

Scoping out the best

Using some clever purchasing techniques, Billa Schleicher was able to keep costs down when equipping her new clinic in Milford Haven

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Scoping out the best

When Sibilla Schleicher set about furnishing her new practice, value for money was top of her mind. For her practice software, however, VetSCOPE's user-friendly experience made it the only option

Good things come to those who wait. As Sibilla ("Billa") Schleicher prepared to set up in practice in January 2007, such thinking was far from her mind. Nor, when the first premises fell through and disappointment followed disappointment from "numerous other buildings, which always had something wrong with them" was she inclined to be so philosophical. However, in late 2009, when her search finally struck gold, Billa was happy to acknowledge the wait had been worth it. The Old Docks Office, in the heart of Milford Haven, offers views of the harbour from one side and easy access for clients on the other and it was here, in September 2009, that All Pets Vet Care finally opened for business.



Nursing staff at All Pets with another happy customer

across through two practices she was in contact with. She was immediately impressed by its high specification and exceptional ease of use.

Surpassing expectations

When the practice opened in 2009, Billa had made her choice and is in no doubt that VetSCOPE has played its part in a year that surpassed all expectations. "I wanted a veterinary practice that was as pleasant as possible to be in and we've achieved that. Clients always comment on what a lovely atmosphere we have here," she says.

That client list now extends to over 800 people and VetSCOPE's utility demonstrates itself on many levels. "We have a little flip video camera, so the first

thing we do when a new animal comes in, is put a picture of them on the history page. Owners are always impressed with that." Early on, she discovered a practical advantage to this. "If I have a client with two dogs, for example, I can have a quick look on my screen and be sure which is which. It's a small thing but clients are really impressed when you get it right."

At a more technical level, progress on the healing of a wound, for example, can be quickly ascertained through VetSCOPE. "I'll have pictures from each time a patient is in the clinic and I can access these immediately to be certain progress is being made."

A further feature to impress, in terms of client relationships, is the ability to offer a detailed costing of a surgical procedure in just a few moments. "I simply press 'procedure – surgery' and it will come up with all the different items that might be used in an operation. It is not only fast and efficient but, because everything is in front of you, you are less likely to forget something."

This comprehensive but easy-to-use approach has

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WELCOME

Welcome to the Spring edition of VetSCOPE News 2011. We've had excellent feedback from our interviews with VetSCOPE customers in 2010 and, in 2011, we'll share more stories of VetSCOPE users.

Veterinarians thinking of opening a new premises or refurbishing their current one will find much food for thought in the experience of Billa Schleicher and her team at All Pets Vet Care, Milford Haven.

Professor Simon More, Veterinary School, UCD, meanwhile explains the challenges facing the veterinary profession in relation to continuous improvement of animal health issues.

How many times do you advise a course of veterinary care to a client that they fail to follow? Our feature on the CRAFT of compliance offers some practical advice.

The principal of a veterinary practice has diverse roles, one of which is that of employer. On page 4, you'll find some useful tips on drafting employment contracts.

Finally, if you would like to participate in a future VetSCOPE Training Day, we'd be delighted to hear from you. Telephone +353 (0) 1 2602207 or email training@vetscope.ie

Stephen Lawler
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a great advantage when bringing in a locum, she explains. "It means it doesn't take an eternity for them to understand how you do this or that – they can get started immediately."

Support

VetSCOPE's robust accounting programme proved more than a pleasant surprise: Billa sees it as a dynamic resource for vets at a time when, like all business people, they need to stay close to their finances. "Each day, I can just click a few buttons and quickly see what my profit and loss for the

day is." VAT returns have, similarly, been simplified and when her accountant called to do her end-of-year accounts, "I was able to take all the information from VetSCOPE and present it to him. He was very impressed with it."

VetSCOPE developers Stephen and Clare Lawler provide user support directly to their clients and Billa describes this hands-on approach as "brilliant".

