

Digital Marketing for Vet Practices



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Introduction

Simply put, digital marketing is pervasive because it works. It's extremely effective in driving new customers. Despite that, many vet practices haven't updated their marketing tactics to fully leverage digital channels, leaving it as an excellent area for opportunity.

[Research by Henry Schein](#) Veterinary Solutions found, "Although practices increasingly rely on digital channels to attract new customers, print advertising still tops the list for marketing spend overall with nearly 38% suggesting this is their most substantial marketing cost. Interestingly, this is despite the fact that no respondents said it provided the best results."

Fortunately, digital marketing spend is highly measurable, and, when done properly, results in new client acquisition and a positive return on investment. In this eBook we'll cover some best practices. You can also watch our webinar recording.

The Marketing Funnel – Fill the Top, Move Leads Through [+ Around]

Fortunately, digital marketing is not as complicated as veterinary science. The marketing “funnel” refers to the progression of attracting visitors to your website, engaging and converting some to marketing leads, then closing sales.

As described by [Hubspot](#), a developer of software products for inbound marketing and sales, “The inbound methodology is composed of three stages: attract, engage, and delight. Inbound businesses use the methodology to build trust, credibility, and momentum. It’s about adding value at every stage in your customer's journey with you.”

We’ll continue to reference the marketing “funnel” in this eBook, but also consider the modern “flywheel,” which represent a circular process where customers feed growth. The new flywheel model still includes the progression from website visitor, to lead, to customer, with the added consideration of the value of existing customers in promoting your business.

The good news is that you can take steps to optimize every one of the steps in the funnel, lowering your cost per lead, and cost per customer.



Step 1

Launch a Decent Website

Of course, a website is a prerequisite for any digital marketing initiative. Fortunately, there are many easy-to-use tools that enable you to buy a template, customize, and build a site yourself without being a web developer, such as Wix and WordPress.

Including photos of the staff, both posed and “candid,” makes your practice seem approachable, making potential new clients more comfortable with your doctors and techs, and easing the decision to use your services. (“Candid” of course, don’t have to be literally candid! The subject of the photo can certainly be posing, just not looking at the camera, and seeming to be in the midst of some activity.) And, of course, include photos of pets belonging to staff, or, after obtaining permission, pets belonging to clients

When writing text for your website, be sure to include:

○ Services

- ▶ Consider one separate page for each service area
- ▶ Write unique content about what the service is and how you provide it
- ▶ Include animals cared for
- ▶ Including all animals cared for and services offered is vital for search engine rankings

○ About us

- ▶ Bios of the care providers
 - Professional credentials and any personal info you’d like to share, such as hobbies, family, and pets owned.
- ▶ Location and hours
- ▶ Perhaps background of how your practice was founded

○ Blog

- ▶ Post new blogs regularly to help educate clients
- ▶ Blogs also help with search engine optimization (SEO)

Mobile Responsiveness is Critical

Google looks out for the best interest of the user.

Considering **over half of all website traffic worldwide is**

Google made mobile responsiveness a high priority. Sites without this critical functionality will rank much lower in the search engine rankings page. Fortunately, most modern content management systems, such as WordPress, include this functionality automatically.



Don't Overestimate the Importance of "Branding"

"Branding" as a verb is often associated with marketing tactics designed to generate awareness and goodwill. Vet practices are quite different from global consumer brands like Nike and Pepsi. There's no need to spend millions on celebrity endorsements, billboards, commercials and viral videos. Additionally, spending multiple thousands of dollars on a "branding" design package with fonts, color schemes, logos, and imagery is incredibly unlikely to result in a positive Return on Investment (ROI.)

When it comes to your brand, be consistent and visually cohesive. Be professional while also having some fun. Don't mix colors that are offensive to the eye. But this too is not as complex as veterinary science. We advise

launching a "decent" website. An exceptionally beautiful site is not likely to generate significantly more revenue than one that is simply good.



Include Online Appointment Booking

A business's digital presence must surpass a mere website, and vets are no different in this regard. Clients simply expect to book a vet appointment online, because they're already booking travel, restaurants, and haircuts online.

