

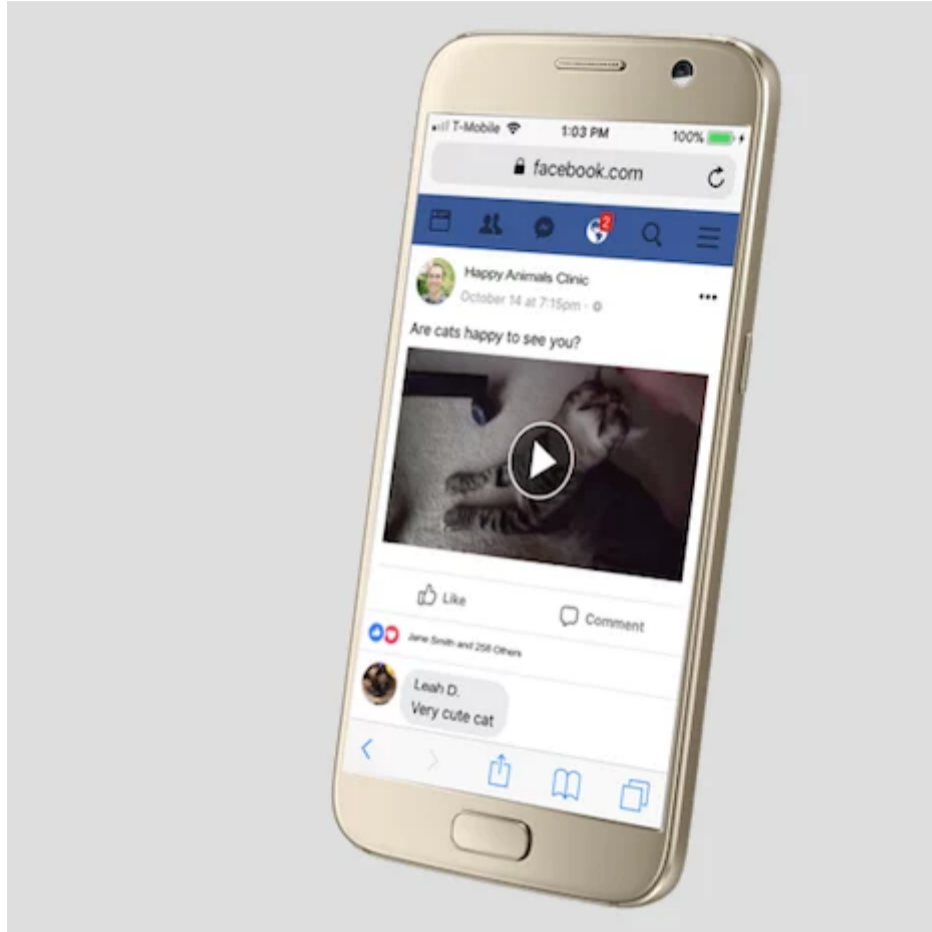
Power-Packed Digital Marketing Strategies

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Establishing an online presence may seem simple, but simply having a presence isn't enough. Position your practice for success with these proven tactics.



At first glance, digital marketing for your veterinary practice might seem easy. Establishing an online presence can be as simple as having a website and joining a few social networks, right?

Unfortunately, just having an online presence won't earn you new customers or engage the ones you already have. Without some strategic planning, you'll find yourself standing in a dark corner of the virtual world, present but not seen. If this is happening to you, try these strategies to propel your marketing – and your practice – to the next level.

Build a High-Performance Website

A decade ago, clients were impressed if you had a website at all. It showed that your practice was progressive and that you were making an effort to reach out. Pet owners appreciated the convenience of finding basic information online, such as your practice location and contact information.

Times have changed, though, and very quickly. Today, every business is expected to have a website. And if you want to stand out, your website needs to stand out.

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You won't get a second chance to make a first impression and neither will your website. The average visitor will form an opinion within a half-second of the page loading.¹ Of course, that is not enough time to read an article, watch a video or even examine a photo closely.

