2018
VETERINARY MARKETING BENCHMARK REPORT

PRESENTED BY iVET360

2018 VETERINARY MARKETING BENCHMARK REPORT

Along with providing quality, trusting care, a large part of a veterinary hospital's success lies in its ability to exude a strong, well-functioning and modern digital presence. In this day and age, every veterinary practice should obviously have a website—however, having a functional website is only the first step to take in order to create an all-encompassing marketing plan that pays off.

But besides having a website, is your veterinary hospital up-to-date on crucial matters like SSL certification, Page Speed, Google Ads or meeting the industry benchmarks for the number of online reviews across Google, Yelp, Facebook and Nextdoor? On top of that, is your marketing provider constantly seeking out new avenues to increase your virtual stronghold?

To benchmark the industry and its use of best practices, we have once again analyzed the digital presences of 1,000 accredited hospitals around the country in all 50 states and compiled approximately 27,000 data points along with year-over-year growth rates.

The overarching theme of this study measures veterinary hospitals and whether they are adhering to the recommended best practices set forth by the major marketing players. Our data reveals that if your practice has taken advantage of these mostly free techniques, you will experience success. In other words, if you pay attention to something it will get better.

This bias-free study is the largest, most comprehensive and most in-depth digital marketing study ever completed in the veterinary field. All checkpoints were based on yes or no questions. We used only facts to build this study—no judgments.

Last year (2017), we created the first Veterinary Marketing Benchmark Report, which was nationally circulated. We are pleased to continue this annual tradition by presenting the 2018 Veterinary Marketing Benchmark Report. We are sharing this valuable information to show all veterinary hospitals where they currently stand and what they need to look for when selecting a marketing provider.

Please note: certain metrics in this report are new for 2018 and were not evaluated in 2017. They have been designated with an asterisk

WEBSITES

84.2%
Have their website domain set up correctly

93.2%
Have a responsive website

47.6%
Have a secure website

17.5%
Have their SEO optimized

77.9%
Have Google Analytics installed

8.6 SECONDS
Average website load time

WEBSITES OVERVIEW

A veterinary hospital's website is the go-to resource for anything related to that hospital. This page should contain all of the necessary information that a potential—and current—client would need to direct them to your practice.

As the backbone of everything your hospital does, it is absolutely essential that your website is functional, trustworthy, responsive for all devices (computer, smartphone and tablet) and optimized for visibility.

84.2%
HAVE THEIR WEBSITE DOMAIN SET UP CORRECTLY

The industry saw a 19% growth over last year.

2017: 70.9%

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals with website domains set up correctly:

100%

The What:

First, we start with the most basic of questions but one of the most important—is your website domain set up correctly? On first glance, you may think that it is, but the fact of the matter is that there are many veterinary pages that are incorrectly set up—meaning they have two versions of the same website out there, living on the internet, competing with each other.

To be more specific, we'll use the example of a fictional practice called Good Veterinary Hospital—this veterinarian does not have their domain set up correctly. As such, their website can be reached at www.GoodVeterinaryHospital.com as well as at GoodVeterinaryHospital.com (notice the second version does not have www). This is bad—by having two versions of the same website, this causes confusion to search engines like Google, which lowers the "value" of Good Veterinary Hospital. It's a simple concept: help Google help you.

Since their value is now lowered, their website will show up less often on search engines, which will hurt their business' online visibility.

The How:

How to check if your website domain is set up correctly: Type your domain name into your browser's address bar including the "www." (for example: www.YourHospitalName.com). Once the page loads completely, remove the www. from the address bar and hit return. If your domain reloads and displays without the www. (as "YourHospitalName.com"), your website is duplicated—this is detrimental. If it reloads with the www. automatically, you are set up correctly. This also works vice versa with the www. redirecting to no www. The important thing is to not have both versions load.

How To Fix This: This one is pretty technical, but extremely easy so talk to your web developer ASAP. If you don't have one, use this link from **NameCheap** to set up the DNS record yourself.

93.2%
HAVE A RESPONSIVE WEBSITE

The industry saw a 9% growth over last year.

2017: 85.2%

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals with a responsive website:

100%

The What:

A responsive website is one that has had the backend adjusted so that it is user-friendly with any device (desktop, smartphone, tablet). When someone is looking for a veterinarian (or a restaurant, shoe store or any other business), they are more likely to search for this vet through a mobile device (phone or tablet) instead of through a desktop computer—in fact, there is **consistently a 50 percent increase** in mobile searches year after year.

In 2015, Google also started penalizing non-mobile-friendly sites.

Despite this development, there are still some veterinary websites (and marketing providers) that have not adjusted their backend to be responsive to all devices. Since a website appears differently on a desktop computer than it does on a tablet or cellphone, certain elements need to be tweaked to ensure that its readability is compatible on all devices.

This affects not only the user-experience, but also search rankings—if a page is not responsive, its visibility will suffer. This simple-yet-important step is critical in this digital, smartphone-driven age and, although numbers are up for 2018, every veterinary practice should absolutely have a responsive website.

The How:

How to check if your website is responsive: Visit **search.google.com/test/mobile-friendly** and enter your veterinary hospital's website address. Google will do the rest.

47.6%
HAVE A SECURE WEBSITE

The industry saw an unprecedented 765% growth over last year.