After a delayed start, setting up in practice has been a voyage of discovery and, with a rapidly

growing customer base responding to her client-centred approach, Billa has much to be proud of. However, she sees the adventure as just beginning – a feeling that applies to VetSCOPE as much as any other aspect of the business.

"Every so often, we find something new we want to do and we wonder how. So, we phone up Stephen and he says "all you do is press this button here and that there and there it is" and I think "wow! I didn't even know that was there". That's the beauty of it." 🌈



SECURING THE FUTURE IN ANIMAL HEALTH

As the cattle industry sets about improving herd health, the biggest challenge may be recognising that the industry must now shape its own future, Prof. Simon More tells VetSCOPE



Prof. Simon More BVSc PhD FRCVSc
 MVB DipECVPD DipECBHM

Bringing together farmers, veterinarians, industry and Government, Animal Health Ireland (AHI) was established in 2009 to address a number of the specific animal-health issues currently confronting Irish farming. AHI aims to improve profitability, sustainability and competitiveness across the sector and Prof. Simon More, Veterinary School, UCD, who is chair of its technical working group on biosecurity, explains the rationale behind it: "Until recently, many of the major on-farm diseases – tuberculosis, brucellosis, BSE – were managed by Government. But there are a whole host of other non-regulated cattle diseases, in many ways more important in terms of on-farm profitability and international competitiveness, with little or no public health concerns. There is a very good argument for saying that these are industry, rather than Government, concerns." One of the strongest arguments in favour of action is undoubtedly the financial one. AHI

calculates that mastitis in a typical 70-80 size dairy herd can cost a farmer as much as €20,000 per annum, "an expense that farmers can ill afford to carry," Prof. More comments.

Additionally, developments elsewhere have put the impetus on Ireland to act sooner rather than later. "All of our international competitors have been moving very quickly in this area for some years. As yet, we've not been keeping up." Milk quality is a particular concern and Prof. More explains that AHI is currently designing a national programme to address the "very significant national milk quality problem that Ireland has".

Learning from experience

In terms of its overall focus, AHI is concentrating initially on three main cattle diseases: Johne's Disease, Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis (IBR) and Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD), as well as mastitis and lameness.

In the case of BVD, AHI recently brought together key experts from a range of stakeholder organisations, to agree a common position in assisting farmers with BVD concerns. A farmer leaflet is available, outlining best-practice in BVD monitoring and control, based on international experience. Following a recent industry-wide consultation process with respect to BVD control, AHI is working towards a national strategy programme in this area. "There are a number of countries that have got rid of BVD. Ireland could also take this route, however, at the end of the day, it's industry, not the Government, who would make this happen." The discussion document "will present a range of options, from which will follow several key questions for industry to resolve

VetSCOPE and Herd Health

VetSCOPE has a facility to manage herd health activity on farm, allowing vets to store clinical reports and veterinary analysis from each herd-health visit. Diseases encountered on farm and vaccinations used can also be recorded, with a follow-up date to ensure the vets can be effective partners with their clients and play their full role as stakeholders as Ireland addresses its herd-health challenges.

including 'which route should we take?'; 'who will coordinate this?'; and 'who will pay?'," Prof. More says.

Coordination

An Australian working in Ireland for a number of years now, he understands better than most that, in terms of solutions, "you can't just pick something up and drop it into the Irish context: that doesn't work". Having said that, he notes that "we need to plan five or ten years ahead, that's the international norm. Working cooperatively, bringing everyone on board, that is how we will adapt to the Irish situation." Vets as much as every other stakeholder will need to adapt to an ongoing process of continuous improvement, he says, concluding that "the key challenge will be to ensure we are all comfortable with this model of moving forward." 🌈

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THE CRAFT OF COMPLIANCE

A simply acronym can play a valuable role in getting better compliance from your clients in veterinary care.

