

## MODULE 4A

### Social Media for the Modern Veterinary Practice

#### » Social Media: The Basics

In this module we are going to be discussing social media, reviewing the basics and learning how to really make it work for your practice. One big question you have to ask yourself is whether or not your demographic is present social media? Many practices are wondering, is it just for kids and are they really representative of the market I'm trying to reach?

Let's consider who is actually using social media. The percentage of people aged 30 and under using social media is 86%. This makes sense. But, if we look closer at those aged 50 and over, their use ranges from 26-47%, and their usage has doubled every other year. This means that even over-50 year olds are active on social media sites. In short, members of every age demographic as a whole representing your target market are using social networking, so you should be too.

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That's all well and good, but how are people actually interacting with businesses, per se, on platforms like Facebook? Well, this particular site alone has over 900 million active users, 50% of whom log on each and every day. And, as we have seen, social networking in the 50+ age range is growing rapidly. This makes seniors the fastest increasing digital demographic.

#### » Let's take a closer look at Facebook

- The average user joins 10 business fan pages to show support for a brand and share with their friends
- 33% of users are likely to do product and service research on Facebook
- 51% of users are likely to buy a product from a business page that they follow
- 68% are likely to buy a product recommended by a friend on Facebook

As we can see, there's a lot of business activity on social media sites such as this, and this highlights a great opportunity for practices to capitalize on. Now, let's take a look at some evidence that social media works in the veterinary industry and why it's so important that it is a part of your client engagement mix. Consider Brenda, a practice manager from Indianapolis who is very active in social media and has actually written a book on the topic.

After implementing a well-conceived social media strategy, Brenda's practice was able to reduce their annual Yellow Pages spend from \$24,000 to just \$2,400, while also increasing new client acquisition by 29%. That's pretty fantastic! They also rolled out wellness plans through social media with a 50% enrollment rate. So, as we can see social networking was a very effective client engagement tool. It allowed the practice to save a significant amount of money whilst also increasing their client base.

One of the biggest obstacles when it comes to social media is that it can seem overwhelming. We've all heard of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, and even some new ones like Google+ and Pinterest. How do we know which one to focus our energies on? The easy answer is to choose one and to do it well, instead of extending yourself in too many directions and not doing any effectively. In order to choose which platform we should use, what do you think the criteria should be for that selection?

I'm sure many of you answered to use the platform where the greatest number of your clients are interacting, and that is exactly right. As we've seen from the data, this platform is Facebook. Therefore, that is going to be the focus of this module, although these principles can be applied to all social media sites.

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## » The ABC's of why your practice should be using Facebook.

**A – Attracting New Clients** – Social media is a cost-effective method for increasing local visibility. This has a positive impact on both new clients who come across it naturally and on new client referrals, as people virally see activity that their friends are engaged with on their pages and become interested. Trust is transferrable. We all know this concept offline with word of mouth referrals, but it is even more effective online. As we saw from the earlier statistics, 60% of Facebook users will recommend a business online, and 68% of people will buy as a result of that recommendation.

**B – Becoming a Leader** – Practices that are not using social media are missing out on a crucial conversation amongst the most active and vocal pet owners, pet businesses and pet organizations in their area. As veterinarians, our passion is education and we need to have a platform to disseminate this expertise. If you are not a presence on social media in your area, another entity is becoming the authority for this population and you are missing out.

In addition to reaching out to your local pet owning community, Facebook also

gives you an opportunity to start a dialogue with other local pet businesses. If we recall Brenda, from the previous example, as a direct result of her social media activities, her practice was able to generate 11 local news stories because reporters learned to turn to her when looking for pet interest stories. As she became a default resource, she also became a leader in her area.

**C – Continuing a Conversation** – As busy veterinarians, we all experience pressure in the exam room to do so many things. We have to listen to the client's story, take a proper history, establish a personal connection, examine the animal, develop differentials, devise a plan and then, it's on to the next client. It's becoming increasingly difficult to cultivate that all-important relationship with our clients - even more so in a practice with multiple vets. This is where social media comes into play, as it is an indispensable tool for continuing that conversation, especially with your most engaged clients.

