

# RxWorks Case Study: Armidale Animal Hospital



## A Fresh Look at Finance, Quality Service and the Art of Automation

Hugh White, Founder and Partner  
Armidale Veterinary Hospital, NSW, Australia

“We are known as the most expensive practice in the area, and our clients respond well to that fact,” says Hugh White, founder and owner of Armidale Veterinary Hospital in New South Wales. “Why? Because we believe that to provide optimal diagnostics and treatment options, and to best serve clients, it does cost more. You need to have state-of-the-art equipment, automated processes, and sufficient staffing levels to provide the best. Our clients understand that reality and appreciate the effort we make to go the extra mile on their behalf.”

In an industry that frequently shies away from the topic of fees, this forthright approach has worked well for Armidale. Founded in 1985 by Hugh White, Armidale Veterinary Hospital, located in Armidale, NSW, also has a branch clinic in Guyra, and is staffed by three full-time and one part-time vet and six support staff. Armidale is a mixed animal practice providing care not only to companion animals but cattle, sheep, and horses over an 80 kilometer area.

Hugh White and his partner Nigel Scott, who joined Armidale in 1993, operate their practice based on three straight-forward principles: strive to provide the best care and client service available, understand the overall cost of running a quality-focused business, then track and bill accurately for all services provided.

“Vet clinics are notorious for undercharging, and most missed fees are due to human error,” says White. “With advancements in practice management technology today, there’s no reason to incur the sometimes significant loss associated with missed charges.”

### Automation: Baseline for Success

White realized early on the importance that technology and process automation could have on his ability to run and grow his practice. In 1990, he began a search for a practice management system that could help eliminate handwritten notes, improve stock control, help eliminate missed fees, and bolster his ability to communicate effectively with clients. He took on the responsibility himself – traveling to other clinics and viewing their systems in action. Most systems in the 90s were focused on small animal practices, but none appeared to do a good job in the mixed practice environment. Eventually, White chose to go with a system produced by the company now known as RxWorks. Unlike other systems, RxWorks software did accommodate a mixed animal practice. Equally important, White felt the company would listen to his needs and continue to build in features and flexibility that would keep pace with his growing practice. Sixteen years later, he’s still with RxWorks, and believes strongly in one basic principle: When it comes to automation, you get out a system what you put into it.

The difference in design is significant when it comes to treating pets, serving clients and tracking results.

“Our system ‘knows’ our specific quality of care standards, and automatically prompts us when a pet is due for worming, the next vaccination, or a reorder on pet food or supplies,” said White. Armidale automatically generates advance mail reminders, or any staff member can alert a client of needed care items at the time of appointment. As a result, clients and animals are better served, while sales of clinic products and services increase.

## Reaping What You Sow: Automated Stock Control

Armidale's approach to stock control is a good example of Hugh White's "reap what you sow" approach to practice management technology. "In any practice, stock control is central both to the level of service you can provide, and to your financial bottom line," said White. "The simple fact is most clinics don't use automated stock control to its full potential, so they don't reap the associated rewards." At Armidale, inventory management is a fully automated process. Each product carried at Armidale is entered into the RxWorks system, or as Practice Manager Cathy Coulter puts it "everything from needles to syringes to every drop of liquid resides in the database". From that point on, automation takes over.

Coulter outlines a typical day at the clinic:

Each morning, with one key click, the system alerts Cathy to what needs to be ordered. She may spot-check items manually to verify the inventory levels, and can easily modify, delete, or add in special orders to the system.

Since the RxWorks system provides interfaces to other applications important to the practice, Cathy then electronically orders replacement inventory through Provet's eOrder software. Provet automatically fills the order, then transmits a goods receipt and invoice back to the RxWorks System

Once product is received, inventory levels are automatically adjusted and any price changes are also updated automatically.

Of course, stock is not only a daily concern, but a seasonal issue. Since Armidale has all stock items resident in the system, they can flag items for seasonal ordering. At the right time of year, the system reminds Cathy to reorder seasonal items.

Front desk "over the counter" sales are also automated. When a product is sold, Armidale uses a bar scanner to capture the item and associated price in the system.

The result of this approach? "I can't make mistakes anymore, because I'm not manually entering five pages of invoices into the system," says Coulter. This degree of automation ensures accuracy, reduces missed charges and frees staff to spend time doing what they do best – treating animals and serving clients.

"We have other clinics calling here all the time to find out about our stock control approach," Coulter adds. "Large, busy clinics will tend to argue that they're too busy to enter stock into the system one time. But if you won't make time to record that an item exists, how can you expect to control your stock?"

## Hand in Hand: Quality Service and Revenue Gain

Armidale also fully utilizes their system's HealthCare Manager feature to track activity from the time a pet arrives at the clinic, through consultation, treatment and checkout. Rather than being designed around invoicing, the RxWorks system is built instead around real-time progress tracking and notes-driven updates of medical records. This difference in design is significant when it comes to treating pets, serving clients and tracking results.

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The system also allows Armidale to store standard approaches to specific procedures. For example, when dealing with a cesarean procedure in cows, the system displays how time should be charged and what drugs should be used – thereby allowing all vets to hit the same quality of healthcare parameters while ensuring no charges are missed.

Finally, a high degree of personalized client communication is enabled through automation. Staff are automatically prompted to call clients whose pets have been discharged after surgery, to ensure all is well. Long-standing clients can be easily identified by the system for a special Christmas mailing or other acknowledgement. "Essentially, the system allows us not only to promote ourselves better but to recognize and reward our clients more quickly and fully", said Coulter.

## Reporting on Success

Armidale keeps a close eye on how they're doing by using the system's extensive reporting capabilities. With the click of a button each Monday morning, Cathy Coulter generates a financial at-a-glance that shows for the previous week how the practice performed, including all services provided and associated vet fees, over the counter sales, and client payment status – including those who haven't paid and why.

Then it's off to start another busy week for a clinic that continues to flourish by focusing on the bottom line in order to offer the best possible service.