2017: 5.5%

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals with a secure website:

100%

The What:

If your website is encrypted, this means that your page is secure and that visitors to your site can rest easy knowing that you have taken an important step in protecting them from nefarious online predators. If your website is not encrypted, then the floodgates are open and visitors to your page are vulnerable to online hackers who can access their personal information.

The breakdown is simple—hyperlinks on safe pages begin with "https" whereas unsafe pages begin with "http." (To make it easier to remember, think of the extra "s" in https pages as standing for "secure.")

But how does the general public know if your website is encrypted/safe? Back in **late July of 2018**, Google announced that they would be alerting users regarding unsafe websites and marking them as "unsecure."

This distinction is greatly harmful to prospective (and current) clients because it shows that your website is not only unsafe, but your marketing provider has not secured this for you. While our numbers show a dramatic increase in safe SSL-secure websites for 2018, over half of the industry are still operating with unsafe https pages. This is bad.

The How:

How to check if your website is secure: Pull up your veterinary hospital's website. Check the address bar of your browser to see if there is a lock symbol in front of your domain name. This will be present on all major browsers, including Chrome, Firefox and Safari. If there is a lock symbol, your website is secure. If there is not a lock symbol, or if you see the words "Not Secure" preceding your hyperlink, your website is not secure.

How to fix this: Read our article here on all things SSL.

17.5%
HAVE THEIR SEO OPTIMIZED

The industry saw a 52% decline over last year.

2017: 36.7%

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals with optimized SEO:

98.9%

The What:

If your website's SEO is optimized, this means that your page has been set up for maximum visibility based on search results—SEO (or, search engine optimization) is essentially marketing 101. For this study, we break down our results based on some simple criteria—have you set up 100 percent of your title tags and have you set up 100 percent of your meta descriptions? On top of that, are your title tags and meta descriptions unique?

To further explain this last point, some marketing providers will use the same title tag and meta description for every page on a website—this lack of variation does little to help a page, therefore if there are duplicates, they have scored a "no."

Think of this as cutting corners—a website has been built, which is visible and looks good, however the SEO is not fully optimized. A good metaphor for this would be a house that has been built but lacks proper interior insulation—upon first glance, things look fine, however the important internal needs are either missing or are not installed specifically to every room.

Proper SEO is the foundation for effective marketing, and if your veterinary website is struggling to rank on Google, this will undoubtedly affect your visibility and client count.

Title tags—technically called title elements—define the title of a document. Title tags are often used on search engine results pages (SERPs) to display preview snippets for a given page, and are important both for SEO and social sharing.

Meta descriptions are HTML attributes that provide concise explanations of the contents of web pages. The meta description tag serves the function of advertising copy. It draws readers to a website from the SERP and thus, is an extremely important part of search marketing.

The How:

How to check if your website SEO is optimized: This one is a bit more challenging, as you have to download a program to review these stats. Screaming Frog is a free tool you can use to review the backend of your website, including SEO. It's our go-to for running tests like this. You can download it here: **screamingfrog.co.uk/seo-spider**. Once this program is installed, simply type your hospital URL into the search field and let the program do the rest. It will highlight all missing or duplicate titles/descriptions as well as a number of other SEO components.

2018 VETERINARY MARKETING BENCHMARK REPORT iVET360°

77.9%

HAVE GOOGLE ANALYTICS INSTALLED

The industry saw a 12% growth over last year.

2017: 69.7%

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals with Google Analytics installed:

100%

The What:

Google Analytics is the Big Brother of the internet—if installed on your website, it tracks data and shows you things like your website's number of page views, how exactly people have accessed your site, what they typed to search for your page, where they are searching from, how long they are staying on certain pages on your site, what are the most popular pages on your site and so on.

The data from Google Analytics is invaluable to your marketing plan—for example, if the veterinary surgery section of your website has a lot more views than the pet boarding section, this indicates that you may not have put as much of a marketing emphasis on boarding as you could have.

Every single website should have Google Analytics installed, but what we have uncovered is that only 78 percent are utilizing this vital—and free—tool. Without GA, your marketing plan is aimless, wandering and left to chance.

The How:

How to check if you have Google Analytics on your website: There are a number of ways to check this.

Option one: visit **https://analytics.google.com/** and log into your Google account. You'll see domains which you control Google Analytics for. However, if your website was built by a third party, they will most likely have access.

Option two: while on your website, the keyboard shortcut is Command + U. For Chrome, navigate to "View" and then click on "Developer" and then "View Source." While reviewing the code, search for "UA" on the page. If you see something along the lines of "UA-45947023-1" then you're set. If nothing comes up, you're probably not tracking website visitors.

How to fix this: Google provides a step-by-step guide here.

8.6 SECS.
IS THE AVERAGE VETERINARY HOSPITAL'S WEBSITE LOAD TIME

The industry slowed by 28% over last year.

2017: 6.65 SECONDS

Average website load time of iVET360 hospitals:
6.6 SECONDS

The What:

How fast does it take for your website to load? The time it takes for your site to be fully functional is a crucial metric for Google when they factor in search rankings. To make matters more difficult, the veterinary industry is very image-driven— meaning, people want to see pictures of joyful vets providing care to very cute pets. These images are one of the culprits of slower-loading websites, therefore a happy-medium must exist between using appropriate imagery and optimizing your website for speed.

