

the companion interview

Mo Gannon

Mo Gannon was born in Sheffield. She went to Notre Dame High School and then studied at Sutton Bonnington, graduating in 1991 with a degree in Animal Science. She did a PhD at Nottingham looking at The Energy Balance of Pigs Outdoors and then worked in the veterinary industry at Willow Francis (which became Fort Dodge) and Boehringer, before finding her 'dream role' as an agricultural and veterinary market researcher. She is now Director at Mo Gannon & Associates and has been commissioned to work on BSAVA's research project to help identify the needs of members in the coming years. Mo is a violinist in a symphony orchestra and counts her greatest non-career achievement as Dragon Boating for Great Britain.



You are now working with BSAVA on its latest research – tell us about the process and why it is worth members participating in this kind of research.

In the past, people belonged to organisations so that they could meet other people with a common interest, make contacts, share information and learn from each other. These associations helped their members achieve this by holding conferences, producing publications for the profession and creating networking opportunities. With the advent of social media and advanced internet technologies coupled with more difficult economic times, membership organisations need to ensure they are continuing to deliver value to their membership in order to retain and build loyalty. As a forward thinking organisation, BSAVA not only wish to retain its membership going forward but also aim to offer more value to more of the profession.

BSAVA has commissioned us to work with them to help uncover what members value about the current offering and what could be offered in the future that would add value. This might be in terms of new products and services or how current products and services are made available. The programme will start with qualitative research to ask the membership and

Q Tell us how your career got you to where you are now.

A When I finally left academia, Phil Sketchley (current Chief Executive at NOAH) gave me my first permanent job as a territory manager for Willows Francis which then became Fort Dodge Animal Health. Phil has always been very supportive and helpful throughout my career and I remain most grateful. After sales, I moved in to product marketing at Boehringer where I got to commission and use market research and saw the value of what it could do. I persuaded the company who I'd commissioned to take me on in what was clearly the perfect role for me.

Two years ago, I took the exciting step

of setting up Mo Gannon & Associates as sole director. MG&A provides market consultancy within agriculture & animal health. I was very fortunate to keep with me the core team with whom I had worked for the last 10 years people who I respect a great deal for their work and even more as people. I am very lucky to be able to say I genuinely love my job and the people with whom I work.

What has been your involvement with BSAVA?

I've been a Congress attendee for the last 15 years, and an exhibitor for some of those years. I wouldn't miss it for the world. It is a great opportunity to catch up with many people in the industry and also network with a few new ones.

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would-be members broad-reaching questions about BSAVA's current economic, functional and emotional offering and about what BSAVA could offer in the future. This will then be followed up by larger scale quantitative research with a wider audience so we ensure that the initiatives of most value to the profession are developed. The research, both qualitative and quantitative, will be carried out in the latter half of this year. If you are contacted to take part in the research, we would ask you to take part and make a difference in building your association.

What, in your opinion, are the key challenges that face the veterinary profession today?

There are a few old challenges that the profession faces regularly:

- The importance of a professional and welcoming receptionist with a want-to-help attitude. I have met some shockers in my day!
- The importance of vets charging for their expertise rather than putting higher mark ups on medicines. This will be a slow migration but becoming increasingly more important as internet shopping in general and internet pharmacies in particular take hold. Although undoubtedly the first port of call in an emergency, we need to continue to develop the practice as the first port of call for any pet health enquiry.
- This then leads on to offering transparent pricing and discussing options with associated costs up front to avoid owner surprises and a generating a fear of coming in to the practice to get general advice; preferring to go to the pet shop or Googling it.
- Be seen to add value – Boosters seem like an expense for no visible benefit. In times of hardship, it would be very easy for owners to cut back on routine healthcare, especially for older pets. Explaining what is being checked

during the booster vaccination appointment as it is being done e.g. ears, heart, weight etc is important for owners to understand the value of the service. It never ceases to amaze me when researching life-long pet owners, that despite the millions spent on education by various vet pharma companies, how very little they know about the basics of fleas, worms, what the vaccinations cover and why they remain important, not to mention the importance of diet and being a healthy weight.

And there are a few newer challenges:

- The challenge for smaller practices to complete with the 5+ man practices and corporates in terms of providing 24/7 care within the working time regulation and provision of equipment and services of a comparable standard to the larger practices.
- With the relaxing of the pet travel scheme rules, how do we keep the non endemic diseases (some of which are zoonotic) out of UK? How do we train the profession to ask the right questions before and after travel and how we diagnose these non endemic diseases which may remain dormant for many months after travel, especially when the pet (or rescue animal) presents as apparently healthy on landing? How do we get the message across to the pet owning public about the importance of these diseases to man and pets?

Formal market research is not within easy reach of all veterinary practices – but what would you say practices can do for themselves?

It is easy for us all to assume that we know what people want – especially in an area that we know well. This, however, can be a costly mistake to make as the first time we realise there is a problem, it has already cost us emotionally and financially. The old adage goes it is

cheaper to retain customers than attract new ones, is certainly true as is the adage that a happy customer will tell one person and an unhappy customer will tell seven! Ideally, all practices would conduct a customer satisfaction survey amongst its clients periodically.

This would:

- Confirm or challenge commonly held views in the practice
- Highlight any awareness issues e.g. most owners may not be aware of certain facilities or specialism's offered by the practice. Simply promoting these areas could build loyalty by confirming a good buying decision to use the practice and gain new clients through word of mouth (we know pet owners come from a family of pet owners and discuss their pets whilst walking the dog)
- Ensure that your clients feel that they are getting a professional and caring service from stepping through the door to going home and throughout the life stages of their pet from kitten / puppy until the inevitable loss
- Identify what clients want more of or want less of. For example, the importance of always seeing the same vet, separate waiting rooms (or appointment slots) for cats and dogs, highlight any areas that could be introduced such as a practice open day, any specific nurse clinics for puppies & kittens, obesity, senior pets, fleas & worms etc
- Identify what makes / could make your clients feel valued

The only way to be certain a practice can answer these questions is to ask the users of a product or service – your clients. You may be surprised by what they tell you and even more surprised to find out ultimately how it affects your bottom line. You may also find that some veterinary pharmaceutical companies may sponsor this service. It may be worth asking your territory manager. ■