How to Get Your Practice Started on Social Media with Instagram

As of June 2018, there are nearly one billion monthly active Instagram users. This places Instagram behind Facebook but ahead of other social network sites, including Twitter and Pinterest. Instagram is steadily growing, and half of its monthly active users log in every day to engage on the platform.

What is Instagram?
Instagram is a social media platform that focuses on visual connection. Individuals and businesses can upload both pictures and video, and people “follow” your page, comment on your post, and “like” the content that you share. Pets are among the most popular content types on Instagram, so veterinary clinics can be a great fit with the right content strategy. In fact, if you are wondering just how many animal lovers and pet parents use Instagram, consider these numbers: as of January 2019, there were more than 98 million posts tagged with the hashtag #catsofinstagram and 130 million tagged with the hashtag #dogsofinstagram, but just 5.4 million tagged with #kidsofinstagram. Sorry kids, pets rule!

What are Instagram Stories?
Instagram Stories are features on Instagram that let users post photos and videos that vanish after 24 hours. But even though they’re temporary, the Instagram Stories feature really allows you to make an impression! Over 70% of Instagram users watch Stories each day—that’s 400 million daily viewers! Ads on Instagram Stories are great tools for veterinarians to help increase brand awareness and build message association.

Though it’s undeniable that Facebook is a powerhouse and is currently the most established social channel with broad topics and audiences, it’s important to consider other channels to promote your practice/engage your clients. In fact, Facebook lost daily users for the first time ever in the U.S. and Canada—though small, this decrease demonstrates the importance of diversifying your social media strategy. Instagram is a powerful and growing channel to consider for your clinic’s social communications and outreach.
An Overview: How Veterinarians Can Use Instagram

The unique, specific focus on images and video offers vet clinics the opportunity to authentically showcase their services. By increasing brand awareness and engaging with pet owners on Instagram to generate trust, you’ll more likely be top of mind when your clients need a veterinarian because you’ve already given them a sense of your personality and your clinic. You can achieve this in several ways, including:

• showcasing pet patients and their happy moms and dads (your satisfied clients)
• highlighting veterinary staff and clinic specializations
• educating clients about pet wellness

Also, because Instagram is a platform specifically tailored for mobile users, it’s ideal for:

• sharing in-the-moment images or video, how-to videos, and giving followers the chance to connect personally with your clinic
• building authenticity, trust, and demonstrating high standards of care
• showing select “behind the scenes” action of your day at your clinic

Instagram Stats to Know

• The “like” button is clicked approximately 4.2 billion times per day, so on average users click it more than once a day every day

• Over 30% of Instagram users make more than $75,000 per year—the ability to connect with a group of individuals with potentially higher disposable incomes is a great asset

• Instagram has a highly engaged, positive, and enthusiastic audience—images get an average of 23% more engagement than their Facebook equivalents

• 60-70% of Instagram users discover and research new products and brands through the platform, with the desire to learn more and potentially become a customer

• 80% of users follow at least one brand on Instagram, and more than 200 million users visit an Instagram business profile at least once daily
Top Instagram ProTips

1. **You don’t have to be a professional designer to create amazing images.** Download apps like Adobe® Spark or Canva® and build collages of your star pet clients or create funny memes that your followers will want to share. These require only minimal technical skills—just start with the pre-loaded templates and customize them with your favorite images, text, and you’re ready!

2. **Use original images as often as possible.** You already have cute cats and dogs all around you, so take advantage of that and snap pics whenever you can! Original photos are more authentic and give your followers a feeling of your clinic, building trust in your brand and professional capabilities. Be sure to use caution when showing clinic pics (i.e., don’t show gory images) and when using authentic images, make sure to have client permission to share their pictures of your clients, their pets and your staff before posting.

3. **Simple photographs** perform well on Instagram, but be sure to keep the visual conversation fun with videos, memes, quotes, and even cartoons.

4. **Optimize your hashtags.** As you type in your hashtag, Instagram will provide options, showing the total number of posts already using the tag. Aim for between 8-11 on each post.

5. **Go local or create your own.** To target regional clients, location-specific hashtags perform better as they don’t get lost in the high volume of others using more general hashtags. Branded hashtags that you create can draw people together around a specific topic and aid discovery of your practice. These can be associated with contests, special events or special causes.