A quality online booking solution provides convenience to pet owners. They can book anytime, anywhere, and from any device, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Additionally, online booking saves time for vet practices, and frees up front desk staff to focus on other initiatives that generate revenue and improve service to the customers currently in the office. Adding "Schedule Now" to your website helps you transform website visitors into new clients. It also effectively makes your practice "open" 24/7, increasing the pool of new clients you can earn.

Step 2

Drive Traffic to the Site

Get Listed Online

If you don't already have one, create a "Google My Business" listing and be sure to keep it updated with any changes such as office hours or new staff members. Having a Google My Business listing is the only way to be listed on Google Maps. Additionally, if you enable online booking, that option will show up right on the listing within maps, further increasing your chances of converting people browsing online to new customers.

Standardize your directory listings everywhere by making sure to have consistent, up to date info on sites such as Yelp, Bing, and Google My Business.



Leverage Happy Clients for Online Reputation Management

Reviews are critical. Word of mouth extends only to those we know in person, but the growth of online reviews enables consumers to tap the expertise of anyone willing to type their thoughts. The great news is that if you simply ask your clients to post reviews, they're likely to assist.

Research shows that 70% of consumers that have been asked to leave reviews went on to do so.

Be sure they don't write the reviews from a computer inside your clinic. With multiple reviews coming from your clinic's same IP address, they could be flagged as false (suspected to be written by you!) and not show up. Clients can use their smart phones or post reviews from home. Send reminder emails or texts and most will be happy to do so. You can also consider an incentive, such as a discount or free product. Additionally, respond to reviews so patients feel heard and respected.

Inbound vs. Interrupt

Traditional marketing interrupts prospects and centers on the marketer. "STOP listening to your favorite songs on the radio or watching your beloved sitcom and listen to why my product is so great!"

Whereas inbound marketing focuses on getting found by customers. Modern, inbound marketing aims to create content that's educational and sometimes entertaining, so people enjoy it and want to click through to your site.





Content Marketing – Use Your Knowledge

Content marketing refers to the practice of sharing information that is useful and valuable to your target audience to drive them to your site. (Yes, this eBook is content marketing!) Quality content marketing also helps you get found through search engines and can be used as promotional assets in search marketing, such as Google AdWords.

Fortunately, these disciplines are all simpler than veterinary medicine! And your knowledge of veterinary science is precisely what can fuel your search engine optimization (SEO) efforts. For example, write a blog about how to keep your pet safe from Lyme disease this summer. Provide the same facts and tone you do when speaking to patients in the office. Include your city name, and, along with some other proper formatting*, such content can help you reach the first page of Google.

*Proper formatting includes using your keyword in your header tags, your image alt tags, and your meta data. You may want to use tools like [Yoast](#), available as a free version, to help drive you toward ideal SEO formatting.

Be sure to select relevant keywords your audience would be searching for. Also incorporate a variety of visual elements, such as bulleted lists, photos, videos, and animated gifs. [Giphy](#) has an excellent selection of fun gifs.

Optimize for the Proper Keywords

Sure, you'll want to optimize for "Vet [your town name]" but also consider natural language search terms. Questions phrased the way people would speak such as, "What do I do when my dog throws up?" Think of the questions clients ask in your office.

Don't forget synonyms and variations of your terms.

Consider tools like [Wordstream's Keyword Niche Finder](#), or [Google webmaster](#) tools.



Create Visual Content

Everyone likes visuals. "According to researched compiled by 3M, the corporation behind Post-it Notes, visuals are processed 60,000 times faster than text, which means you can paint a picture for your audience much faster with an actual picture."

We're drawn to read text when it's accompanied by attractive, funny, or even intriguing visual elements. As noted, your website should include beautiful photos, ideally of your office

and staff, perhaps along with their own pets. When sharing content, such as blogs or social media posts, include such proprietary images, or use sites such as [Pixabay](#) for royalty-free images.

You can also make other types of content such as "infographics." There's an excellent one in the [Fast Company](#) article linked above. There are many templates online to choose from, but the idea is to provide some interesting key facts and stats, arranged with coordinating visuals, in one image, often PDF or JPG.

Make Videos

According to Cisco globally video traffic will account for 82 percent of all IP traffic (both business and consumer) by 2022. 90% of consumers say video can help them make buying decisions.

