

CAVEAT EMPROR

LET THE BUYER BEWARE

Installment 1: FREE EQUIPMENT?

Just when you think you have seen it all, another gimmick pops up in the x-ray business. Over the years, there have been countless offers of “free” equipment, supplies or services. Among the many definitions of the word “free”, the Merriam-Webster dictionary includes “not costing or charging anything”. This seems pretty simple and unambiguous; free means free. Well, not really. As I learned in grade school from Sister Delores: “What you don’t make on the peaches, you add to the price of the bananas”.

In the x-ray business “free” usually means that someone is trying to convince you that you are not paying for something that in some way usually costs you something (remember the peaches and the bananas). Sound confusing? Right! We suspect that these offers are most likely designed to be confusing.

Two of the current “free offers” involve “free digital” x-ray equipment. Can you imagine equipment that typically sells for \$25,000 to over \$100,000 being free? Remember the Merriam-Webster definition: “not costing or charging anything”. And while you are at it, keep in mind the wisdom of Sister Delores.

In the first of these “free offers” you can get a Fuji Prima CR system. Not a bad price for a system that typically costs more than many new cars. In order to get the “free” CR system, all you have to do is sign up for some sort of agreement that provides service for the life of some of your imaging equipment. We have been told that the cost of this “service for life” exceeds \$20,000 and by the way you need to pay for this in advance. That is, paying in advance of getting the “free” Fuji CR or whatever service is called for by the agreement. This could be a great deal for the dealer but I am not so sure that it is such a great deal for your practice. Some questions are in order:

- If the CR is free, why do you need to sign up for a service agreement that will likely cost more than you would if you simply bought the equipment?
- Is there a reason you have to pay now in order to get service over some number of years? Remember, they are not charging you for the CR; it is free isn’t it?
- How often do you pay in advance for a \$20,000 plus service agreement?
- What if you pay the \$20,000 plus and do not like the service? Do you get your money back? (If you would get your money back, I bet you do not get to keep the CR!)

The next installment of CAVEAT EMPTOR will deal with another “free” digital equipment offer that involves veterinary lab services. It is similar to the “free” CR but the dollars are much greater (hint: think over \$50,000).