



Adding Hydrotherapy Services to your Veterinary Practice

Business and Financial Planning for Vets Your ROI

Help in planning your business

"Westcoast wants its customers to make a success of their business. And that's where our step-by-step consultancy service comes into its own: site visits and IT-based tools to help you plan your business, advice on equipment installation and sundry purchases, a full after-sales service and customer forwarding to your hydrotherapy centre from a listing on our website. If there's anything else we can do to help, please ask us." James Smith, Westcoast Hydrotherapy Ltd.

How can Westcoast help your business?

With over twenty years' experience, Westcoast knows it's not enough to just supply top quality canine hydrotherapy equipment. So we also provide excellent customer service, whenever you need it, including at the all-important business planning stage.

Our team of experts can:

- ❖ Give advice about running a hydrotherapy centre – everything from financial considerations to promoting your venture*
- ❖ Visit your site to advise on the best possible solution for the available space
- ❖ Put you in contact with a finance provider
- ❖ Assist in the design and layout of your premises.

Westcoast also:

- ❖ Installs all equipment with minimal disruption, giving advice on its use and maintenance
- ❖ Runs a full after-sales telephone service and email hotline
- ❖ Provides various service plans.

How offering hydrotherapy services can boost your turnover

Veterinary surgeries, boarding kennels, professional breeders and grooming centres can all increase turnover by adding swimming fitness and stamina sessions to their portfolio of services, which can be extended to provide rehabilitation services.

Don't miss out on any opportunities

General advice and case studies for a start-up hydrotherapy referral centre and a veterinary practice follow:

Obvious users of a hydrotherapy pool on a day-to-day basis are professional breeders' own dogs and their puppies, grooming centres' customers, military/police retirees' own dogs and ex colleagues' working and pet dogs. It may also be possible to fully utilise available sessions by offering fitness swimming to users such as dog clubs and veterinary practices that are unable to provide this facility or veterinary practices where their own facility is already fully booked. Many vets prescribe hydrotherapy for dogs' behavioural problems to use their excess energy.

A start-up hydrotherapy referral centre example

Making the most of a start-up business' opportunities

Creating a successful start-up business is never easy, making it essential to carry out extensive research and preparing a realistic business plan before launching a new venture. Westcoast recommends getting professional advice from a business advisor, e.g. your bank manager or a professional organisation.

It is important you look into a diverse range of advertising to promote your new business, including:

- ❖ A press release for the canine trade newspapers and magazines, plus local general publications, radio and TV stations □ an advert for:
 - ❖ The local papers: some offer free space for words only ads
 - ❖ Local veterinary practices' waiting areas
 - ❖ Parish magazines
 - ❖ Newsagents' windows
 - ❖ Online and offline local business directories
 - ❖ A flyer – local newsagents may deliver them with their papers
- ❖ Social media: including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Google, LinkedIn etc

The more people you can tell about your business the better, so don't forget:

- ❖ Family, friends and ex-colleagues with pet dogs
- ❖ Join a business support network: you may be able to 'trade' services with other members and get referrals through them

Veterinary practices may:

- I. not offer hydrotherapy facilities
 - II. need to outsource fitness swimming patients if their own pool is fully booked
- ❖ The armed forces and police may welcome an opportunity to swim working dogs
 - ❖ To contact local dog clubs to offer fitness swimming sessions
 - ❖ To arrange an open evening – including a dog swimming demonstration – and invite all the people listed above
 - ❖ If you have the budget, get a professional to create a simple website and register it with one or more search engines.

As a minimum you should include:

- ❖ A brief overview of your business, with photo(s) of the equipment in use
- ❖ Contact details, including:
- ❖ An automatic email link to your business email address
- ❖ A map of your centre.

Taking the plunge

After 15 years as a veterinary nurse Julie needed a new challenge. Keen to continue working with animals and, having already completed some hands-on training, she decided to open her business in Sussex, running the whole operation herself, from book keeping to assessing and swimming the dogs.