Thanks to the advancement of smartphones, making a video to share no longer requires the time and expense of hiring pro videographers. It's very helpful to be able to do at least a little video editing to remove errors and add titles. Tools like Camtasia make it easy for a low cost, but you can also get away without it. YouTube also includes basic video editing capabilities.

Consider making the following videos and sharing on your website:

- Walk through of your clinic
- Testimonial statements from satisfied customers
- Informative tutorial, such as how to brush a dog's teeth



Capture Client Testimonial Videos

Chances are you have many satisfied customers who would be more than happy to record a testimonial for your practice. Simply ask if they're willing to do so, find a good spot – minimal background noise, a decent amount of lighting, without having your customer back-lit (i.e. sun behind them.) Then turn on the video recording device (phone, tablet, built in laptop cam, etc.) and ask them a few questions, perhaps while they're holding or petting their pet. Have the interviewer stand next to the camera and encourage the client to look at the interviewer and simply tell their story. Prompt their feedback with questions such as, “Why do you like coming to our practice? Do you trust our vets to provide quality care to your pet?”

To capture the most sincere, enthusiastic testimonial, it's best to film for a bit longer, then cut down the footage to the best snippets. If you ask someone to read an exact statement on camera, chances are, it's going to sound like they're reading. No emotion. No passion. Acting is harder than the pros in movies make it seem!