Google wants users to get to your site fast and secure, with the most accurate information possible. If your page is slow, your business suffers—the faster your site is, the more this helps you adhere to Google's rules, therefore improving your visibility. At the current industry average speed of over eight seconds, **Google estimates a 29% visitor loss due to loading time**.

The How:

How to check your site: You can test your site here: **testmysite.thinkwithgoogle. com/**.

How to fix this: Once you test your site speed above, Google will provide a detailed report on how to fix the issues that are slowing down your site as well as providing a link to share with your current webmaster. The best part, like with most things Google, is that it's free.

GOOGLE

73
Average number of Google Reviews

10.7%
Are using Google Ads

91.7%
Have verified their Google My Business listing

10.2%
Are utilizing Google Posts

5.3%
Are using Google Questions and Answers

14.7%
Have a Google appointment link

12.7%
Are using a Google My Business Description

GOOGLE BUSINESS OVERVIEW

You have probably heard of Google, the tech giant that the worldwide web revolves around. While it's commonplace to think of Google as simply a search engine that occasionally changes up their logo, they are much, much, much more than that.

Google is far and away the most relied-upon search engine, and because of this, they are able to set the rules regarding how websites rank and how easy they are to find. They determine these rules based on a number of factors, which are covered below.

73

GOOGLE REVIEWS FOR THE AVERAGE VETERINARY HOSPITAL

The industry saw an 83% growth over last year.

2017: 40 GOOGLE REVIEWS

Average number of Google Reviews for iVET360 hospitals:

82

The What:

Google Reviews are reviews of your business that show up in your Google Knowledge Panel when someone searches for you online. There are two main variables that determine where your business shows up in the search results—proximity and number of Google reviews.

Google's internal algorithm takes a lot of factors into consideration when ranking businesses—one of the most important of these factors is the amount of reviews—the more reviews your hospital has, the more visible you are.

For example, say you are five miles away from Hospital A, and 10 miles away from Hospital B. Hospital A has 35 Google reviews, whereas Hospital B has 70. Google's algorithm will place Hospital B higher in search results, despite Hospital A being slightly closer. The reason for this is the amount of reviews.

What Google is looking at is the community—when a practice is reviewed more often, this means that the people, or the general consensus, are favoring this hospital.

Along with helping your search ranking, reviews are also important for your practice in gathering and evaluating feedback and letting you know the positive—and negative—things your practice is doing.

The How:

How to gain more Google reviews: Ask your clients. Your hospital sees 10s to 100s of people every day—a simple request to review your services goes a long way in growing your online reviews.

GOOGLE ADS (FORMERLY ADWORDS)*

10.7%
ARE USING GOOGLE ADS

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals using Google Ads:

93.9%

The What:

When you search for a business online, the order that the search results appear in is no accident. Certain companies pay Google to show up higher in search results, so that consumers will have easier access to their business. These companies are utilizing a service called Google Ads, which has constantly been proven to be successful in the veterinary industry.

Google Ads is tricky, yet extremely effective when used correctly. Google does offer online courses for this service, and for those individuals who do complete these courses, they are designated as Google Ads Certified. We do not recommend that hospitals try using Google Ads on their own due to its complexity—our study even reveals that there are a good amount of practices that have tried it and then essentially given up on it because it was too difficult.

In 2017, the Veterinary Hospital Managers Association (VHMA) revealed that new clients are down nine percent in the veterinary industry—however, hospitals that are utilizing Google Ads have seen a 12 percent increase. This is a stark contrast, and our data has revealed that this 21 percent discrepancy is entirely attributed to successful implementation of Google Ads. So, if your hospital is not using this service, you need to only look at the numbers to show you how valuable it really is.

Hospitals that utilize Google Ads also saw a 38 percent increase in number of reviews over those that did not.

The How:

How to set up Google Ads: We recommend your veterinary hospital finds a **Google Certified Partner**. But if you'd like to venture out on your own, **Google has provided this checklist to help**.

Google also offers AdWords Express. AdWords Express has solutions for every business. Google's advertising technology will optimize your ad to help you accomplish specific goals. While it's fairly easy to set up, you likely won't see the same results as working with a marketing professional.

91.7%

HAVE VERIFIED THEIR GOOGLE MY BUSINESS LISTING

The industry saw a 1% growth over last year.

2017: 90.8%

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals with a verified Google My Business listing:

100%

The What:

When you verify your practice with Google My Business, this means that you can now control the way your information appears on Google—this includes your hours, phone number, photos and more. As long as you are a representative of your hospital, you can verify—or in other words, "claim," your listing.

Depending on your eligibility, there are several ways you can be verified, such as a phone call, email, snail mail or through immediate verification. What we have seen before is an unverified practice that has not updated their Google listing, therefore something as elementary as their holiday hours are not accurate. This is where you will see Google stating, "These hours may vary depending on holidays." With a verified Google listing, you can edit your hours and let clients know what your holiday hours or closures may be, instead of leaving them—and Google—guessing. You can also add a bunch of new features for clients that we go more in-depth in later on in this report.

The How:

How to verify your Google listing: If your hospital is eligible to be verified by phone, you'll see the "Verify by phone" option when you request verification. From there, sign in to Google My Business and click "Verify now," which will call your hospital and give you a verification code. Now enter the code from the message.