While Julie's veterinary experience and veterinary connections – with the latter being aware of the advantages of hydrotherapy to post-op and post-illness patients – gave her a head start in building a client base, the finance companies were less helpful. "Although they were impressed with my business plan, no one wanted to help as I was starting a new venture," said Julie. "Fortunately, my Dad managed to raise money on his property, some of which I used to pay for building work and the rest I spent on the pool. I couldn't have got started without him."

Then Westcoast offered some good advice that would allow the business to launch and grow without excessive pressures to meet financial repayment commitments. If Julie revised her original plan – and only bought a pool, heat-retaining cover, overhead hoist plus slings, floatation jackets and aqua toys – having established her business, she could re-approach the finance companies to fund purchase of the Westcoast Water Walker treadmill and Hot Spa.

Steady progression is exactly what Julie has in mind. "After just a few weeks trading I've been asked by two people if I'd be interested in taking on a partner but I don't feel it's the right time. At the moment, I've no real plans for expansion other than buying more equipment and doing some Hot Spa training. I chose Westcoast because they came highly recommended; they've lived up to that and been very helpful every step of the way," she confirmed.

Developing your income

It's difficult to predict how long it will take any business to become established and each one has to develop its own pricing structure that is:

- ❖ Competitive with other suppliers in the area
- ❖ Enough to: cover overheads, and provide income for the operator.

NB The examples of activities and figures used here are an illustration for reference purposes only.

Activity	Fee per session (excluding VAT)	Number of sessions	Total income for activity (excluding VAT)
Reduced rate fitness swim for family/friends' pets	£20	12	£240
Fun swimming for dog club (group block booking)	£55	4	£220
Fitness swim for police dogs (individual sessions)	£22	8	£176

Hydrotherapy maintenance (fitness swim, i.e. excluding rehabilitation) to meet excess demand at veterinary practices	£24	8	£192
Rehabilitation sessions	£35.00	4	£140
Projected weekly totals	N/A	36	£968 (excluding VAT)

A veterinary hydrotherapy rehabilitation service example

Making the most of a veterinary practice's opportunities

In an average month, a veterinary practice, which has four vets, three qualified and two trainee veterinary nurses (VN), – might expect to see the following new patients that could benefit from rehabilitation using hydrotherapy methods:

- ❖ Cruciate rupture repairs: 4
- ❖ Hip/elbow dysplasia: 4
- ❖ Senior mobility: 4
- ❖ Obesity management: 1
- ❖ Agility/fitness programme: 1
- ❖ Post-operative spinal: 1

Add those to your existing patients already receiving such treatment and the business case for investing in a hydrotherapy suite and appropriate staff training becomes very strong. This practice runs its hydrotherapy suite using one vet, one qualified VN and, when busy, with an additional unqualified VN or trainee.

After the patient's initial consultation with a vet to agree the course of hydrotherapy rehabilitation, a suitably trained VN can carry out treatment sessions. This benefits the practice because the:

- ❖ Fee is likely to be 20 to 25 per cent more than a veterinary surgeon-attended consultation
- ❖ Operating cost is lower because treatment is carried out by a VN
- ❖ Vet is available for normal duties, maintaining a high level of customer service.

We've got our dog back

Naturally, Louise and Simon Miller were very concerned when their six-month old Labrador Millie began 'bunny-hopping' instead of climbing stairs and running around their garden. The puppy's condition improved following a seven-day course of carprofen anti-inflammatory tablets, although an X-ray at her follow-up appointment revealed severe dysplasia of both hips, which assistant veterinary surgeon Sarah Tavener of the Stowe Veterinary Group in Suffolk hoped could be treated without having to resort to surgery. "I replaced Millie's anti-inflammatories with glucosamine, a powered joint supplement that's taken with food, and – having seen similarly affected dogs benefit from hydrotherapy – I also referred her for hydrotherapy to strengthen her hips and muscles and to help her lose a bit of weight," said Sarah. "Millie wasn't anxious at her first hydrotherapy session because she's a confident dog," confirmed Louise. "But it left her exhausted. And for the first couple of sessions she could hardly manage five or six minutes walking but is now doing up to 30 minutes in the pool and is able to swim 10 laps. And, amazingly, she knows when it's time to go swimming and gets very excited – she loves it!

