



Hold Time can be **Golden** for Your Practice

Instead of Silence or Music, Use Educational, Enlightening On-Hold Messages to Elevate Your Customer Care

By Connie Gualiano

If you think placing callers on hold goes against everything you've been taught about good customer care, think again!

Hold time can be golden for your practice.

I often hear from doctors that they don't think they have hold time. That's probably because they think of hold time on the telephone in particular, and waiting in general, as an indictment of their office's efficiency and customer care.

I've even had doctors tell me that they order their staff to never place anyone on hold. They seem to think it is better customer service to take the caller's information down and play phone tag with them later rather than place them on hold for a moment until they have the time to answer their question.

Don't fool yourself – hold time happens in every practice. Hold time is necessary in every practice. But there is a tremendous difference between Good Hold Time and Bad Hold Time.

Good Hold Time is when you place a caller on hold to pull a chart or ask the doctor a question about a medication or treatment. If you play messages while they wait on hold their time is occupied with information about the practice and general pet healthcare and behavior. That makes hold time even better and more productive.

When you place clients on hold to get them the information they're asking for and give them entertaining and enlightening messages while they wait, that's not bad; indeed that's great customer care.

In fact, *Sales & Marketing Management Magazine* reported that 88% of callers prefer on-hold messages to silence or even music.

Of course, if your team places client-owners on hold the minute they answer the phone and the caller hears silence or static from a radio, then you have committed the cardinal sin of good customer care by giving them the telephone equivalent of the cold shoulder. That's Bad Hold Time. Because with silence on-hold you run the risk of your good intentions to take care of your callers needs resulting in your clients feeling ignored.

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The reality is that hold time happens and in a typical practice it averages 60-90 seconds. No matter how efficiently your practice is run hold time is inevitable. People are busy. They call your practice when they have time. Taking their information and then calling them back can often turn a good intended act into a frustrating game of telephone tag.

While 60 or 90 seconds may not seem like a long time, it certainly feels that way if you're listening to dead silence, wondering if you've been disconnected. Or even worse, feeling ignored. An AT&T survey showed that callers left on-hold to silence perceived their wait to be three times longer than it actually was!

Another small business study showed

that more than one-third (34%) of first-time callers who hang up to silence on-hold will never call you back!

In this economy, you can't afford to even think about that possibility.

Having the freedom and confidence to place callers on hold can actually be good for customer service. It allows the staff to give their full attention to clients at the front desk, or help callers on the other line. And with targeted, topical messages you can be confident knowing that client-owners are hearing service and treatment recommendations, helpful nutrition and behavior advice, and important educational information.

According to an American Animal Hospital Association survey, 73% of pet owners would go into debt to provide for their pets well being. Pet owners crave information and appreciate direction when making informed decisions about their pet's health.

Message on-hold is a cost effective, compelling media for promoting and educating internally, with virtually no effort on your staff's part. The result is better perceived customer care, greater client loyalty, improved treatment acceptance, and increased average invoice.

So, you see, hold time is not a bad thing it just depends on how you use it.

Connie Gualiano is the president of Wait Media Group, the creators of PawsTime "Wait Marketing Solutions for Veterinary Practices."

PawsTime Message On-Hold offers the perfect opportunity to reach and engage your client-owners with educational information, enlightening advice, entertaining facts, and treatment recommendations.

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