If you're eligible to be verified by email, first make sure you can access the email address shown in the verification screen. Now go to Google My Business and click "Verify now" then click "Email" from the list of verification options. You will be sent an email, and in this email click the "Verify" button.

To verify your business listing by snail mail, sign in to Google My Business. Then, on the postcard request screen, check if your address is correct. If it isn't, edit the address before requesting your letter. Now click "Send postcard." Check the mail for your postcard which should arrive within 14 days. This postcard will contain a Google Verification code. On your Google My Business account, click the "Verify now" button then enter your code in the code field.

10.2%
UTILIZING GOOGLE POSTS

The industry saw a 500% growth over last year.

2017: 1.7%

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals using Google Posts:
76.5%

The What:

Google Posts allows you to add some unique creative content to your otherwise bland, Google Knowledge Panel. With Google Posts, you can share content in the form of posts with people who are searching for your hospital. These posts can be up to 300-words long with an image and a link with a call to action.

When utilized strategically, Google Posts is a strong weapon in your digital marketing arsenal—say for example that you want to advertise a **free first exam**. If you do this on a Google Post, you can include in that post a direct link to your hospital's website, where a client can make an appointment—this gives them a simplified process of looking up a hospital, clicking on an offer and then scheduling an appointment.

Along with providing ease of use, Google Posts are also a way for practices to stand out from the competition—when a client is looking through a listing of hospitals and sees a practice with an offer and a practice without an offer, the client will likely make an appointment with the practice with an offer.

Hospitals that utilize Google Posts also saw a 12 percent increase in number of reviews over those that did not.

The How:

How to create a Google Post: Sign in to your Google My Business account. Click "Create post," or click "Posts" from the menu. The "Create post" screen appears. Then choose which type of post you'd like to create based on the available options. Choose an option and then enter any relevant information. Click Preview to see a preview of your post and, if you're happy with your post, click "Publish" in the top right corner of the screen.

5.3%
ARE USING GOOGLE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals using Google Questions and Answers:

48%

The What:

Google Questions and Answers acts as an open-forum FAQ for your hospital. Displayed on the Google Knowledge Panel, users can ask—and answer—questions related to your practice. While this seems like a generally minimal feature, when employed properly, it can be a strong marketing tactic. However, if ignored, it can lead to catastrophe.

Let's start with the good part first—a creative way to use Google QA would be to ask your own questions and give your own answers to highlight how your hospital stands out. Say for instance that your practice is the only one in your area that treats reptiles. A good way to use this feature to your advantage would be to ask a question like:

"I can't find a veterinarian in this area to treat my pet snake. Does this hospital see snakes?"
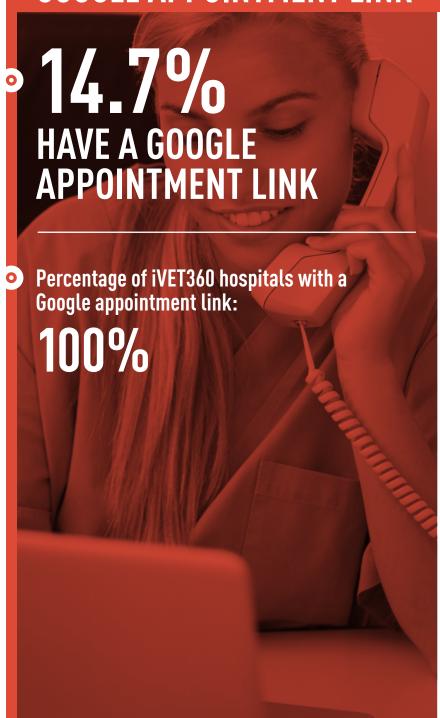
An appropriate and strong marketing answer would be:

"We do treat snakes at our hospital, as well as other reptiles. As the only practice in the 30-mile radius of our city, we are proud to take care of our scaly friends."

On the flip side, if you are not active with Google Questions and Answers, anyone can ask any question, and anyone can give any answer—which could mislead potential and current clients into thinking that these discussions are representative of your practice.

Hospitals that answer Google Q/A also saw a 22 percent increase in number of reviews over those that did not.

The How:

How to set up Google Questions and Answers: We've provided a step-by-step guide here.

14.7%
HAVE A GOOGLE APPOINTMENT LINK

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals with a Google appointment link:
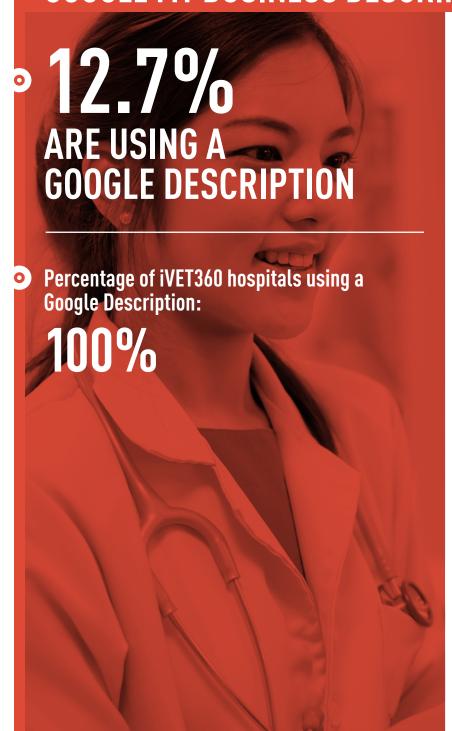
100%

The What:

In 2017, Google rolled out the option for appropriate businesses to add an appointment link to their **Knowledge Panel**. If a practice does use this option, you can see the appointment link in the same area where their map, phone number and hours are.

