



### **Be a Better Surfer:**

#### **How Pet Owners can navigate the sea of information (and misinformation) to get the best from the Internet**

The Internet can provide a wealth of instructive, accurate, and worthwhile information that can help you better care for your pet. The Internet can also be an excellent source for online support groups when you are going through a difficult time with your pet. The Internet, however, can also be a source of misinformation and a marketing mechanism for disreputable persons and companies selling untested and unproven remedies. The following guidelines will help you safely navigate the Internet and find information that will truly benefit you and your pet:

- 1) Start by talking to your veterinarian to confirm the specific diagnosis and/or the specific name of the symptom that your pet is exhibiting.
- 2) Some of the best sites for reliable information are College of Veterinary Medicine websites. Search for information on these sites by entering the words "veterinary college" or "veterinary school" after the name of the disease or symptom that you are researching.
- 3) If your pet has a breed-specific disease, pay a visit to the site hosted by that specific breed's national organization.
- 4) Disease specific online forums can be a great source of support. Check out those sponsored by Yahoo (<http://groups.yahoo.com>). Not only can they provide a wealth of educational information, members can provide a wealth of emotional support. Look for a group that focuses on a specific disease, has lots of members, and has been around for several years. Look for groups that have multiple moderators who screen participants, screen comments, and present more than one point of view. Also, moderators increase the probability of round-the clock support. Look for presentation of cited references (clinical research that supports what is being recommended). These groups should have a homepage that explains the focus of the group and provides the number of members and posts per month. They may also have public archives of previous posts that can provide a wealth of information.
- 5) Be wary of anecdotal information and remarkable or miraculous cures. As fascinating as these stories seem, don't let them significantly influence the choices that you make for your pet.
- 6) AVOID business-sponsored Websites that stand to make money when you believe and act on what they profess by purchasing a product that they have for sale.