A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Likes

Use these 3 winning Instagram strategies to attract more followers and gain new clients.

By Naren Arulrajah

With well over 2 billion monthly active users,[1] Facebook may be the reigning king of social media, but it is not necessarily the most brand-friendly social network platform for businesses. Instead, Instagram is the rising star of the social sphere. The image-based network now has 10 times more brand engagement than Facebook[2] and is expected to soon reach the billion-user milestone.[3]

This growing platform is especially well suited for veterinary content. If you are wondering how many animal lovers and pet parents use Instagram, consider these numbers: There are more than 85 million posts tagged #catsofinstagram and 108 million tagged #dogsofinstagram, but just 4.5 million tagged #kidsofinstagram.*
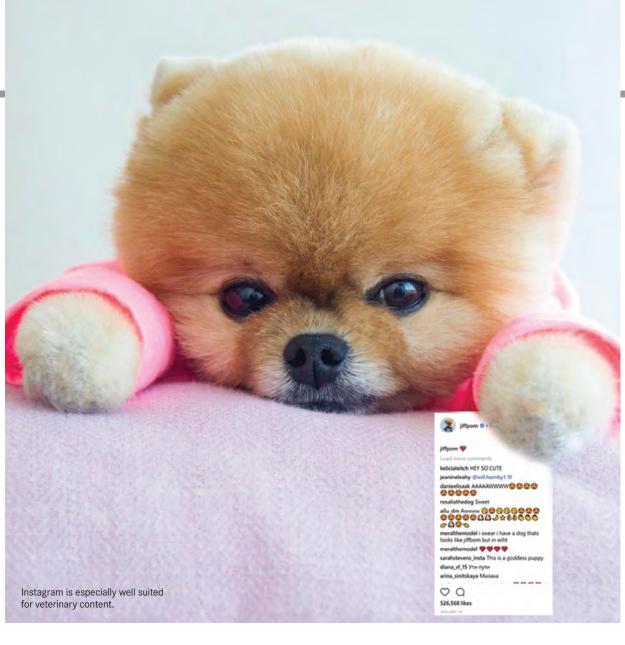
If your practice doesn't already have an Instagram account, the good news is that getting started is easy and business accounts are linked to Facebook pages. Simply log in to your personal Instagram account, go to settings and select "Switch to Business Profile." If you administer multiple pages, you will need to select your veterinary practice from the list. Instagram will pull information from your Facebook page, so very little is needed to complete your business profile.

Now you have an account on an engagement-eager network with millions of pet lovers. How can you get their attention, build an audience and acquire leads?

CREATE AMAZING VISUALS

Because Instagram is a photo-sharing network, it should come as no surprise that a photo is the most important feature of any post. Every picture makes a statement. Poor-quality photos and uninspired clip art will appear unprofessional and sloppy. Try these tips to create top-notch imagery:

- **Use the right tools.** You can download apps such as Adobe Spark and Canva to create collages, memes, and more, and they require only minimal technical skills. Simply start with a template and customize it with your image, text, and practice logo.
- **Choose stock photos carefully.** When possible, steer clear of using stock photos. Original images are more authentic, interesting, and personalized. If you need a stock photo, make sure the picture is high quality and relevant to the post. Avoid overused

images—if you recognize them from ads or memes, other people will too.
- **Hire a professional.** Do-it-yourself options are available, but for maximum customization and quality, consider hiring a professional photographer or graphic designer.
- **Don't be basic.** Simple photographs are ideal for Instagram, but don't be afraid to mix it up with funny pet memes, cartoons, quotes, and videos.

USE HASHTAGS CORRECTLY

Take advantage of hashtags to generate buzz around your brand and make your content more discoverable. Posts with 4 or 5 hashtags earn about 60% more engagement than those with none.[4] Tips for choosing hashtags:

