

# Incorporating small ruminant theriogenology in private practice: Creating a brand that keeps producing

**N. Isaac Bott, DVM**

Mountain West Animal Hospital, Inc., Springville, UT 84663, (801) 489-9676, isaac@docbott.com

## Abstract

Today's small ruminant practitioners are expected to provide herd health and management services that require a sound understanding of a variety of species. These veterinarians spend time working with small ruminants, particularly goats and sheep. This small ruminant category also includes camelids, such as llamas and alpacas, and cervids, such as deer and elk. A tremendous amount of assisted reproductive technologies in sheep, whitetail deer and non-domestic bovids are currently being provided by non-veterinarians. The purpose of this lecture will be to familiarize the mixed-animal and small ruminant veterinarian with marketing ideas and practical advice on how to incorporate small ruminant theriogenology in private practice.

**Key words:** small ruminant, cervid, sheep, goat, camelid, theriogenology, private practice

## Résumé

De nos jours, on demande aux praticiens chez les petits ruminants de fournir des services de santé du troupeau et des conseils de régie qui exigent de bien connaître une grande variété d'espèces. Ces vétérinaires passent un certain temps à travailler avec des petits ruminants surtout des chèvres et des moutons. La catégorie des petits ruminants inclut aussi les camélidés comme le lama et l'alpaga et des cervidés comme le cerf et l'élan (ou wapiti). Des non-vétérinaires fournissent actuellement une grande quantité de technologies de reproduction assistée chez les ovins, les cerfs de Virginie et les bovidés non domestiques. Le but de cette présentation est de familiariser le vétérinaire en pratique mixte et de petits ruminants avec des idées de mise en marché et des conseils pratiques pour pouvoir inclure la thériogénologie des petits ruminants dans la pratique privée.

## Introduction

Goats live on approximately 128,000 farms in the United States, according to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, with a population of roughly 2.6 million. Sheep are on fewer farms, 88,000, but are more numerous, with a population of about 5.4 million. Llamas, alpacas, deer, and elk also live on thousands of farms but are much less numerous than goats or sheep. This provides tremendous opportunity for

veterinarians with interest in small ruminant practice, and in particular small ruminant theriogenology practice. During this presentation, we will discuss some advances in small ruminant theriogenology and how providing these services can help you stand out in today's competitive market. We will also discuss the potential of social media marketing and how to effectively promote your unique brand.

## Identifying Opportunity

According to a 2009 goat study performed by the National Animal Health Monitoring System of the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, "About one-third of operations had consulted a veterinarian during the previous 12 months. While it is unclear why so few operations used a veterinarian, 1 reason could be the difficulty in finding a veterinarian experienced in working with goats." A similar 2011 NAHMS report on sheep reveal that 51.8% of operations had consulted with a private veterinarian during the preceding year, up from 46.1% in 2001. Of note, "Approximately twice the percentage of operations consulted a veterinarian for disease diagnosis, disease prevention, and lambing problems in 2011 than in 2001." Additionally, a 2014 NAHMS cervid study revealed that "About half of all operations had a veterinarian visit during the study reference period."

Each of these studies show significant opportunity for veterinary services and consultation. The challenge that veterinarians face is how to market veterinary services to these farming operations. How does a veterinarian market the value of the services that he or she provides? How do we convince potential clients that our services exceed the scope of animal disease and illness?

## Equipment

Small ruminant theriogenology work begins with a breeding soundness evaluation in both males and females. In addition to standard veterinary supplies, this procedure requires an ultrasound, an appropriate electroejaculator, a scrotal tape, a quality microscope, and methods for appropriate restraint. A sigmoidoscope speculum is a useful instrument that can be used to facilitate visualization of the vagina and cervix in small ruminants. Laparoscopic equipment is useful and imperative for sheep and some cervid work, but experience and practice are required to become proficient in practical and efficacious use. Hand-held endoscopes that have

wireless transmission are becoming more common in small ruminant theriogenology and provide a valuable visualization tool for the client. Smart phone and tablet applications can be downloaded that can livestream a vaginoscopy or artificial insemination procedure for teaching purposes. The costs associated with equipment can vary tremendously. Quality equipment must be considered a sound investment for the success of any small ruminant theriogenology program.

### **Social Media Marketing**

We live in an age of social media. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and websites have opened communication around the globe like nothing before. Social media platforms can provide free exposure and advertising that, when used judiciously, can exponentially grow a practice. Of all social media platforms, Facebook seems to provide the best platform to help drive clients through your clinic doors.

It is important to remember the geographic nature of your veterinary practice, and hone your Facebook and blog content accordingly.

Engagement is the goal when posting on Facebook. Creating and posting original, educational content is a great

way to reach potential consumers. Posting frequently is key to keeping your audience engaged. The more people like, comment and share your post, the more visible it will become. When the veterinary practice posts engaging content, their fans will often share the posts to their page. And, that “share” will link back to you and will help build your following.

It is important to remember that if you’re not building clients, you’re wasting your time. When used appropriately, social media will help to improve the relationships with and education of your clients.

### **Conclusion**

Veterinarians who find themselves involved in small ruminant medicine on any level have an obligation to educate themselves about small ruminant diseases, pharmacology, reproduction, and herd health. When this knowledge is attained, application of social media marketing and sound communication skills will help a private practitioner incorporate small ruminant theriogenology in private practice.