"It's just fantastic," Louise added. "We're absolutely delighted to see the difference in Millie. Six months ago I would have thought she'd have to be put down or have an operation on both hips with a long

remedial time but we've got our lovely family dog back. She's now a crazy socialite again and can walk for up to an hour-and-a-half with the children out on picnics."

A veterinary example continued

How a hydrotherapy rehabilitation service could increase your income

Using Millie's case study as an example – based on prices in rural Norfolk – during the course of a year, a practice could expect to receive:

Activity	Fee per session (excluding VAT)	Number of sessions	Total income for activity (excluding VAT)
Initial consultation with vet	£47.00	1	£47.00
Weekly hydrotherapy rehabilitation with vet	£35.00	11	£385.00
Weekly hydrotherapy maintenance (fitness swim) with vet until Millie is 18 months old	£30.00	28	£840.00
Total income *	N/A	40	£1272.00 (excluding VAT)

* Excluding any necessary ongoing hydrotherapy maintenance (fitness swim) with vet, planned to reduce to twice a month then once a month.

Other examples of income from a hydrotherapy rehabilitation service

NB The examples of activities and figures used here are an illustration for reference purposes only. Only canine professionals with a suitable qualification should provide such treatment.

Medical condition	Hydrotherapy activity	Fee per session (excluding VAT)	Number of sessions	Total income for activity (excluding VAT)
Elbow dysplasia	Westcoast Under Water Treadmill	£35.00	40	£1400.00
Ruptured cranial cruciate ligament and medially luxating patella	Under Water Treadmill initially twice weekly, then weekly	£35.00	10	£350.00
Hind limb paresis	Standing supported by water, progressing to underwater treadmill work eventually, unsupported	£35.00	22	£770.00
Ischaemic myelopathy	Underwater treadmill work, initially three times a week, then weekly for five weeks	£35.00	8	£280.00
Thoracolumbar disc disease	UWT or gentle swimming with supported spine	£35.00	20	£700.00

Elbow dysplasia, OCD and hip dysplasia	Ongoing weekly spa treatment and swimming	£50.00 (£15.00 + £35.00)	Ongoing	Ongoing
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Insured Pets

Most insurance companies are happy to receive claims for Hydrotherapy services carried out by veterinary professionals. Many practices offer a slightly reduced fee to their clients for follow up sessions when the insurance paid sessions are complete.

We can even help you now

There's nothing like getting a head start. If you are starting a new business your finance provider will want to see a comprehensive business plan, and that's something we can help you with. We can also provide you with a spreadsheet to calculate potential monthly income and expenses, with an example also included.

Don't forget:

The most important thing to remember is that the monthly income and expenses example on is a rough guide only because:

- ❖ Utility costs vary from one supplier to another – you will need to contact yours to get an accurate cost per unit
- ❖ All other expenses – both fixed and variable costs – also depend on individual circumstances
- ❖ Only you can decide the cost per hydrotherapy session and how much to spend on marketing: while Westcoast can advise you about these aspects, unfortunately, we cannot guarantee the success of anyone's business.

Your business and Westcoast: an ongoing partnership

Westcoast will do whatever it can to help set up your hydrotherapy centre and provide the best possible customer service to support your business as it grows. To find out more, contact a member of the Westcoast team now.

Head office

Westcoast Hydrotherapy Ltd
Malthouse Farm
Malthouse Lane
Gissing
Norfolk
IP22 5UT
England

Tel: +44 (0)1379 674633

Fax: +44 (0)1379 674748

sales@westcoasthydrotherapy.co.uk

www.westcoasthydrotherapy.co.uk

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