from major corporations. For final confirmation, I cross-checked the definition of confounding: (i) to perplex or amaze, bewilder, confuse; (ii) to throw into



The author at the Frankfurt Book Festival – the world's largest.



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confusion or disorder; (iii) to contradict or refute; (iv) to bring to ruin or naught. The behavioural profiles of certain of my practice managers were a perfect match!

Overwhelmed by the magnitude of my discovery, and the nearly endless sea of knowledge in which I was inexorably immersed, I began to diagnose within myself the first symptoms of Advanced Information Overload: a nearly overpowering urge to recline on a tropical island beach (to process and reflect).

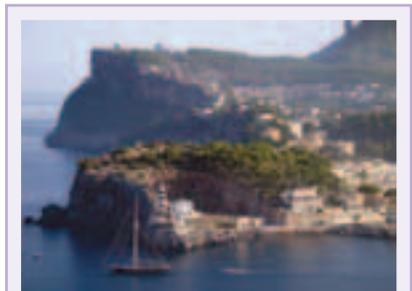
Urgent intervention is required when symptoms are advanced, and whilst not quite within the Frankfurt city limits, the Mediterranean island of Mallorca was nevertheless the closest I could find.

A quick check on www.carbonneutral.com revealed that our flights would produce 0.3 tonnes of CO₂ which, for only a few additional pounds, could be offset in a variety of interesting ways. Renewable energy projects in Turkey and China were prominently offered.

The rapid economic growth and associated industrialisation of China, in combination with increasing affluence and the adoption of consumptive Western lifestyles, combined with a rising population of over 1.3 billion people, result in impacts on global warming and loss of biodiversity



The Business Book of Horror at the book fair. Below: Port de Soller.



Must-have medicine

Importance of asking questions...

LISTENING to the news over the last few days it seems clear that the worst is yet to come. Economic gloom continues to reign, even with the interest rate cuts and all the other things the Government is trying to do to improve things for us.

Our industry at the moment does not seem to have been too affected, but if you apply the general gloomy forecasts to the next few months, then we are all likely to start feeling the pinch.

It was interesting to read yet another article on surviving the slowdown in a recent veterinary journal, this time written by a vet, and I scanned it to see what advice was given.

Sadly, not one word about selling and it made me wonder why so many vet practices have such a reluctance to embrace this important part of their business?

The answer I think is in the whole image of what sales is about. Ask a person on the street to give you five

words that describe a salesperson and you get: pushy, aggressive, overbearing, loud, untrustworthy – to name just a few.

Ask a salesperson to give you five words that describe a sales person and you get words like: professional, responsible, good listener, trustworthy and competent.

So why the big gap between the general public's perception of a salesperson and a salesperson's perception of him or

herself? Primarily it's because of what we see on television and what we encounter in our daily lives.

Doesn't it make great television to show the double-glazing salesman who terrorizes a customer into buying a new set of windows, or the jack-the-lad young guy trying to sell a second-hand car! Don't we hate it if someone pounces on us the minute we go into a shop, or the rep who talks at us and wastes our time!

So is this why non-sales people never want to be thought of as sales people?



CATHY GURNEY continues her series on 'selling' with a look at Rule No. 3

Pretty much the answer to this is "Yes".

But we sell every day of our lives in some form or another. We just don't think of it as selling.

Everyone with young children experiences a determined sales pitch most days, usually starting with "I want..." or "Can I have...?" If you answer "No" they come back straight away with "Why not?"

"Because you can't."

"But why not?" – until we give in and "give them the order!"

Why do we bother to get all dressed up to go out on a Saturday night? We do it to be popular and to present ourselves in our most favourable light. In other words, we "sell" ourselves to our friends and the people we want to meet. Speed dating, for those of you who have done it, is the ultimate sales process!

Pushy?

In veterinary practice, we believe that by asking the client to buy something we are being "pushy". But it is only pushy if you present it that way. A good salesperson is never pushy. It is very important to find out the client's view. So, Rule 3 of Selling: ASK QUESTIONS.

Use *open* questions starting with "How", "Why", "What", "Where", as

this encourages the client to talk to you. Asking anything that elicits a "yes" or a "no" can make for a very short conversation.

If the client replies "no" to the question "Is Sooty up to date with his flea treatment?" and you then have to try and suggest that he or she buys some flea treatment, just makes you feel you are being pushy, whereas if you say "When did you last give Sooty his flea prevention?", it makes the conversation so much easier.

Asking questions also enables you to find out what the client thinks or feels about things. People are very happy to give you their opinion about something, so asking clients their opinion is a good opportunity to see what they think.

"We are thinking of doing more on pet nutrition here at the practice. What do you think we should focus on initially?" This can lead nicely into a conversation about where that client currently buys pet food and also enables you to find out why he or she might not buy it from you.

Asking questions and involving our clients is an important part of the selling process and we are losing out if we don't do it! So remember the words of Henry Ford, "It's not the employer who pays the wages. Employers only handle the money. It's the client who pays the wages."

■ Got something to say about sales? Please e-mail me at sales@cgsales-marketing.com and tell me about it.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD - from page 9

that are particularly grave.

Accordingly, I was keen to encourage Chinese energy conservation, and chose to support a waste heat recovery project at a cement production facility. New equipment funded partly by my trip will utilise waste heat to generate electricity for use on-site, thereby replacing electricity generated by fossil fuel power stations which run mainly on coal.

In due course we arrived on the Mallorcan beaches, with slightly cleaner consciences. However, the years of insanity-inducing veterinary experiences finally appeared to be taking their toll, because within a short time I had left the sunshine, white sands and palm trees, in favour of the jagged rocks and precipitous drops of the Serra de Tramuntana mountain range, along the north-west coast.

I rashly embarked on a 20km horizontal, 2.4km vertical hike through mud, rain, fog, and a long, dark, partially flooded mountain tunnel.

As I contemplated a more dangerous descent from a ridge, a sheep bleated disturbingly and persistently at me out of the swirling mist from the top of a cliff.

An omen of doom...

I could not help feeling it was an omen of doom, and so I heeded the sheep's advice, halting my questionable advance. A desperate run down a mountain track followed thereafter - again in pouring rain - delivering me to my hire car as the last pale dregs of daylight faded. I exited into a lightening storm. By some trick of Mallorcan weather, the beaches remained sunny and clear throughout.

Despite such dubious pleasures, the highlight of this trip was our cautious penetration 500 metres into the freezing floodwaters exiting from the Torrent de Pareis – the second largest eroded canyon in Southern Europe. Descending the 4km Torrent in winter, when neoprene and ropes are mandatory, remains the last major thrill on the island for daring locals.

As a former spelunker I am most excited by Sa Fosca - "The Darkness" - a flooded region into which no light at all penetrates! I'm seeking volunteers to join my descent of the Torrent next winter, equipped with wetsuits, torches, inflatables and ropes. Insanity is an important prerequisite; experienced veterinary personnel would therefore be ideal. Interested readers can reach me via www.ExtremeVeganSports.org.



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