How many times do you advise a course of veterinary care to a client but they fail to follow it? It's quite a common scenario and one that probably happens more frequently than you think. Research from veterinary and human medicine shows that people often fail to follow professional healthcare advice and many tend not to admit to it afterwards. One of the biggest studies into veterinary compliance was carried out by the American Animal Hospital Association (AHA) in 2003. This study, which involved 240 vet hospitals and over 1,600 clients across the USA, showed that pet owners were not sticking to veterinary recommendations. In one case, therapeutic diets, only 21% of clients were following their vet's advice. More worryingly, 59% of the vets thought that clients had been following these dietary recommendations.

CRAFT

Non-compliance with veterinary advice means that animals are not receiving the right care. And, if clients are not administering therapeutics correctly – for example, with antibiotics or parasiticides – issues of resistance can arise. If a client does not follow your recommendations, this could also be interpreted as meaning your vet-client relationship needs some work. Was the issue explained as well as it could have been? Does the client fully trust you and your advice?

As a result of the AHA Compliance Study, the acronym 'CRAFT' was devised to help vets remember the key points in encouraging

client compliance. This stands for: Compliance = Recommendation + Acceptance + Follow-through. But how are these steps translated into action in the consult room?

Recommendation is the clear, concise message about the best course of action for the animal, which is passed from vet to client. It is also vital that this message is reinforced by the other staff members – if a vet contradicts a nurse or vice versa, the client can lose trust that this is the right course of action. Here, practice policies and protocols – that everyone is 'singing off the same hymn sheet' – come into their own.

Acceptance means that the client has heard and understood the message and is in agreement that this is the right course of action. The owner must leave the consult room with a full understanding of what the situation is and why this is the best thing to do. Remember, many clients will come to you with their own idea of what is happening with their pet. If the vet does not address this idea – listen to the client and show empathy – then it will be harder to convince the client of the correct situation. Think of the cat owner who is sure that her pet has had a skin reaction to plants rather than flea allergy dermatitis. If you do not listen to this idea and explain why it is less likely, she is less likely to keep to strict flea prevention. A vet must also be vigilant for acceptance of the treatment itself. Can the owner afford the care? Is he or she physically able to pill the animal or give doses three-times daily?

Follow-through is a catch-all term for the practice's policies, procedures and protocols that make sure the client is supported in carrying out the right course of action. This is a safety net where owners



are booked in for repeat appointments or are called a couple of days later. A quick telephone call can be a great way of assessing how well an owner is coping with a treatment regime. With the follow-through step your VetSCOPE software is immensely helpful. Not only does it allow you to set reminders to get in contact with your clients, the system also provides a wide variety of written material to help support the treatment plan.

Tailored

Clients can sometimes be overwhelmed by the amount of information that they receive during a consultation, so written documents, including labels and specific instructions, are invaluable to remind them of important points. Your VetSCOPE software also comes equipped with templates for the most common surgeries and procedures, which can be tailored to each client. This means that general instructions with more specific points can be generated at the touch of a button.

By using these simple steps you can make sure that you client is 'on-board' with the treatment plan – and compliant with the recommended care – from day one. 🐾

VETSCOPE TRAINING DAY

The most recent VetSCOPE Training day was held on Wednesday 6 April 2011 at the CompuB Apple Centre, Grafton Street, Dublin 2 and was fully booked. The Advanced Level 1 course is suitable for the principals of veterinary practices and support staff that have used VetSCOPE for at least six months. The learning objectives are that on completion of the course, participants will be able to:

- input data correctly, so the practice can generate reports on the KPIs (Key Performance Indicators); and
- identify areas within the practice where VetSCOPE can improve efficiencies to save money and generate extra income.



Participants have found the course well worthwhile, easy to follow and very informative. For further information on VetSCOPE training see www.vetscope.ie. If you would like to register your interest in attending a future course, please let us know by emailing training@vetscope.ie

DID YOU KNOW...

That you can search for any medications that are about to reach their expiry date? To do this open Prices/Codes and click on any item to enter the Price and Stock Details screen. Click on the 'find' button and enter a date range in the expiry date box. For example, to find all items due to expire in June and July 2011; enter 1/6/2011..31/7/2011 and press enter. This will find all medications with an expiry date within that range.

batch number	expiry date	last modified/entered
	01/06/2011	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1...31/07/2011	
	011	



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PRACTICAL TIPS FOR DRAFTING A CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT

The entire area of employment law is commonly, and with some justification, viewed as a minefield for employers.