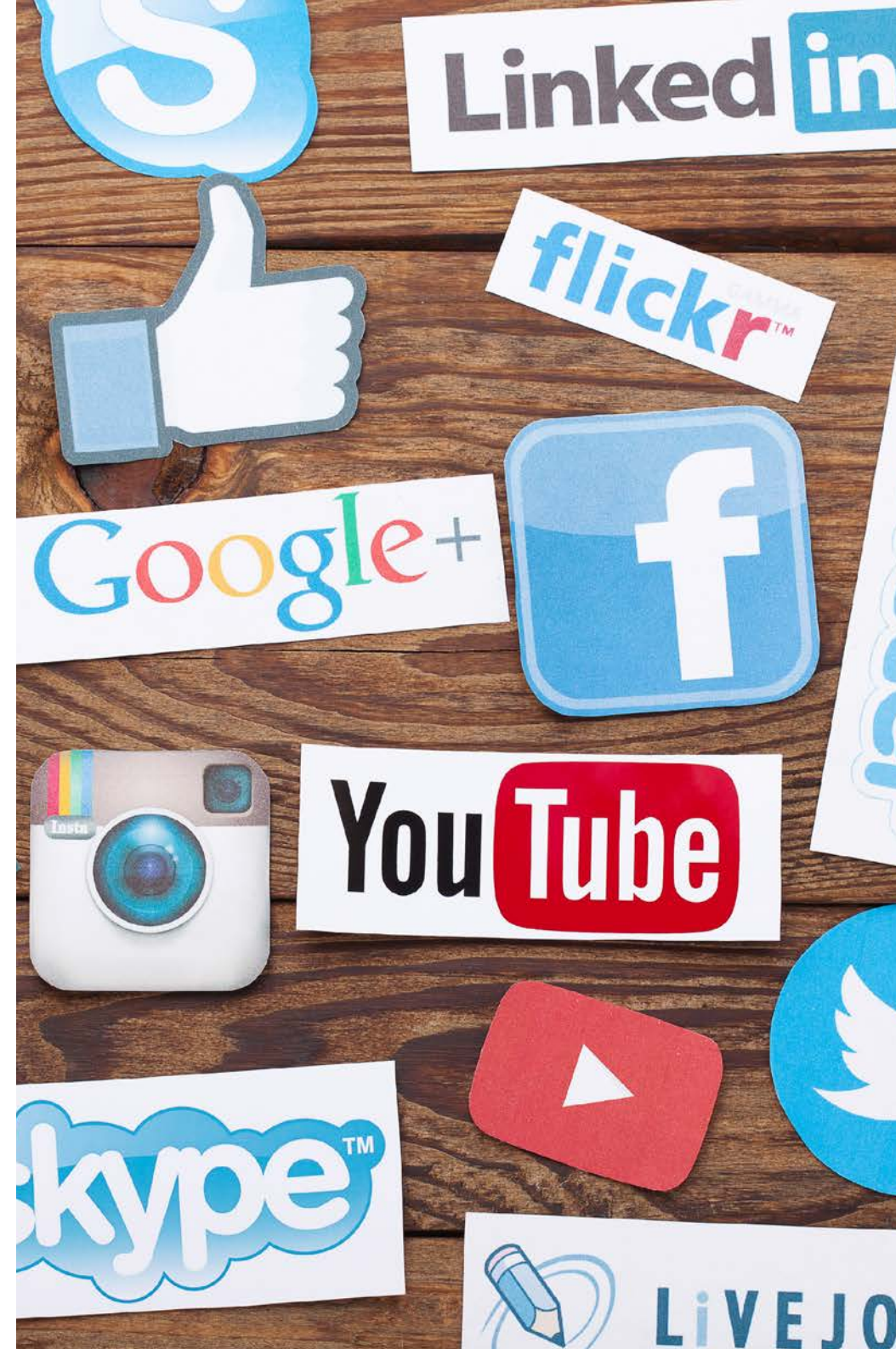


Syndicate Your Content Across Various Channels

Digital communication must use multiple channels in a connected and dependent way. When you create new content such as a blog post with helpful pet care tips, a funny meme, or even an update to your office hours, you can:

- Post to social media
- Place on your website (new blog post, update to existing info, etc.)
- Send a dedicated email to clients
- Include in a periodic email newsletter
- Share into other channels, such as a dedicated cat-owners Twitter feed, or regional business Facebook page

Syndicating content across various channels increases the odds that it will be seen by new clients, helping them consider patronizing your clinic. It also expands your reach with existing clients, helping strengthen the bond with your practice.



Content Marketing for Vet Practices – Blogs & Newsletters

Aim to write a new blog post once or twice per month, minimum. Also consider sending email newsletters with a compilation of content, such as the newest blog posts, new staff member profile, or any other types of quick tips you've created for distribution.

According to research conducted by [The Direct Marketing Association \(UK\) Ltd](#), the average return for email marketing is £38 for every pound invested, or an ROI of 3800%. While it can be tempting to pour more money into this channel expecting to get more out of it, be sure to not send very frequently, as that increases the rate of clients opting out of your communications. Once or twice per month is a good target for email newsletters.



The Value of Social Media

According to Google, social media is not a direct SEO ranking factor. However, [it can amplify](#) the ranking factors that Google does consider. Restated without the marketing jargon, this means that doing a good job on social media won't get you on the front page of Google. But it can possibly help.

Make sure your online presence looks good and is complete and updated whenever necessary with changes such as new clinic hours. According to research by MarketingProfs, 71% of B2C marketers say Social Media Posts are the most effective type of content marketing.

If you're using a quality online appointment booking system such as Vetstoria, you can integrate this capability into your social media presence as well. Integrating a "Book Now" button provides an ideal call to action so you can convert those browsing to new customers.



Have Fun with Social Media

In addition to syndicating new content such as blogs, you can have some fun with social media, sharing photos of staff and clients' pets (again, only after obtaining permission.) I'll never forget having my dog put down on Halloween. The vet tech was dressed for the occasion with a unicorn horn and rainbow wig. Her long, glittery hair got wrapped around my little dog as she handed her back to me after they put the IV in.

I was glad to have a reason to giggle at that moment. A photo of that vet tech is an excellent piece of content to share on Facebook and Twitter.

Additionally, use sites like [Giphy](#) to search for animated gifs relevant to your posting, or try generating memes.



Actively Engage on Social Media

If anyone comments on your social media posts, take the time to comment back and show engagement. The reply should come from “Your Clinic Practice” and, as such, the reply can be written by any staff member you might delegate to speak on behalf of the practice. Multiple people can have this role to ensure timely coverage.

Social media also provides another channel for your clients and prospects to engage with your practice.

People can send direct messages, and these that should be viewed as equivalent to phone calls and replied to promptly. Again, having multiple staff members monitor channels like Facebook is vital to ensure timely responses.