A common fear that many clinics have is, what happens when medical questions arise? Just like any phone call that we receive in the office, callers are always advised to book an appointment with the vet. Not only are we not expected to give this medical feedback, but indeed we cannot give it unless the animal is seen. So, to apply this concept in real life, if someone were to write in with a specific question about a specific pet, your editor would simply guide that person to book an appointment.

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## » Common mistakes to avoid

- ***Using a personal profile instead of a business page.*** Having a personal account represent a business or non-human entity is against Facebook's terms of use, and may result in your practice's efforts being erased. If your personal profile is closed down, you cannot after-the-fact transfer your network of connections to a new business page. This could be a huge setback for your team, undoing all the hard work that's gone into creating a profile.
- ***Not promoting your Facebook business page offline.*** Basically, the "build it and they will come" phenomenon does not apply. You have to take an active role in getting people to your Facebook page which includes creating signs for your reception area and exam rooms, preparing an email newsletter update, writing a blog post directing people to the page, and adding your Facebook link to all client communications.

I would like to underscore that you have access to clients while they're physically in your clinic, so this is your opportunity to connect them to your

online presence, letting them know that a good way to stay engaged with you is via social media. Check out the toolbox for an online promotion checklist that you can use to spread the word.

- **Not seeding your message.** Another aspect of the ‘build it and they will come’ notion is that if you just start speaking online, people will hear you. This is, unfortunately, simply not the case. You have to actively go out and “seed the message”, which means establishing a presence on other businesses’ pages that already have visibility in your niche. We do this by “liking” or commenting on other pages.

Every time you like or comment on another business page, you leave a little footprint, otherwise known as a link, back to your pages, and these markers are what ultimately create your network. This will bring people to your page to read your content and then to promote it. If you do not seed your message, you are essentially lecturing to an empty room, with no impact. This not only thwarts success, but it’s also terribly frustrating.

## » The “SECRETs” to Social Media Success

S – Scheduling content 12 months in advance. Like with your blog, your schedule will be the engine of efficiency and consistency.

E – Editor. Select a person within your practice that will schedule, proof and post all the content for your profile.

C – Comment. This corresponds with planting the seeds on other businesses’ pages. The more active we are, the more visible your practice will become.

R – Remember to add links. Links are an important component of your search engine rankings, and social media is a natural place to share links back to your website. For example, each time you write a new blog post, your editor should share a link to that post on your Facebook page. This will not only notify your followers of the post, but it will also add a valuable link back to your website.

E – Engage your followers. The more we do this, the greater our visibility. In the next module I'll be sharing some tips and tricks for getting the most out of your engagement efforts, such as asking questions, launching contests and other interactive, fun stuff.

T – Telling stories. Over and over again, when practices ask their followers what they would like to see on their Facebook page, invariably it's about pet interest topics. They want to see cute client anecdotes, interesting things that happened in the clinic, and anything else regarding pets that make them feel connected.

As you can see, the “secret” really isn't a mystery, but rather it's putting it all together that gives you a winning formula.

## » The “L” method of making social media work.

We start with “**link**”, which we have to do because it's one of the indicators that Google uses for search engine rankings. Again, link from your Facebook page back to your website. A great way to do this is by linking to your blog posts.

Next is “**limit**”. We have to focus our social media involvement, as a business, to 1-2 hours per week. It's very easy to have social media become a huge time waster, but if you use the editorial schedule and calendar available in your toolbox, you will be able to efficiently engage in these pursuits in an ROI-driven manner.

Finally, there's the all-important “**love**,” which can mean a number of things. Try to give back to your fans. This can be in the form of content, or in the form of tangible benefits, such as specials or other promotions. This will not only reward your followers but will also have a positive impact on the growth of your practice.