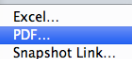
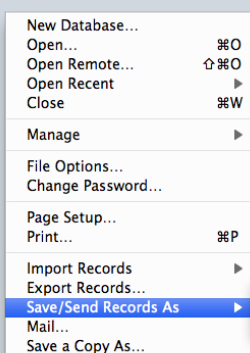
Although it is accepted that many important conditions of employment are implied as a matter of law, the provision of an employment contract should be addressed from the outset of the relationship. The following tips may help avoid some of the common pitfalls that befall employers:

- A contract containing the particulars of employment as set out in the Terms of Employment (Information) Act 1994-2001 must be provided to the employee within two months of the commencement of employment.
- The contract should impose a probationary period during which performance should be reviewed. Employers should make up their mind whether an employee is going to be fit for the job before the employee acquires one year's continuous service, inclusive of any notice period, as, at this point, he/she will be protected by the provisions of the Unfair Dismissals Acts 1977-2007 (the 'UD Acts').
- The contract should clearly spell out the period of notice to be given by either party upon termination.
- Include in the contract an express right to make a payment in lieu of notice. Payment in lieu of notice cannot be made in the absence of a contractual provision or agreement with the employee.

DID YOU KNOW...

That you can email reports right from within VetSCOPE*. When the report is on screen, simply select from the file menu 'Save/Send Records as - PDF'. Choose the name and

location to save the file. Tick the option to create an email with attachment** and your email will be created in your mail client.



*May not work with older versions of FileMaker (can be upgraded).

**Needs email client such as Outlook or Apple Mail

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Saving Per Box	9.24	9.99	10.24	11.04	12.04
Saving Per Delivery	110.88	239.76	368.64	529.92	722.40
Percentage Saving	46.78%	52.58%	54.61%	61.50%	71.03%

- Post-termination restrictions, commonly called restrictive covenants, generally seek to restrict the ability of an employee to work for the competition, to solicit the business of clients and to poach staff. Notoriously difficult to enforce, they should not be used as a matter of routine but they can be very useful, if carefully drafted, in certain instances.
- A provision allowing the employer to introduce lay-off (where employment ceases temporarily) or short-time (where there is a temporary reduction in working hours to less than half of normal weekly hours) can be a useful temporary solution to relieve cashflow problems. However, these measures cannot be introduced in the absence of a contractual provision or agreement with the employee.
- An 'Entire Agreement' clause, which provides that the contract supersedes any prior discussions or agreements the parties might have had in relation to the terms of the contract, should prevent either party from trying to assert that there are other (frequently unwritten) terms of employment not written into the contract.
- The contract should include a provision permitting the employer to make deductions from the employee's pay in certain circumstances, for example, where there has been an overpayment of wages. Otherwise, save for certain exceptions, a deduction cannot be made from an employee's wages without consent.
- A 'variation' clause will allow the employer to lawfully amend aspects of the contract at a later date. Such variations must be reasonable, however, and would not be effective, for example, to lawfully introduce pay cuts.
- Fixed-term contracts should only be used where necessary, not as a probationary period. A fixed-term contract should contain a clause

excluding the application of the UD Acts from the termination of the contract arising from the expiration of the fixed-term/specified purpose. Renewals of fixed-term contracts should be considered carefully before being implemented. A written statement setting out objective reasons for the renewal and failure to offer a permanent contract must be issued. Like permanent contracts, fixed-term contracts should include a notice provision providing for termination of the contract at an earlier time.

Far too much litigation arises from the breakdown of the employment relationship. Being in a position to reach for a signed contract which clearly addresses key issues can often be invaluable, even if it seems like an unnecessary burden at the point of preparation.

Peter McInnes is Head of the Employment Law Unit at McDowell Purcell Solicitors.

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