Be Helpful and Authentic

Helpfulness and authenticity will combat relationships lost through tech and automation. This proclamation was among the 5 [Marketing Trends To Pay Attention to](#) in 2019. Helpfulness is an integral part of content marketing. Be authentic as well to remain connected with your clients and forge new connections with potential clients.

Step 3

Convert Website Visitors to Customers

Drive the Call to Action

Once potential clients have arrived on your site, they should be able to easily take the next step to engage with your clinic. And ideally, that step is making an appointment. Booking an appointment should also be as easy as possible, with an online appointment booking solution integrated into your Practice Management System.

Marketing objectives should center around being found, converting web traffic, and retaining customers. Online scheduling furthers all of these objectives. Prominently displaying the appealing call to action of “Book Now” can boost the number of visitors as well as the number of conversions. Online booking is an essential piece of the puzzle to acquire a new customer.



The Need for Omnichannel Communications

Preferred communication channels don't shift based on the nature of the business a client is interacting with. Those who prefer social media or internet/ web chat prefer it for airlines, retailers, and vets alike. Customers, particularly younger customers, want to engage with your business through a variety of channels. Transcending a mere desire, this has become an expectation, and failure to meet this expectation could result in lost opportunities for new clients.

According to [a study by Kleiner Perkins - Valley - San Francisco](#), telephone is the channel millennials prefer least. Four other means of communication are preferred above the phone. A website alone is not enough. Embedding a "Contact Us" form in your website is a great next step... but still not far enough to meet expectations. Offer multiple avenues for them to communicate with you, including booking an appointment.

Paid Search Marketing

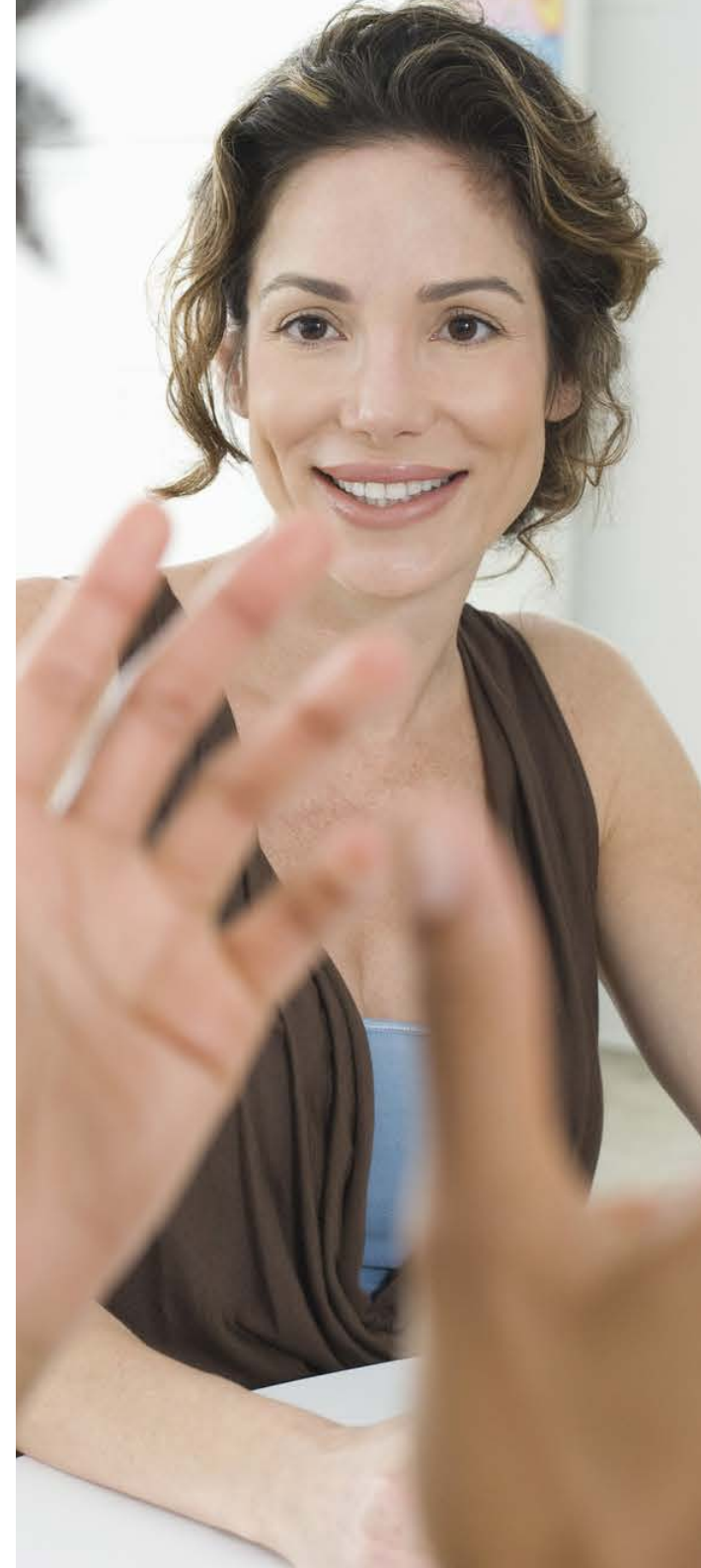
To drive additional traffic to your site, you can consider paid services such as Google AdWords. These are sophisticated channels with many options you can set, such as targeted locations, times of day, and negative keywords. This may be one marketing initiative to consider outsourcing to companies such as Vetmatrix, InTouchVet, and Digital Empathy.