The intent of Google in adding this feature is to give users an opportunity to contact businesses in the easiest way possible. According to Google, 68 percent of consumers value the option to either call a business or interact with that business online on their smartphone—at iVET360, we only forecast this percentage to go up as more and more people prefer the ease of use of a handheld device.

Hospitals that have set up their appointment link also saw a four percent increase in number of reviews over those that did not.

The How:

How to add an appointment link: Sign in to your Google My Business account and then choose the "My Business" listing. Then click on the URLs section, which should show you fields for relevant links that you will want to add. Now add an appointment link to the field.

GOOGLE MY BUSINESS DESCRIPTION*

12.7%
ARE USING A GOOGLE DESCRIPTION

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals using a Google Description:

100%

The What:

The Google My Business Description lives on the very bottom of your Knowledge Panel and allows you up to 750 characters to write what you wish about your business. You can use this space to add your mission statement, more information about your doctors, a generic overview of your hospital or anything else you see fit.

If you don't add a Google Description to your Knowledge Panel, Google will say that your profile is 20 percent incomplete, which will affect your search ranking—profiles that are aren't as complete will show up less often than profiles that are.

Sometimes however, the option to add your Google Description is unavailable. Because we work so closely with Google, we can confirm that the Google Description option will only be available if you have your business appropriately categorized in Google Business.

For example, if a veterinary practice is categorized as a "veterinarian" but they also offer orthopedic surgery, they may think that it would be a good idea to also add a category of "orthopedic surgeon." This confuses Google, and what happens is that they will not let you add a Google Description. To get around this, simply reduce your number of categories, and the Google Description option should appear.

Hospitals that have a Google Description also saw an 11 percent increase in number of reviews over those that did not.

The How:

How to add a Google My Business description: Log in to your Google My Business account, click on the "Info" button on the menu bar and then look for a section labeled "Add business description." Click on the pencil icon next to that field, and a menu will come up which will let you enter a brief description of your business.

FACEBOOK

87
Average number of reviews on Facebook

78.9%
Have a vanity URL for their Facebook page

32.2%
Have verified their Facebook page

87.6%
Allow direct messaging on their Facebook page

62.8%
Have their Facebook branded to their hospital

FACEBOOK OVERVIEW

Despite its ups and downs in recent times, Facebook is still a marketing force which must be used to promote your practice. Any social media network always falls victim to the cuteness of pets, and Facebook is no exception, as their user base is still just as gigantic as ever and chock full of users who have companion animals and who like to look at pictures of other companion animals.

But remember, just having an online presence on Facebook does not necessarily guarantee marketing success—it all depends on how you use it.

87
FACEBOOK REVIEWS FOR THE AVERAGE VETERINARY HOSPITAL

The industry saw a 52% growth over last year.

2017: 57 FACEBOOK REVIEWS

Average number of Facebook Reviews for iVET360 hospitals:

87

The What:

Facebook Reviews are feedback of your hospital written by people for all of your clientele to see. Around mid-May, Facebook **switched things up** and updated their reviews feature to be reviews and recommendations (which should explain the jump in numbers from this year to last year).

This means that, along with reviews of your hospital by clients, your practice will also get a visible "recommendation" score. This score is, according to Facebook, "based on how many people recommend or don't recommend the Page, as well as any past ratings and reviews it may have." So now clients and prospective clients can go off of your recommendation score as well as the reviews left by pet owners when deciding if they want to visit your hospital for their veterinary needs.

The more reviews your practice has, the better—this demonstrates that you are active with your Facebook page, which helps with search functionality and it also shows that people are taking the time to review your hospital.

The How:

How to gain more Facebook reviews: Make your page more visible by following our guidelines on branding and verifying your page. Then respectfully ask your clients to review your hospital.

FACEBOOK VANITY URL

78.9%
HAVE A VANITY URL FOR THEIR FACEBOOK PAGE

The industry saw a 4% growth over last year.

2017: 75.6%

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals with a vanity URL for their Facebook page:
100%

The What:

A Facebook vanity URL is a customized web address your clients can use to find your Facebook page. When you first create your hospital's page, Facebook assigns you a randomized URL with lots of numbers attached at the end. When you create a vanity URL, you simplify your address and make it easier for your clients to find you on Facebook. The vanity URL also allows for easier branding of your hospital's Facebook page with the "@" symbol.

For example, at iVET360, the vanity URL of our Facebook page is: facebook.com/iVET360. If we hadn't claimed our vanity URL, it would have been something like: facebook.com/pages/iVET360/839408. (You can also find us on Facebook @iVET360.)

So, this is a simple, minimal thing your practice can do to make it easier for your clients to find you and communicate with you.

Hospitals that have a vanity URL also saw a four percent increase in number of reviews over those that did not.