- **Do your research.** When you begin typing a hashtag, Instagram will generate a list of options and show the number of posts that already use each tag. You can also use tools such as hashtagify. me or hashtag.org (both subscription services) for in-depth hashtag research.
- **Be descriptive.** The more popular a hashtag is, the higher the competition for it will be. Additionally, the highest-rated tags tend to be general. For example, #cat is used in millions of posts, meaning you will quickly be crowded out of search results. On the other hand, #mammacat and #kittencare have around 1000 posts each, indicating a more targeted audience with less competition.
- **Use local hashtags.** General hashtags are used around the world, whereas location-specific tags will target people near your practice. If you are in a larger city, you will probably find a number of relevant tags
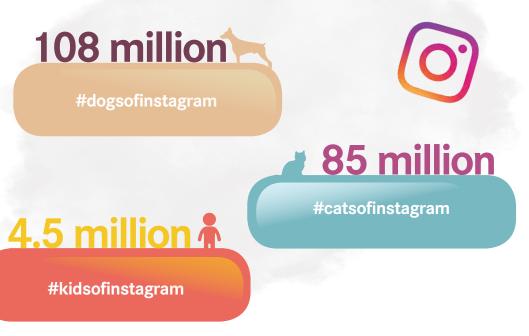
that are already trending. For example, there are over 27,600 posts tagged #catsofseattle and more than 89,000 with #miamidogs.*
- **Create your own.** Generic hashtags (those not specific to your practice) aid discoverability, but branded hashtags draw people together around a specific topic. They are most often used with contests, promotions, special events and anything that will create social media conversations. For example, if you hold a free vaccination clinic, you might encourage people to share pictures of their vaccinated pets using a designated hashtag.
- **Use tags sparingly.** The Instagram audience is more tolerant of excessive hashtags than users of other networks. However, that doesn't mean more is always better. Too many hashtags can make your post look spammy and unprofessional, especially if they're not relevant to the image.

RUN CONTESTS

This is probably the fastest way to generate buzz on Instagram. The simplest contests can be administered manually. For more complex promotions, or those attracting a high number of entries, consider purchasing a subscription to contest management software such as Wishpond or Woobox.

Before you launch a promotion, check your local laws. Depending on your location, accidentally stepping over a legal line may be surprisingly easy, even for a contest with a very modest prize. Additionally, familiarize yourself with Instagram's rules.[5] They are rather basic, but you should take the time to read and understand the latest guidelines before you get started.

Instagram is especially well suited for veterinary content.

jiffpom (@jiffpom) / Instagram

*As of press time.

Considering these hashtag numbers, it's clear how many pet lovers use Instagram.

108 million
#dogsofinstagram

85 million
#catsofinstagram

4.5 million
#kidsofinstagram

Once you know what you can do, it's time to create your contest. Start by identifying a goal and choosing a relevant theme. If you want to attract cat owners, for example, you might have a contest for the funniest cat photo.

The next step is creating your own rules and guidelines. Summarize them in 1 or 2 lines for inclusion in contest promotions, and make a detailed version available on your website. Rules should include:

- **Prize.** The best option is usually a gift certificate for your practice or a free sample of a product you sell.
- **Entry eligibility.** Decide what qualifies as an entry and whether there are restrictions. For example, in a photo contest, each picture is an entry. You might require that the image be original and inoffensive and include a pet. Alternately, in a "caption this" contest, each suggested caption is an entry. You might include an acceptable character count and forbid explicit words.
- **Participant eligibility.** Are there age restrictions? Can people enter more than once? Is the contest open to the public or just your clients?
- **How to enter.** The simplest Instagram photo contest requires a participant to share a photo, tag your practice, and include a branded hashtag. There are other options, such as requiring a like or comment and allowing entries on other networks. However, you cannot ask people to tag others who are not actually in the picture.
- **Judging.** Who will choose the winner? If the voting is going to be public, will you provide an online ballot, count likes, or use another voting system? What will you do if there is a tie?
- **Dates.** You need to establish when you'll begin accepting entries, the final deadline, when voting will begin and end, and when the winner will be announced.

The internet loves pictures of animals, making Instagram an ideal marketing opportunity for veterinarians. If you aren't making use of it, now is the time to start. ∎

References available at AmericanVeterinarian.com.

Mr. Arulrajah is president and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, a complete internet marketing company that focuses on SEO, social media, marketing education and the online reputations of veterinarians/practice owners. With a team of 180+ full-time marketers, ekwa.com helps practice owners who know where they want to go, get there by dominating their market and growing their business significantly year after year. If you have questions about marketing your practice online, call 855-598-3320 to speak one-on-one with Naren.

Mirataz™
(mirtazapine transdermal ointment)

For topical application in cats only. Not for oral or ophthalmic use.

CAUTION: Federal law (USA) restricts this drug to use by or on the order of a licensed veterinarian.

Before using this product, please consult the product insert, a summary of which follows:

INDICATION: Mirataz™ is indicated for the management of weight loss in cats.

DOSAGE AND ADMINISTRATION: Administer topically by applying a 1.5-inch ribbon of ointment (approximately 2 mg/cat) on the inner pinna of the cat's ear once daily for 14 days. Wear disposable gloves when applying Mirataz™. Alternate the daily application of Mirataz™ between the left and right inner pinna of the ears. **See Product Insert for complete dosing and administration information.**

CONTRAINDICATIONS: Mirataz™ is contraindicated in cats with a known hypersensitivity to mirtazapine or to any of the excipients. Mirataz™ should not be given in combination, or within 14 days before or after treatment with a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) [e.g. selegiline hydrochloride (L-deprenyl), amitraz], as there may be an increased risk of serotonin syndrome.

