

# 2019 VETERINARY MARKETING BENCHMARK REPORT

Presented by iVET360



# 2019 VETERINARY MARKETING BENCHMARK REPORT

While the large part of a veterinary hospital's success will always remain in the quality of care given to pets as a trusted presence in the community, it has also become increasingly important to have a strong digital presence. As the world continues to evolve and intertwine with the internet, simply having a personalized website (which every veterinary practice should have) is not enough; in fact, it's only the first step. To be successful in a digital environment, hospitals should take care to create a marketing plan that spans the platforms and ecosystems that make up the internet—which can be a lot to think about.

You attend conferences throughout the year where you're given countless items to add to your to-do list. You get marketing calls everyday in the hospital about the "next big thing." But the thing no one tells you is, does this stuff really matter? And if it does, how can you implement it and what should your hospital shoot for? For example, should you have an SSL certification on your website (YES!) and why does it matter? Are people still using Yelp (not really)? Could there be a platform out there where your hospital has over 80 reviews that you're unaware of—where most of the industry has no idea what's being said about them (good or bad)?

In 2017, we created the Veterinary Marketing Benchmark Report, which was nationally circulated. We continued this annual tradition last year (2018) and are now pleased to present the 2019 Veterinary Marketing Benchmark Report with new and updated statistics. 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.

To benchmark the industry and its use of best practices, we have once again analyzed the digital presence of 1,000 accredited hospitals around the country—in all 50 states—and compiled approximately 37,000 data points (adding 10,000 new data points this year) along with year-over-year growth and decline rates.

Simply put, our goal in creating this study was to reveal the efforts veterinary hospitals have given to marketing their services in the digital sphere, according to the recommended best practices that have been outlined by major marketing players in the industry. Most of the best tools put forth are free of charge and result in success for your hospital, should you take advantage of them.

This bias-free study continues to be 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. It's the only way we know how to create and review best practices.

Please note: certain metrics in this report are new for 2019 and were not evaluated in 2018 or 2017. They have been designated with an (NEW) mark after the category title.

# WEBSITES



## OVERVIEW

A veterinary hospital's website should be a digital manifestation of the information and personality a client would be able to receive by walking through the doors of the physical hospital. This would include answers to any question a client or potential client would have about the practice and multiple points of contact should they not find the information they were looking for. Basically, the website should be the go-to resource for anything and everything related to its respective hospital.

You've heard it all before: as a business, you need a fast, mobile-friendly, secure website with SEO, SEO, SEO. But the truth is, you really need to start comparing your hospital's website with other, local animal hospitals, and stop comparing your site to standards set up outside the industry. The key is to learn the what, why and how to make sure your hospital's website will out-perform any local competition.

Here we dive into the foundational best practices of what your website should shoot for.

Have their website domain set up correctly **83.3%**

Have Google Analytics installed **83.2%**

Have a mobile responsive website **93.9%**

Have an ADA compliant website **46.6%**

Have a secure website **73.4%**

Average website load time (4G) **3.9 Seconds**

Have their SEO optimized **18.5%**

Average website load time (3G) **8.2 Seconds**



# WEBSITES



## DOMAIN NAME SET UP (WEBSITE URL)

83.3%

HAVE THEIR  
WEBSITE DOMAIN  
SET UP CORRECTLY

### PRIOR YEAR STATS

2018: 84.2%

2017: 70.9%

### NOTES

The industry saw a 7% decline over last year, but is up 17% overall over the past two years. 100% of iVET360 clients have a correctly set up URL.

### The What:

We start with one of the most basic—though also one of the most important—questions: 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, competing with each other.

To be more specific, we'll use the example of a fictional practice called Good Veterinary Hospital. Now, this veterinarian does not have their domain set up correctly—as such, their website can be reached at [www.GoodVeterinaryHospital.com](http://www.GoodVeterinaryHospital.com) as well as at [GoodVeterinaryHospital.com](http://GoodVeterinaryHospital.com) (notice the second version does not have www). This is bad—by having two versions of the same website, search engines like Google view this as duplicate content, which lowers the “value” of Good Veterinary Hospital's SEO.