Step 1, 2, 3, 4: Engage

Keeping customers engaged is listed as part of each of these 4 steps because it should be a constant effort. Making regular posts on social media that are both entertaining and informative keeps existing clients engaged with your practice. Automated appointment reminders combined with the ease of online booking reduce friction for customers returning for check-ups.

Gathering feedback from customers enables you to improve your practice based on the needs of your unique customer base. Making changes based on that feedback shows customers you're listening and working to meet their needs. Leveraging happy customers by sharing testimonials on your website and asking customers to post to social media enhances your online reputation for new prospects considering visiting your practice. Even offering additional services helps keep existing customers coming back, appreciating the convenience of one-stop-shopping from a trusted authority.

It's easy to see why the marketing "funnel" is now often described as a flywheel. For additional info on gathering and leveraging customer feedback, read our eBook.



A Quick Note on Offline Marketing

In this eBook, we've chosen to focus on digital marketing, but there is still value to traditional "offline" marketing initiatives. Some of these initiatives, such as print advertising and billboards, can be very expensive, and most are difficult, if not impossible to measure the outcomes of.

However, when the costs aren't exorbitant, consider promotional activities such as having a booth at your local community fair. This can be a great opportunity for community members to meet your staff members face to face and build camaraderie by answering questions. A direct mailer, such as a postcard, might also be helpful to new residents, such as those moving into a newly built housing development.



ROI Insights – Are your Marketing Investments Paying Off?

If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. There are many opportunities to improve your customer acquisition processes, and improve the rate or progression through each stage of the marketing funnel. For example, you can:

- Increase the number of visitors to your website by:
 - ▶ Improving your search engine rankings
 - ▶ Increasing click-through-rates by improving meta descriptions
- Increase the number of customers who take a step to interact and become leads by:
 - ▶ Improving landing page design or user experience
 - ▶ Making your calls-to-action more appealing
- Increase the number of those leads who become customers by:
 - ▶ Reducing friction in the appointment-booking process by offering online booking
 - ▶ Creating and sharing content, such as testimonials, that helps drive a purchase
- Increase revenue from existing customers and increase your customer retention rate by:
 - ▶ Expanding the scope of your offerings
 - ▶ Providing excellent customer service
- Those happy customers can write reviews, helping draw in more new potential customers



Even without making incremental improvements in various Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), simply knowing which digital marketing initiatives are performing the best enables you to allocate your funds most effectively, resulting in a lower cost per each new client acquisition.

But you can't know if you're making any progress with any of these KPIs without analytics. Fortunately, digital marketing is highly measurable and there are many great options to gather this crucial insight. For example, Google Analytics are free and robust, and analytics are built right into many tools such as WordPress. Your online appointment scheduling app should also include analytics showing KPIs such as the rate customers book through various platforms such as Facebook.