To make a great first impression, you need a cohesive and aesthetically pleasing design. Pay attention to details such as color choices, shapes, graphics and visual layout of text. Is the page welcoming? Does it draw in the viewer?

Once you have a viewer's attention, the next challenge is keeping and directing it. Here are some smart ways to do that:

- **Use real photographs – and lots of them.** Pictures of your office and team help personalize your website. They allow the user to get to know your practice and they establish credibility. Multiple case studies have found that replacing stock photos with genuine, original pictures can increase conversion by more than 30 percent to 40 percent.^{2,3}

- **Include videos.** These can range from educational content to cute animals. No matter what the topic, videos garner engagement. They are also highly sharable, so be sure that your website includes convenient share buttons.
- **Lead the viewer.** Americans read from left to right, top to bottom. The eyes are trained to this pattern, even when scanning. Include your practice name and logo, phone number and contact buttons in the header. Use bright colors, standout shapes or directional graphics to draw the viewer to the most important page elements.
- **Provide educational content.** Your website can serve as nothing more than an online advertisement for your practice, or it can be a go-to information source for current and prospective clients. Just think of the issues you are asked about most frequently, such as the appropriate age for spaying and neutering, signs of certain diseases, feeding schedules and vaccinations. People are looking online for information about these topics. When you become their trusted resource, you position yourself as an expert and begin building an audience.

Garner Social Media Success

When you think of social media success, you might think of followers (or friends or page likes, depending on the platform). This number is often used to gauge the popularity of a person or business, and it is the subject of many social media marketing articles. However, the number of followers you have is not a measure of success, and it should not be your No. 1 concern.

Acquiring an audience may seem daunting when you first join a new network, but you can easily use existing channels to reach out. Include social media links on your website and in your emails, and list your handle for each platform on printed ads and communications. You can gain exposure more quickly with paid advertising, although you risk a lower-quality audience unless the ads are well targeted.

Once you are established, gaining followers doesn't have to be a high priority. One of the remarkable things about social media is that your audience and reach continue to multiply with minimal effort on your part. Every time someone shares a post, it will reach that person's friends and followers. Liking, favoriting and commenting will increase exposure. However, this happens only if people engage with your content.

The true secret to social media success is engagement. You can post basic information and promotional material all day long, and most viewers will scroll right past it. If it doesn't catch their attention, they will not click the link or act on the offer. They won't interact with the post, meaning their friends won't see it. Furthermore, many networks use advanced algorithms to determine the quality of a profile.

Facebook, in particular, has made several changes⁴ designed to increase relevancy of content in an individual's news feed. The algorithm uses clues such as who has commented on a post, how many times it has been hidden and how much a user has previously interacted with the page. In other words, the more engaging your content is, the better your page will perform. The reverse is also true.

Fortunately for you, veterinarians have a unique advantage when creating engaging content. Pet owners are among the most active social media users, and animal-related content is among the most popular⁵ on the internet. That means some of the most engaging and sharable content is highly relevant to your industry and target audience. If your social media are underperforming, try posts like these:

- **Pet care infographics:** The possibilities are endless. You can create infographics showing training tips, nutritional guides, kitten or puppy growth charts and lists of human foods that are safe (or toxic) for animals.
- **Seasonal warnings and tips:** Post about the signs of heatstroke in animals, excess heat or cold warnings, how to protect a dog's feet on hot sidewalks, coping with cats and holiday decorations, or anything else relevant to your locale and the time of year.
- **Cute animal videos:** They are all over the internet, and people can't get enough of them. You can share existing content or, even better, create your own (see **Originality Counts**). If your office has a resident animal, or you have especially photogenic pets, you could have the next feline or canine internet star.
- **Humor:** How often do your friends share funny memes featuring animals? Whether it is a sad bloodhound mourning the end of the weekend or a playful kitten ready to conquer an enemy, an expressive animal photo illustrates a statement or joke like nothing else

Mr. Arulrajah is president and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, a full-service internet marketing company that focuses on SEO, social media, marketing education and the online reputations of veterinarians/practice owners. If you have questions about marketing your practice online, call 855-598-3320 to speak one-on-one with him.