### The Why:

Considering the simplicity of this issue, this year's decline in corrected domains is concerning. It's likely that many of the practices that caused the rather large increase in secure websites did not install their SSL certificates correctly. This could cause a separation of domains, making one “secure” and one “not secure,” neither of which would be able to redirect to the other. The example for this would be <https://www.GoodVeterinaryHospital.com> versus <http://www.GoodVeterinaryHospital.com>.

### 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](http://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](http://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.

If you or your developer has added an SSL certification to your website, type in “<http://>” before your domain name. Your website should automatically reload to “<https://>” if the certificate was installed correctly.

**How To Fix This:** Both of these issues are pretty technical, so talk to your web developer ASAP. If you don't have one, you can fix the “www.” redirect by using this link from [NameCheap](#) to set up the DNS record yourself. For the incorrect SSL installation, you'll need to contact your service provider if you don't have a developer.

# WEBSITES



## MOBILE RESPONSIVE WEBSITE

93.9%

HAVE A MOBILE  
RESPONSIVE  
WEBSITE

### PRIOR YEAR STATS

2018: 93.2%

2017: 85.2%

### NOTES

The industry saw a mere 1% growth over last year, but an overall growth of 10% over the past two years. 100% of iVET360 clients have a responsive website.

### The What:

With the number of varied devices people use to access the internet—and to search for veterinary hospitals—it is incredibly important for a website to behave responsively. For you, this means that the backend of your website needs to be adjusted so that it can change depending on the device used; whether it be accessed by tablet, smartphone, or plain old desktop, your website should to boast easy engagement and be entirely user-friendly. While this may not have been as consequential a few years ago, there is evidence that [mobile searches have increased by a consistent 50 percent](#), year after year. This means your current and potential clients are most likely going to look for, and find, a veterinarian using their phone or tablet.

If that wasn't enough, Google has also been penalizing non-mobile-friendly sites since 2015.

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 while it seems the industry has plateaued this year, we still believe every veterinary practice should have a responsive website.

### The Why:

This metric has inched closer and closer to 100 percent for the past three years. With the continued push by Google to be Mobile First, we don't foresee this metric declining.

### The How:

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

# WEBSITES



## SSL CERTIFICATES

**73.4%** HAVE A  
SECURE  
WEBSITE

### PRIOR YEAR STATS

2018: 44.6%  
2017: 3.9%

### NOTES

The industry saw a 65% growth over last year and an incredible 1782% growth over the past two years. 100% of iVET360 clients have a secure website.

### The What:

The breakdown for website security is simple—hyperlinks on safe pages begin with “https,” while unsafe pages begin with “http.” To make it easier to remember, think of the extra “s” in https pages as standing for “secure.”

If your website is encrypted, it is guaranteed as safe for people to visit without fear of being attacked by viruses. If it’s not encrypted, the floodgates of are left open, leaving visitors vulnerable to online hackers who can access their personal information.

To help the general public determine whether or not they should venture onto an unfamiliar site, [Google has placed a “Not Secure” warning](#) on the left side of the address bar whenever the user enters an unencrypted site. This was done in an effort to make the internet safer by somewhat shaming those websites that have not put the privacy of their visitors first.

As you can imagine, this distinction could seriously hurt your client growth and retention as a hospital if you have not taken the extra step of having your website encrypted. Not only will the visitor avoid entering any information (whether in a comment box or appointment portal) on your hospital’s site, they may also conclude that you or your marketing provider does not care for the safety or wellbeing of others—and how could they trust you with their pet if that’s the case?

### The Why:

While our numbers show a dramatic increase in secure websites for the third year in a row, there are still a decent number of hospitals who have not taken the important step of encrypting their website. Thankfully, major website providers in the industry have begun adding the SSL certificate on their client’s sites—without charging an extra fee. While this is likely a response to competition from free services, it is also a major contributor to a growth of over 65 percent from last year.

