

# How to Create a Winning Social Media Plan

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In the span of a decade, technology has quite literally changed the way we live our lives and do business. Today, 8 in 10 Americans use social media<sup>1</sup> and they are there for more than just socializing. It has become one of the most important marketing channels for veterinarians.

## Set Goals and Objectives

The first step in creating a winning social media plan is defining your marketing goals. Without clear goals, it can be difficult to decide which networks to use and how to use them. More importantly, you won't have a clear benchmark to determine the success of a campaign and ultimately calculate your return on investment.

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When setting social media goals, look to your overall marketing plan and brand identity for guidance. Many veterinarians think of social media purely in terms of client acquisition, but it is also a great way to communicate with current clients — which is key to retention. Plus, a strong social media presence is essential for brand awareness.

Once you have decided what you want to accomplish, defined specific, measurable objectives. These may include:

- *Audience engagement*: This is more important than even your number of followers.
- *Reach*: Only a small percentage of those who “like” your page actually see your posts.

- *Email subscribers:* Cross-platform marketing is a great way to build a loyal audience. Networks such as Facebook allow the option of adding a subscription button, and you can promote your newsletter anywhere with a link to sign up.
- *Website traffic:* Include your URL in your profile, and use targeted posts to drive people to your practice's blog or website.
- *New leads:* The most direct benefit of social media is potential clients who read your posts and decide to call your office.

## **Choose the Right Networks**

Given the large number of social media networks, you could spend all day posting and still not keep up. Don't worry — you don't need to use all of them. In fact, it would be a mistake to try. Instead, choose a few that best meet your needs, and work on creating a strong presence on these platforms. If you maintain only one social profile, make it Facebook. It is the most popular network by a wide margin.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Facebook is business friendly, with customizable pages and a variety of advertising options.

With over 300 million users,<sup>3</sup> Twitter is no lightweight in the social sphere. However, its performance has been lagging for some time, while several other networks are skyrocketing in popularity, making it optional.

Although it began as a niche network targeted to do-it-yourself project planning, Pinterest has become a social media powerhouse. This network is worth considering, especially if your practice sells retail items. Proving that video dominates today's internet, YouTube is the second most popular social media network in the world.<sup>4</sup> As any internet user will tell you, animal videos consistently rank among the most popular content, making this platform especially well suited to veterinary medicine.

Not just for selfies, Instagram is another popular place to share animal cuteness and pet health care information. If you have a regular supply of original photos, infographics and other quality visual content, you should be on Instagram.

## **Before You Post**

### *Complete Your Profile*

Don't just fill in a few fields and move on. The more information you can provide, the better. Answer all questions, craft a well-written biography or "about us" section, and use quality pictures for your profile and cover photo.

### *Check Technical Specifications*

The amount of text allowed in a post varies by network, and optimal image size varies because each website or app displays differently. If you want to post the same graphic to different networks, you will need to create several versions with slightly different dimensions.

### *Follow the Rules*

If you plan to use paid advertisements, work with social influencers, run contests or partner with another business for co-promotion, the rules can become complicated and technical. Always review and abide by the terms to keep your account in good standing.

### *Create a Calendar*

Without a schedule, it can be easy to lose track of what you posted where and when. You don't want to leave an account inactive, and you don't want to spam your audience. Choose a frequency, which may vary from a few posts per day to a few per month, based on the site and your audience. Whatever you choose, consistency is important. Your calendar will also help maintain a balance among various types of content, such as infographics, humorous postings and links to your blog.

### **Produce Engaging Content**

This is the final — and most important — part of your plan. A good strategy includes a variety of content types, such as videos, links, informational content and promotions. The best content is interesting, surprising, shareable and engaging.

Avoid overly formal, dull, dry posts. Your brand should have a distinct personality and unique voice. Be careful of any potentially offensive or controversial topics, but don't be afraid to include humor, use a conversational tone and add your own personal commentary. If multiple people help maintain the account, have the poster include his or her name. This will avoid confusion and help people get to know your team.

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