The How:

How to set up a Facebook vanity URL: To create a Facebook vanity URL, your page must first have 25 "Likes" to be eligible. If you are eligible, log into Facebook then go to **www.facebook.com/username**. Now select "Select a Username" for your page, which will bring up a drop-down menu. From there, enter your desired username and click on "check availability." If the vanity URL you want is available, click "Confirm" to abide by Facebook's terms and get your vanity URL.

32.2%
HAVE VERIFIED THEIR FACEBOOK PAGE

The industry saw a 39% growth over last year.

2017: 23.1%

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals with a verified Facebook page:
92.4%

The What:

Facebook verification is similar to Google verification. When you complete this step and become verified, you can edit important information in your Facebook listing.

Once upon a time, Facebook verification was something that was only reserved for celebrities or major corporations. Several years ago, however, they rolled out a verification process for small businesses, including veterinary hospitals—you can now verify your practice by phone or if you have a utility bill for your hospital.

Facebook verification is a great way to add credibility to your page for clients and other Facebook users—plus it eliminates any scenario where a competitor or someone unaffiliated with your practice could create a false Facebook page in your name to potentially harm your business. And of course, becoming verified does help you in Facebook's search algorithm, much like Google.

Hospitals that have a verified page also saw a three percent increase in number of reviews over those that did not.

The How:

How to verify your Facebook page: On your account, click "Settings" then "Page Verification." Select "Verify This Page" and then enter your hospital's phone number. Then select "Call Me Now" and answer Facebook's call, where they will provide you with a code. Once you get this code from the call, Facebook will prompt you for it. Enter the code to become verified.

We've also created a step-by-step guide here.

87.6%
ALLOW DIRECT MESSAGING ON THEIR FACEBOOK PAGE

The industry saw a 2% decline over last year.

2017: 89.6%

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals using Facebook Messenger:

85.9%

The What:

Facebook Messenger is a chat feature that lets people communicate with your practice through individualized messages. It's just another way that clients can get in contact with hospitals—some people prefer digital communication instead of making phone calls, and Facebook Messenger is perfect for this, especially if a pet owner is already on your Facebook page.

You can turn this feature on or off—having it off limits your lines of communication to your clients, yet some businesses prefer turning it off, so they can limit the number of platforms their front office utilizes. Having it turned on doesn't necessarily mean you have to answer medical questions or respond to every single message. Rather, certain practices utilize Messenger to leave an auto response with their phone number or with a link to their website to make an appointment.

Once again, by making your hospital available on Facebook Messenger, you open your practice to more conversations, which leads to more appointments.

62.8%
HAVE THEIR FACEBOOK PAGE BRANDED TO THEIR HOSPITAL

The industry saw a 3% growth over last year.

2017: 61%

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals with their Facebook page branded to their hospital:

97.8%

The What:

Your Facebook page's visibility continues to **dwindle**, therefore having your brand stand out within the newsfeed is a must.

Your hospital's visual branding should extend to your Facebook page, so your clients and other members of the community can recognize you immediately. Think of it this way—your practice will be listed in a user's newsfeed along with their friends, so you want to be easily noticeable and not just something that gets skipped over.

In this study, we are scoring practices based on a rubric of visibility—is your logo used? Are your colors user-friendly? We have seen hospitals switch out their Facebook image for something like a staff member's pet, or a pet of the month— while this is cute, it does degrade visibility. Simply put, your profile photo needs to be your logo or any other identifiable markers that make your hospital stand out.

Hospitals that have a branded page also saw a three percent increase in number of reviews over those that did not.

The How:

How to brand your hospital's Facebook page: We've created a step-by-step guide here.

YELP

27
Average number of reviews on Yelp

86.9%
Have claimed their Yelp listing

15.9%
Are utilizing Yelp ads

9.6%
Have a Yelp Check-In offer

1.1%
Are offering a Yelp Deal

YELP BUSINESS PAGES

After we analyzed hospital websites, Facebook pages and Google pages, we researched Yelp. With 142 million unique users per month, Yelp is a powerful tool for gaining new clients and managing your reputation. Similar to Google, Yelp thrives on customer reviews and claiming your Yelp listing, which allows you to personalize your page and make sure your content is relevant. You can also use Yelp ads to grow your hospital and target customers who you usually wouldn't reach.

Much like your website, Facebook page and Google page, it is essential to properly utilize the tools offered by Yelp to maximize your hospital's online presence.

27
YELP REVIEWS FOR THE AVERAGE VETERINARY HOSPITAL

The industry saw a 17% growth over last year.

2017: 23 YELP REVIEWS

Average number of Yelp reviews for iVET360 hospitals:

44

The What:

Yelp reviews are feedback written by Yelp users about your practice—they are of course a powerful tool for your hospital's search rankings. The more reviews you have, the better your search results will be. Yelp relies on an algorithm that dictates which reviews appear and in what order they will appear. This algorithm depends on how active the reviewer is and takes into account factors such as number of reviews written by the user and whether or not they have a picture on their account.

Yelp strongly advocates against asking your clients for reviews, and they do monitor this. There are however, ways to encourage your clients to pen reviews. You could add a Yelp button to your website that prompts returning customers to review, or you could add the Yelp Review button to your email signature.

Additionally, you could inform clients that you are on Yelp by posting some signage in your storefront. As stated earlier, the more reviews you have, the better your search results will be, which will affect your traffic and ultimately, your hospital's success.

