

The Five Pillars of Content Marketing

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Content marketing is the backbone of modern business promotion today. If your veterinary content is not performing well, then your marketing strategy is not performing well. Of the many possible reasons why, one of the most common is a basic misunderstanding of content marketing.

You create some content and put it online. That's content marketing, right? Wrong. Content marketing is a strategic, multiphase process that can easily be derailed by a misstep at any point. Here is your guide to troubleshooting and optimizing every stage of your veterinary content marketing.

1. Plan

The process does not begin with writing a blog post. First, you need to know why you are writing the post, who will read it and how it will turn that person into a new client.

- Define your goals and priorities. Do you want new clients similar to those you have? Are you hoping to break into a new market or expand your reach? Do you want to increase the volume of certain types of procedures or certain species of pets? Are brand awareness and reputation building your priorities?
- Identify your target market. In addition to demographic information, consider potential new clients' social media habits, lifestyles and interests. What do they want to know? What would they want to read?
- Choose the best platforms. Content can be distributed on social media, via email, in a newsletter or on your blog or website, among other options. Wherever you publish, you want to build an audience. Choose your preferred channels, and provide fresh content regularly.
- Develop a strategy. Invest some thought into exactly what you want to accomplish. Do you want the viewer to visit your website or subscribe to your newsletter? Does your content guide the person toward those actions? How will your website or newsletter convert that person into a client?

2. Create Content

With a clear marketing strategy in mind, it's time to begin creating. Neither readers nor search engines will be impressed by poor-quality, low-value content. Whatever you publish should be well written, professionally presented and error free. Beyond those basic requirements, "quality" means compelling, engaging content that provides value to the reader. Choose topics that will interest your target market and provide useful information.

A common cause of content marketing failure is lack of skills and knowledge. The specific problems tend to differ between in-house and outsourced marketing teams.

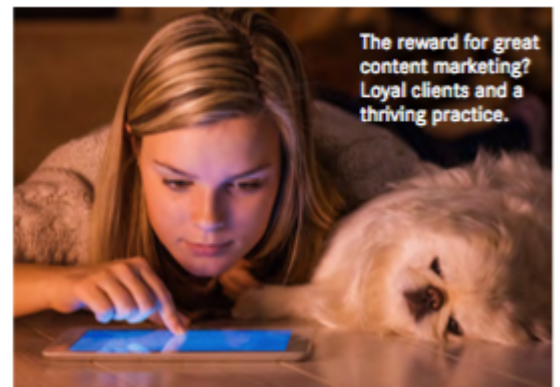
In-house teams often lack writing, editing, design, social media and digital marketing skills. You and your staff specialize in veterinary medicine, not marketing. Effective in-house content creation usually requires either hiring people with the necessary expertise and experience or investing in training for your current team.

Outsourcing is a popular solution that can deliver and distribute timely, well-crafted content. Unfortunately, marketing professionals are unlikely to have extensive veterinary knowledge or be familiar with the details of your practice and branding. If you outsource content, choose a provider that specializes in your field, if possible. Work closely with the marketer, answering questions and conveying as much information as possible about your practice.

3. Optimize Your Content

Like planning, this very important part of the process tends to be overlooked. Once content is created, it needs to be optimized and presented in the best possible way at every step.

- *Editing:* Verify facts, proofread text for grammar and writing style, and check video for sound quality and visual flow. If the content is destined for social media or a similar platform, verify that word count, image sizes and other specifications comply with the applicable requirements and best practices.
- *Keywords:* Targeted keywords should appear naturally in the flow of text. If they are overused or inserted where they seem out of place, readers will quickly lose interest.
- *Originality:* Is your content unique? If portions duplicate that of other websites, your search ranking will suffer. You might even be in violation of copyright laws.
- *Tone:* Effective content is user-centric. Its primary purpose should be to educate, entertain or otherwise provide value. The content placement, call to action and subtle mentions of your practice accomplish the goals of marketing. If the content is overly promotional and brand-centric, it will read like an advertisement. People seeking information are unlikely to read an ad.
- *Presentation:* The importance of visual impact cannot be overstated. People will notice images before they read the text. Choose pictures carefully and add infographics or other educational graphics to illustrate a point when possible. Break up long blocks of text with subheads and bulleted lists, because many people scan a page instead of reading every word.



4. Distribute Your Content

Publishing your content is the simplest step in the process. However, simply “putting it out there” doesn’t guarantee an audience.

Search engine optimization (SEO) is one of the most significant factors determining the performance of website content, which entails optimizing not only the article but also the entire website. The primary components of SEO include responsive design, compliance with web standards, strong backlinks, meta information, clean coding and fast loading time.

Similarly, content published on social media will perform better if your profile is optimized with your complete business information, a good header and profile pictures, and a significant following.

The final — and most overlooked — step in distribution is promotion and crossposting. Post links to your blog posts and website articles on your social media accounts. Include social sharing links on your website and in newsletters. If you publish a lot of content directly to social media, consider embedding a stream in your website. Promote your newsletter on your website and social accounts.

5. Analyze Your Results

If planning, creation, optimization and distribution are done well, then your content should perform well. Unfortunately, between the high number of variables and ever-changing habits of internet users, success is never guaranteed. By analyzing the performance of each marketing campaign, you can identify what topics and types of content your audience prefers and which tactics are most effective.

Google Analytics can provide a wealth of information about what is happening on your website, and most social media platforms provide some analytic information. However, those tools may not give you the granular data needed to track the performance of individual pieces of content. Work with your IT and web development teams to implement advanced tracking strategies, including codes embedded in content, call tracking to identify the source of leads and split testing, which compares performance of variations of the same campaign.

Back to the Beginning

The next step is to go back to the first step. Take the information gathered from analytics and use it to refine your strategy. In reality, there is no final step in content marketing. It is a continual cycle that should evolve to keep up with trends, incorporate new technology and meet the needs of your audience. You will be rewarded with new clients and stronger customer loyalty to help your veterinary practice thrive.

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