Conclusion

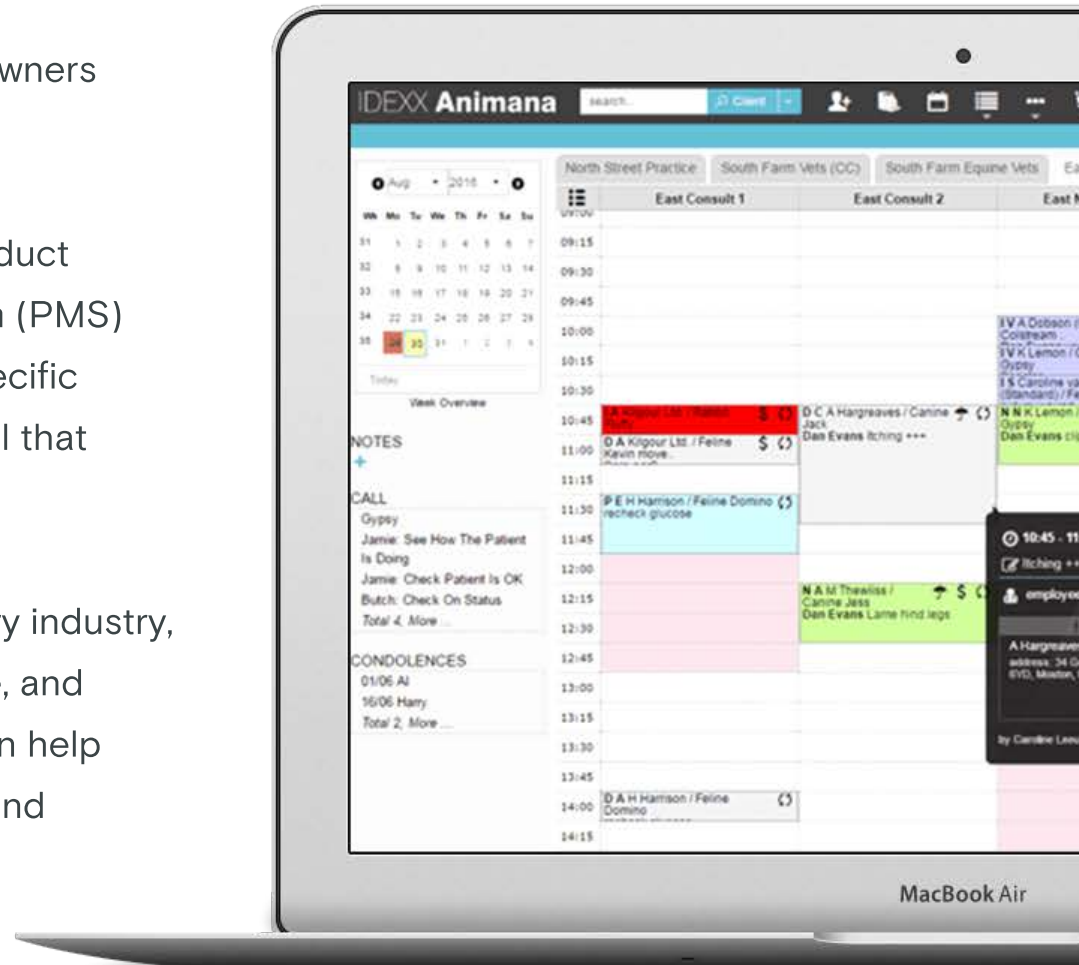
Whether you refer to the classic funnel or the modern flywheel, inbound digital marketing has many different components. Fortunately, you can rely on your existing knowledge as a veterinarian to execute many of these initiatives, such as writing blog posts and posting to social media. Leverage happy customers, and perhaps keep some offline marketing initiatives in your mix, and help your business continue to thrive.





At Vetstoria, we create technology to transform the way pet owners connect with veterinary clinics. We've built an appointment scheduling platform that allows pet owners to save time and schedule an appointment at any time, via any device. Our product not only connects with a clinic's practice management system (PMS) in real-time with complete control over all aspects of your specific scheduling processes, but also acts as a digital marketing tool that boosts your clinic's visibility online.

As one of the fastest growing tech companies in the veterinary industry, our presence is felt in over 1,800 clinics in the US, UK, Europe, and the Asia Pacific regions. Talk to us to see how our product can help your brand reach more customers, gain more appointments, and generate more revenue.



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