### 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.](#)



# WEBSITES



## SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION (SEO)

18.5%

HAVE AN SEO  
OPTIMIZED  
WEBSITE

### PRIOR YEAR STATS

2018: 17.5%

2017: 36.7%

### NOTES

The industry saw a 6% growth over last year, but this is part of an overall 50% decline over the past two years. 100% of iVET360 clients have optimized SEO.

### The What:

If your website's SEO is optimized, your page has been set up for maximum visibility based on search results. 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 this, are these title tags and meta descriptions unique?

Often, even if some of your website's pages have the SEO configured, some marketing providers will forget to add it to new content or blog posts. Even those that do may choose to reuse a title tag and meta description for every page on a website, which does very little to help a page.

A good metaphor for SEO would be a house that has been built and has a brilliant interior layout and decor but lacks proper siding and is completely hidden from the road by a copse of trees. On the inside, things are up to date, but without the curb appeal, no one will give notice to the site, especially not search engines. 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 “title elements”—define the title of a document. They are often used on search engine results pages (SERPs) to display preview snippets for a given web page, making them important for both SEO and social sharing.*

*\*\*Meta descriptions are HTML attributes that provide concise explanations of the contents of web pages. The meta description tag serves as advertisement for copy, drawing readers to a website from the SERP, making it an extremely important part of search marketing.*

### The Why:

One major reason for the continued decline in the industry's SEO optimization is the increased use of free platforms such as Wix or Weebly. With these sites, it is incredibly hard, if not impossible, to input unique SEO modifications, which creates a major pitfall and reveals the quality of sites built with these platforms.

### The How:

This one is a bit more challenging, as you have to download a program to review these stats. Screaming Frog is our go-to for running tests like this—it's a free tool you can use to review the backend of your website, including SEO. You can download it here: [screamingfrog.co.uk/seo-spider](https://www.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.

# WEBSITES



## GOOGLE ANALYTICS

**83.2%** HAVE GOOGLE ANALYTICS INSTALLED

**PRIOR YEAR STATS**  
2018: 77.9%  
2017: 69.7%

### NOTES

The industry saw a 7% growth in installations over last year and a growth of 19% over the past two years. 100% of iVET360 clients utilize Google Analytics.

### The What:

Having Google Analytics installed on your website gives you access to more information than you may have believed possible. Want to know how many people are viewing your site? How far down the page those people are typically scrolling? What they searched to get to your website in the first place? Or what the most popular or time-greedy page on your website is? Just ask Google Analytics!

With the data you receive from Google Analytics, you can create a more pointed and intentional marketing plan that responds to the places of your website that are getting more or less traffic than you'd prefer. This is a much more efficient and cost-effective plan than projecting out and basically guessing at what people's eyes will tend toward (whether that be colors, images or even turns of phrase).

### The Why:

Every single website should have Google Analytics installed, and while there continues to be a slow increase, we still see only 83 percent of the industry 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 the domains for which you control Google Analytics. If your website was built by a third party, though, they will most likely have access.

**Option two:** while on your website, the keyboard shortcut is Command + U (or CTRL +U on PC). 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.](#)



# WEBSITES



## ADA ACCESSIBILITY (NEW)

**46.6%** HAVE AN ADA COMPLIANT WEBSITE

### NOTES

100% of iVET360 clients have complete ADA Compliance on their websites.

### The What:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination (intentional or not) against people with disabilities in all areas of public life, ensuring equal opportunity. Because this act was signed in 1990, before the advent of the internet, the rules of how it should apply to publicly-accessed websites have been rather up in the air. There has been a lot of discussion on the topic in the veterinary industry, but the bottom line is that digital accessibility is an absolute necessity.

The benefits of building a website following ADA guidelines are greater than just meeting the law in every area of your practice. By making your site accessible, you are allowing more people to access the information on your website, and to do so with increased ease. Showing the public that you are aware of differences in ability and functionality could also be a good representation of how well you'll care for their pets.