The How:

How to get more Yelp reviews: Utilize the Yelp Check-In offer. Or better yet, politely ask your clients for a review.

86.9%
HAVE CLAIMED THEIR YELP LISTING

The industry saw a 6% growth over last year.

2017: 82.2%

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals with a claimed Yelp listing:

100%

The What:

A claimed Yelp listing is similar to verifying your practice on Google and Facebook. It is important to claim your veterinary hospital's Yelp page, so you are assured that you—and not some stranger or competitor—are the one actually updating your practice's information. On top of this, according to Yelp, businesses with more complete profiles receive more customer leads per month.

So, what exactly, is the first step in having a complete profile? Claiming your business listing. With a claimed Yelp listing, you'll have all the keys to your digital Yelp toolbox, and you'll be able to respond to reviews, add photos, make offers and more.

Hospitals that have a claimed Yelp profile also saw a nine percent increase in number of reviews over those that did not.

The How:

How to claim your hospital's Yelp page: Search for your hospital on Yelp. If your page has not been claimed, there will be a link that says, "Claim your business." Select this link which will lead you through the steps to create a business account. Once your account is set up, continue the instructions to claim the business. Yelp will call the number listed on the business page, and provide you with a code. Once you get this code, type it in to verify ownership of your page.

You can also view our step-by-step guide here.

YELP ADS

● **15.9%**
ARE UTILIZING YELP ADS

The industry saw a 34% growth over last year.

● **2017: 11.9%**

● Percentage of iVET360 hospitals using Yelp Ads:
8.2%

The What:

Yelp Ads are just what they sound like—an additional way to advertise your hospital through Yelp. These paid ads are targeted towards consumers who search for a business like yours, and they help drive users to your Yelp page. Ads get promoted across all Yelp platforms including desktop, mobile website and the mobile app.

Along with appearing in all relevant search pages, they even show up on competitor business pages. Options for Yelp Ads include restricting competitors' ads, having an editable slideshow of your best photos and adding a call-to-action button on your business page which will take clients directly to an order form, coupon image or other custom landing page on your website.

Hospitals that utilize Yelp Ads also saw a 90 percent increase in number of reviews over those that did not.

The How:

How to set up Yelp Ads: Yelp makes it easy to advertise on their platform. **Simply click here for their detailed run down**.

9.6%
HAVE A YELP CHECK-IN OFFER

The industry saw a 92% growth over last year.

2017: 5%

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals using Yelp Check-In offers:

58%

The What:

Yelp Check-In is a smart marketing option that provides incentives to loyal customers to "check in" to your hospital on Yelp. When clients use the check-in feature on the mobile app, this shows their friends that they're at your business. To encourage these check-ins, businesses can create special offers such as a discounted price, free item or a percentage off to reward client loyalty—these offers can be pretty much anything and they can be added or removed at any time.

Yelp Check-In features measurable results including viewing the number of check-ins to your business and keeping track of the number of redeemed offers. What's new in 2018 for Yelp Check-In is that it is now available on desktop.

Hospitals that utilize a Yelp Check-In offer also saw a 119 percent increase in number of reviews over those that did not.

The How:

How to set up a Yelp Check-In Offer: First, establish a Check-In Offer with clients, like $5 off an exam, a free nail trim, a free branded frisbee or a small bag of treats they could get from a vendor. Ideally, give away little things you already have around the clinic. Then go to biz.yelp.com and log in.

Click "Check-In Offers," then click "Create a Check-In Offer." Select what type of offer to give from percent off, price off, fixed price or free item. Add a headline and add description details such as: Check in at (Hospital Name) to receive (offer). Click "Create Offer" and once it has been created, you will see it on the "Check-In Offers" page, which will also show you how many people have checked in and received this offer.

You can also view our step-by-step course here.

2018 VETERINARY MARKETING BENCHMARK REPORT iVET360°

1.1%

ARE OFFERING A YELP DEAL

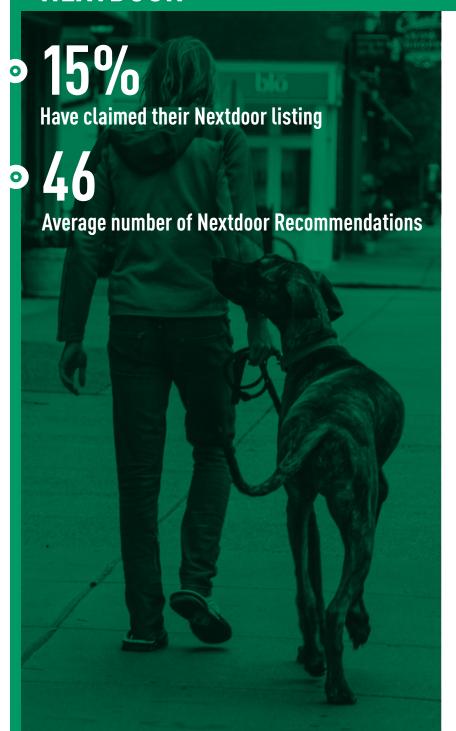Percentage of iVET360 clients offering a Yelp Deal:

2%

The What:

Yelp Deal is a new addition to our Veterinary Marketing Benchmark Report—think of it as similar to Groupon, in that it includes prepaid vouchers that give clients tempting discounts (such as $20 for $30). It's a simple way to give pet owners who are seeking a veterinarian an incentive to pick your hospital over other competitors. It's easy to set up and manage, and you can remove the deal from your Yelp business page at any time.