6. **Bonus Instagram Stories ProTip:** 25% of Gen Z and Millennials actively seek stories of products and services they are considering buying. And approximately 50% of these users prefer videos that make them laugh.²

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Instagram and pets are a terrific match, making it an ideal marketing opportunity for veterinarians. If you aren’t already on Instagram, consider exploring the channel for your clinic services.

If you already have a single point of contact at your clinic who is responsible for Facebook content, extend their responsibilities to Instagram but allow everyone to participate. Don’t make social media a requirement, and ensure that employees post judiciously and as a positive representative of the clinic—keep it fun and authentic and you’ll do great!

These social media tips are sponsored by Catisphere, a cat fanatical community dedicated to a mutual love of cats and their wellness. They come from years of experience as we learn from our amazing, devoted community members, and the best of other social media platforms.

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How to Get Your Practice Started on Social Media With Facebook®

With over a billion users and 890 million active daily users, Facebook is the most established social channel that offers broad topics, reaches vast audiences, and welcomes business brands to join. Facebook Pages Manager helps businesses, organizations and brands share their stories and connect with people. Like Profiles, you can customize Pages by posting stories, hosting events, adding apps, and more.

How to Get Others to See You: Facebook’s Algorithm

People who “Like” your Page and their friends can get updates in their News Feed. Because there is far too much Facebook content for any person’s News Feed, Facebook uses an algorithm to identify content that members value the most based on:

- past online activities or interactions
- who you interact with
- who you mark as most important

The more people who interact with—engage with—your page on Facebook, the higher it will rank in Facebook’s algorithm and the more people will see it in their News Feed.

Good Content Leads to Good Engagement

Highly engaging content can lead to visibility for subsequent content. Consider mixing up your content and communicating a variety of topics.

- Topics about your brand that talk about you, your clinic practice, or a product partner—these drive your business
- Topics about your category that can be more general, including animal wellness or behavior. These help to build a sense of community on your page
- Topics that entertain, engage, and touch the viewer in a more personal way—these get you into the News Feed

Engaging your audience on Facebook can be done in many ways, and veterinary clinics are especially lucky because cute dog and cat pics are always a success! Here are other ways to keep your fans engaged:

- **Socialize:** Prioritize your community with content that speaks to their genuine interests
- **Reciprocate:** Build community and extend word-of-mouth marketing by collaborating with fans. After you ask for permission, reshare user-generated content that positively reflects your culture or service
- **Tell a story:** Use videos that feel authentic
- **Ask questions:** Use polls, questions, fill in the blank, and contests to engage and get to know your community and clients

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Social media can be a fun part of any veterinary practice and it doesn’t have to be time-consuming. Establish a single point of contact at your clinic who will be responsible for social content and posting, but allow everyone to participate.

Because shared content from friends is 16X more likely to be read than brand posts, encourage employees to join your page and share your content from their personal pages. But don’t make it a requirement to ensure that employees post judiciously and as a positive representative of the clinic—keep it fun and you’ll do great!

TOP FACEBOOK PRO TIPS

1. Let your personality shine through. Don’t hesitate to have fun, give your opinion, or say something amusing. Talk about community activities, special occasions, etc.

2. Keep it moving: video posts, especially live video, perform better in Facebook’s algorithm and have 6X more interactions than static posts.

3. Facebook wants to be a news source for its members, so share articles from news sources regularly and you’ll rank higher in the algorithm.

4. Post during active Facebook hours: early morning, after work, late at night, and on Thursdays and Fridays.

5. Keep it simple: Facebook is often viewed on a mobile phone, so post simple, compelling images, short copy, video with subtitles, and questions that ask for short responses (yes/no or multiple choice).

6. Tag or mention other influencers when appropriate, eg, handles of vendors, artists, celebrities, brands.

7. Acknowledge fans who share your content by liking or commenting on a shared post; it often opens the door to conversation.

8. Don’t directly ask for a like or share—Facebook will penalize you with reduced reach.

9. Don’t focus too much on selling products and/or antisocial topics; instead, focus on building your community and ignoring detractors who only want to provoke a response and to try to turn the conversation their way.

10. Remember that Facebook is also an opportunity for customers to engage with you. Prepare your strategy in advance for how you want to engage with customer service issues, potential complaints, and medical questions.

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