



Quick and Dirty Veterinary Social Media: Shortcuts to Getting Social Media Off the Ground

Jessica Vogelsang, DVM
Director, Pawcurious Media

Content presented at the 2017 Hill's Global Symposium
in Washington D.C., May 5 - 6, 2017.

All too often, when people want to jump-start a social media strategy, they lead by asking "How?" Give me the tools! Show me what apps to download! Teach me how to edit a picture! They spend hundreds of dollars learning all these technologies and downloading software, and then once this massive infrastructure is in place, they have no idea what to do with it. How many times have you seen clinics hire an outside company to come in, get everything set up, and they still wind up with boring posts and zero engagement? After spending thousands of dollars and seeing little ROI, it's no wonder some business owners choose to ignore social media – but they are making a big mistake.

Social media, when used correctly, is a powerful tool for a small business. In veterinary medicine, we are uniquely positioned to take advantage of it, as we are an industry that naturally creates compelling stories and strong emotional bonds, which drive social media engagement. It attracts the type of clients you want and enhances

the bond of those clients you already work with. If you don't have a social media presence, you might as well not exist in the eyes of many people.

Here's the thing many people don't realize: the best veterinary social media is done in house, because only you understand the story of your practice. And understanding that is truly the key that makes the rest of it fall into place. Good journalists know that the 5 Ws are the key to a coherent story, and that same principle can be applied to your social media strategy. Once you know what to post and why you are posting it, the 'how' becomes much, much simpler.

WHO

Who are you? People assume you know veterinary medicine – you don't need to prove that. They want to know the people behind the scrubs, what they stand for and what they care about. Featuring your employees builds trust.

In veterinary medicine, we are uniquely positioned to take advantage of it, as we are an industry that naturally creates compelling stories and strong emotional bonds, which drive social media engagement.

WHAT

If you were to describe what your practice does in one sentence, what would that be? Is it, “We sell stuff?” “We talk about heartworm disease?” That’s how people’s eyes glaze over. Loyalty programs and dental month specials are very effective sales tools in the clinic, and used sparingly can be ok on social media occasionally. Better on social media are stories that describe what you do in more general terms: You fix people’s best friends. You heal. You make kids smile and seniors bring you cookies. You value your relationships.

Better on social media are stories that describe what you do in more general terms: You fix people’s best friends. You heal. You make kids smile and seniors bring you cookies.

WHERE

Your location informs your story. Are you in a large city or a small town? How does your clinic fit into the local community? As opposed to a global entity like Coca-Cola or Starbucks, you have the advantage of being able to discuss local events that dovetail with your clinic story; dog-friendly events, community walks. You want to establish that you are a part of the local tribe, which will set you apart from a larger corporate entity (unless you are a large corporate entity and then you have your own set of rules). This establishes common values.

WHEN

Social media is defined by immediacy. Stay on top of current events and

news, and don’t be afraid to share those things if doing so supports your clinic story.

WHY

WHY is the most important question you must answer on social media. Why are you here? Why should clients trust you? Telling the story of what motivates you will allow your followers to fill in the blanks for themselves: because you care. Because you commit to providing the best care possible. Because you are also pet parents.

HOW

Once you know what stories to tell, how you tell them becomes much easier. The specific technologies of social media change yearly, but the stories always stay the same. Here are some general guidelines for getting started:

Platforms: Keep up with a minimum of 2, ideally 3. For our industry, Facebook and Instagram are the major players. Because they are now owned by the same company, they integrate well.

Facebook: 71% of adult internet users are on Facebook, which makes it the must-have social media site. People will find you there to leave reviews, tag you in photos and comments, and drive awareness of your brand to their friends. Facebook is also the best place to spend your advertising dollars, offering options for extremely hyper-targeted ads, the ability to boost specific posts that are performing well, and lead ads to drive people to join your newsletter lists.

Instagram: This is the fastest-growing platform for users in the 18-29 age demographic. It is highly visual, which is fantastic for our industry. The use of

hashtags makes it easy for people to sort posts by location and topic.

Optional: Twitter, Snapchat, Pinterest all have similar numbers and can be good side platforms for driving clicks.

TOOLS

It’s easier than ever to run a beautiful-looking social media account without

It’s easier than ever to run a beautiful-looking social media account without the need to invest in new cameras, microphones, or software. All you need is a mobile device!

the need to invest in new cameras, microphones, or software. All you need is a mobile device!

The resolution and quality of the images is better than the expensive DSLRs of just a few years ago.

Editing tools: For editing photos, Canva, picmonkey, and Snapseed are just a few simple and powerful photo apps. For movies, iMovie is still the gold standard.

Schedulers: Don’t be afraid to use auto-scheduling software if it helps you keep up with posting for a once-a-day minimum. The posts may not be seen by as many people as they would if you scheduled them directly, but it’s still better than nothing. Some popular options are Hootsuite, MeetEdgar, Grum.