Hospitals that utilize a Yelp Deal also saw a three percent increase in number of reviews over those that did not.

The How:

How to post a Yelp Deal: To create a Yelp Deal, log in to Yelp for Business Owners and then click "Deals & Gift Certificates" in the sidebar menu. Then click "Set Up Deals and Gift Certificates." From there, choose a price, the number of vouchers to make available and any other special terms. Now review and agree to the Merchant Terms then click "Post this Deal" to finalize the process.

NEXTDOOR

15%
Have claimed their Nextdoor listing

46
Average number of Nextdoor Recommendations

NEXTDOOR OVERVIEW

We have covered the importance of websites, Google, Facebook and Yelp, but the newest player in this game of digital marketing is a platform called Nextdoor. Think of Nextdoor like this—it's similar to Facebook, however the content is limited to people that live in a certain area of town. The residents of Portland, Oregon cannot see any Nextdoor content that the residents of Portland, Maine can—and vice versa.

Nextdoor bills itself as a platform that lets neighbors connect online and make their neighborhoods better, which includes local businesses. While everyone has heard of Facebook and Yelp, Nextdoor has quietly been making their presence known. What's important to ask is this: has your hospital been active on Nextdoor?

Regardless of whether your practice has been active or not, **your hospital does indeed have a Nextdoor business listing**, and it's crucial to make sure that you have claimed it and are monitoring it.

15%
HAVE CLAIMED THEIR NEXTDOOR LISTING

Percentage of iVET360 hospitals with claimed Nextdoor listings:
100%

The What:

Imagine that your hospital has 45 people recommending your services. These are the clients that live in your local community—they are the people next to you and who know you best—they are your neighbors. Now picture that you had no idea about these reviews or about any of the feedback. Or worse, imagine that you were receiving unfair, negative reviews that you didn't even know existed.
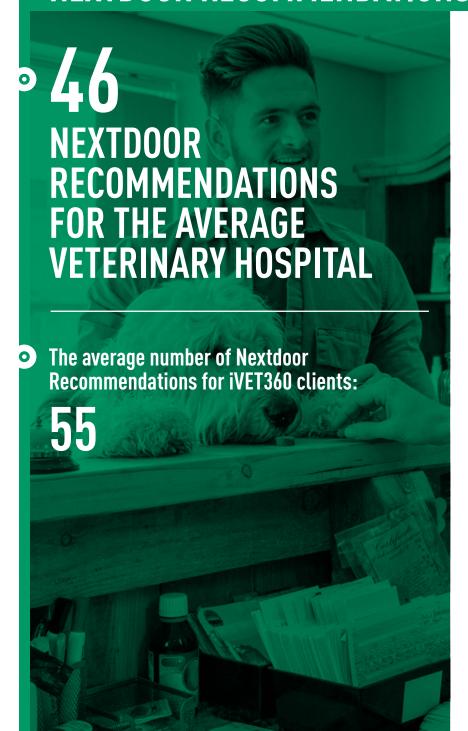
This is why it's so important to claim your Nextdoor listing—there are hospitals out there that are unaware and defenseless to what people are saying about them on Nextdoor, all because they haven't claimed their listing and haven't been active on their account.

The How:

How to claim your Nextdoor listing: To claim your listing, you must (of course) first be affiliated with your hospital, then you need to create an account, search for your practice and click "Claim"—make sure to claim it as a business.

Then enter your name, email and a password. Once you claim your page, you will have to go through a basic phone verification protocol to confirm you are who you say you are. When you are finished claiming your hospital, you can see what people are saying about you, respond to comments and update your profile information.

You can also follow our step-by-step guide here.

46

NEXTDOOR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE AVERAGE VETERINARY HOSPITAL

The average number of Nextdoor Recommendations for iVET360 clients:

55

The What:

On your public Nextdoor business page, there is a button with a heart logo that says "Recommend." Users can click this button and then write a positive comment about your hospital, which everyone in your network can see. However, people can also just write a comment about your hospital without hitting the "Recommend" button, which shows up in the same feed as the recommendation comments—here is where users often post negative reviews.

While negative feedback can't necessarily be helped, what you can do if this occurs is either reply publicly on the forum or you can send the commenter a private message to mend any wrongdoing. Negative reviews can also be removed by Nextdoor if the content violates their guidelines, however this must first be reported and then removed by them.

Recommendations help by not only creating a positive aura around your hospital, but the more that people recommend your practice, the higher you show up on search results in your network, which helps with visibility and ultimately, client count.

This report was created to establish a benchmark you can use to measure your hospital's marketing efforts, with the majority of these data points showing an increase from 2017. What this demonstrates is an industry that is ever-evolving, yet still has some catchup work to do to effectively manage all of the available marketing tools out there.

If your veterinary hospital is doing your own marketing, or if you rely on a provider, ask yourself—is my practice utilizing all of the methods in this report? And, are we capable of adjusting to the new marketing trends next year, or even 10 years from now?

To receive your veterinary hospital's score, contact iVET360 and tell us your hospital name, website and email address, and we'll provide a complimentary all-inclusive digital report for your hospital within 24 hours.

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