HUMAN WARNINGS: Not for human use. Keep out of reach of children. **Wear disposable gloves when handling or applying Mirataz™ to prevent accidental topical exposure.** After application, dispose of used gloves and wash hands with soap and water. After application, care should be taken that people or other animals in the household do not come in contact with the treated cat for 2 hours because mirtazapine can be absorbed transdermally and orally. However, negligible residues are present at the application site and the body of the cat at 2 hours after dosing. In case of accidental skin exposure, wash thoroughly with soap and warm water. In case of accidental eye exposure, flush eyes with water. If skin or eye irritation occurs seek medical attention. In case of accidental ingestion, or if skin or eye irritation occurs, seek medical attention.

PRECAUTIONS: Do not administer orally or to the eye. Use with caution in cats with hepatic disease. Mirtazapine may cause elevated serum liver enzymes (See **Animal Safety** in the product insert). Use with caution in cats with kidney disease. Kidney disease may cause reduced clearance of mirtazapine which may result in higher drug exposure. Upon discontinuation of Mirataz™, it is important to monitor the cat's food intake. Food intake may lessen after discontinuation of mirtazapine transdermal ointment. If food intake diminishes dramatically (>75%) for several days, or if the cat stops eating for more than 48 hours, reevaluate the cat. Mirataz™ has not been evaluated in cats < 2 kg or less than 6 months of age. The safe use of Mirataz™ has not been evaluated in cats that are intended for breeding, pregnant or lactating cats.

ADVERSE REACTIONS: In a randomized, double-masked, vehicle-controlled field study to assess the effectiveness and safety of mirtazapine for the management of weight loss in cats, 115 cats treated with Mirataz™ and 115 cats treated with vehicle control were evaluated for safety. The vehicle control was an ointment containing the same inert ingredients as Mirataz™ without mirtazapine. The most common adverse reactions included application site reactions, behavioral abnormalities (vocalization and hyperactivity), and vomiting. **See Product Insert for complete Adverse Reaction information.** To report suspected adverse events, for technical assistance or to obtain a copy of the SDS, contact Kindred Biosciences, Inc. at 888-608-2542. For additional information about adverse drug experience reporting for animal drugs, contact FDA at 1-888-FDA-VETS or online at **http://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/SafetyHealth**.

EFFECTIVENESS: The effectiveness of Mirataz™ (mirtazapine transdermal ointment) was demonstrated in a randomized, double-masked, vehicle-controlled, multi-site field study involving client-owned cats of various breeds. Enrolled cats were ≥ 1 year of age and had existing documented medical history of ≥ 5% weight loss deemed clinically significant. The most common pre-existing conditions included renal insufficiency, vomiting, and hyperthyroidism. Some cats had more than one pre-existing condition. Cats were randomized to treatment groups in a 1:1 ratio of Mirataz™ to vehicle control. A total of 230 cats were enrolled and received either Mirataz™ (115 cats) or a vehicle control (115 cats) containing the same inert ingredients without mirtazapine. The cats were 2.8-24.6 years of age and weighed 2.1-9.2 kg. The dosage was a 1.5-inch ribbon (approximately 2 mg/cat) mirtazapine or vehicle ointment administered topically to the inner pinna of the cat's ear. A total of 177 cats were determined to be eligible for the effectiveness analysis; 83 cats were in the Mirataz™ group and 94 cats were in the vehicle control group. The primary effectiveness endpoint was the mean percent change in body weight from Day 1 to the Week 2 Visit. At Week 2, the mean percent increase in body weight from Day 1 was 3.94% in the mirtazapine group and 0.41% in the vehicle control group. The difference between the two groups was significant ($p < 0.0001$) based on a two-sample t-test assuming equal variances. A 95% confidence interval on the mean percent change in body weight for the Mirataz™ group is (2.77, 5.11), demonstrating that the mean percent change is statistically different from and greater than 0.

STORAGE: Store below 25°C (77°F). Multi-use tube. Discard within 30 days of first use.

HOW SUPPLIED: Mirataz™ is supplied in a 5 gram aluminum tube.

MANUFACTURED FOR:
Kindred Biosciences, Inc.
1555 Bayshore Highway, suite 200
Burlingame, CA 94010

NADA 141-481, Approved by FDA
Made in USA.
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