So, link, limit and love to ensure that your social media efforts are done in an efficient and effective way.

## » Let's consider a real-world example.

The previous section was mostly theoretical. Now let's take a look at how to implement these theories in a more practical way. In order to understand how Facebook is used, let's look at the basic components of a veterinary business Facebook page:

- Logo
- Address
- Like Button
- Photos
- Map
- Welcome Section
- Recent Posts by Others Who Follow the Page

Fans have the ability to like, comment on or share the posts and updates made on your Facebook business page. Someone would like the post if they wanted to express their approval, comment if they wanted to offer their opinion, or share the post if they wanted to make it viral for their own networks to enjoy.

## » Scheduling your social media activities.

To make this process efficient and consistent, I strongly recommend that you use an editorial calendar, just as you do with your blog posts. Just as a note, all of the tools we're reviewing here will be in your resource toolbox.

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You should have already completed the section of your editorial calendar for blog topics, so now we're just going to add social media content. The key is to create a 6 month schedule in advance, and we're going to break down the 8 components for each month's content.

First, we have a **story**. For example, this could be something like a pug that I recently saw that had swallowed a hoop earring. Next we have a **question**. In this example it would be something like "what is the strangest thing your dog has ever eaten?" This is designed to promote interaction.

Next there is a **blog snippet**. This is essentially announcing that a blog article has been written on a related topic with a link back to that article, which is posted on your website.

Then, we have a **related promotion**. This is where the love comes in. Think of something that you can offer your clients that is related to this month's theme. Then you can add some visual media, such as a **funny picture** or a **quote**.

Then, we're on to the **second blog post** of the month. Again, this blog snippet will link back to another post on your website. Finally, this is your opportunity to **highlight a local event**.



To put this into perspective, let's consider what an actual Facebook post would look like. We would first post the question, "What is the strangest thing your dog has ever eaten?" Then, we would post the story about the pug that swallowed the earring, which would, of course, be several paragraphs long. Then we could add a related picture, and finally make it live for your clients to be able to like, comment on and share this pet interest story with their own networks.

Back to the editorial calendar, your homework is to create a 6 month schedule. It's best to theme your social media content around your blog topics. So, if one of your articles is about fleas, some of the information in the social media section could correspond.

In the last tool we determined what content we wanted to use. Now we need to apply it in a systematic way, which we accomplish through the weekly editorial checklist. Pick 2 days in the work week – for example, Tuesday and Thursday. On any given Tuesday, your editor will go into Facebook and like or comment on three other pages. They will also add one item from the social media schedule that we just covered. There are 4 Tuesdays and 4 Thursdays in every month, and 8 pieces of social media content in the schedule that you can use each month. Finally, the editor will respond to all of the comments made by your followers.

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Each Thursday for 30 minutes, the editor will comment or share something on 3 different Facebook pages, add another item from the social media schedule, respond to all comments and post any images that you've taken from the clinic. In all, your editor will only be spending 1 hour per week on Facebook because all of the back work has been done through the use of this social media schedule. Now they just have to pick and choose which components to use, rather than spend countless hours dreaming up new content every time.

The last piece of the puzzle is to promote your Facebook presence offline. Remember, if you're not actively driving people to your page, it will never be effective. Some techniques for getting people to join your Facebook page include:

- Creating a sign for your reception area
- Creating signs for your exam rooms
- Emailing a newsletter update about the launch or re-launch of your Facebook page
- Taking the same content and writing a blog post
- Adding a sticky note at your reception so that your staff is constantly reminded to tell every single client that walks through your door to join your Facebook page

Your homework is to apply this checklist to your practice in earnest, and to incorporate the content development and time management strategies set forth here. As a special bonus, we've created a number of posters that you can customize, print and put around your practice, promoting your new Facebook page.

I hope enjoyed today's session. Make sure you email any questions you may have, and I look forward to seeing you in the next module!