Beyond ADA compliance, which covers basic functions like alternative text for images, we created the metric with complete accessibility in mind, a distinction which is often missed. For example, your site should be able to flip its content to be accessible to multiple audiences. Currently, less than half of websites in the industry are accessible and ADA compliant, which is a sad percentage considering the heart of the industry is helping people and their pets, some of which may be service animals that aid in accessibility themselves.

### The How:

**How to check if your website is ADA compliant:** Run your website through this free online tool at [info.user1st.com/ada-website-compliance-checker](https://info.user1st.com/ada-website-compliance-checker).

**How to fix this:** Accessible features can be difficult to implement on websites that are already up and running. It would be best to talk to your provider to see if they are able to reconfigure the necessary HTML.

# WEBSITES



## WEBSITE PAGE SPEED

3.9 Seconds

AVERAGE  
WEBSITE LOAD  
TIME (4G)

### PRIOR YEAR STATS

2018: 8.6 Secs. (3G)

2017: 6.7 Secs. (3G)

8.2 Seconds

AVERAGE  
WEBSITE LOAD  
TIME (3G)

### NOTES

Industry websites have sped up by 5% over last year, but they are still 23% slower than they were two years ago. The speed of iVET360 clients websites is 2.9 seconds (4G).

### The What:

Site speed is a metric that Google takes into account when deciding whose websites to feature on the SERP. This year, they altered their algorithm, which prioritizes the speed of a site on mobile devices over desktop—a speed they'd still like to be under 2 seconds. Theoretically, this is a good thing, because Google wants users to be able to get into a site securely and efficiently. You just need to make sure your website speed is at least on the faster side of the average for veterinary hospitals so that your competitors don't start out-ranking you on Google.

For 4G, the veterinary industry is currently sitting at an average loading speed of just under 4 seconds—and it's been found that [by that time, 24 percent of potential visitors have grown impatient and left](#) the site.

Data-consuming images are a large reason why the veterinary industry isn't up to Google's standard. People want a visual of how well their dog is going to be cared for. While this isn't entirely a bad thing—we too love endless puppy videos—it's important to cater to what clients want to see on your website without forcing them to wait so long for a high-def cat GIF that they end up leaving your site to find another vet in the area.

### The Why:

In their effort to prioritize mobile site speed, Google has updated the tool we use for this metric to measure speed at 4G as well as 3G, as much of the population relies on the former when using mobile devices. While moving forward, we will focus on the 4G data as well, it's still important to note that there was a small increase in 3G speed (or a decrease in seconds) since last year. While still much slower than the 2017 statistics, this is definitely a step in the right direction, especially considering 4G speed tends to be about twice as fast as 3G. A major factor to this increase in speed is the site theme and server upgrades that a major industry provider did in 2019. It is likely other major providers will follow suit in the coming years.

### The How:

**How to check your site:** You can test your site here: [thinkwithgoogle.com/feature/testmysite](https://thinkwithgoogle.com/feature/testmysite). **How to fix this:** Once you test your site speed, 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 MY BUSINESS



## OVERVIEW

As the most relied-upon search engine, Google has a deep and expansive influence. There are so many different websites and pages that advertise similar things, though, that it's important to let Google know you matter to the public and belong in their search results. The best way to do this is with the Google My Business Knowledge Panel, which can be thought of as a mini website that pops up after a search is made, which gives Google searchers an idea of what your hospital is, how you operate and why they should bring their beloved pet to you instead of anyone else. From answering questions to keeping updated business hours, Google's broad-stroke feature lets you communicate directly to your clients using this.

The Knowledge Panel is absolutely necessary, in this day and age, to not only maintain your veterinary hospital's presence but to maximize your clientele and, ultimately, maximize your revenue as well. We've included below the different aspects of this profile that Google takes into account and which you should as well if you want the best online traffic and visibility possible.

Average number of reviews on Google	115	Have a GMB Short Name	8.3%
Are using Google Ads	11.8%	Are utilizing Google Posts	21%
Have claimed their GMB listing	92.5%	Are utilizing Google Offers	3.4%
Have a GMB appointment link	22.6%	Are using GMB Questions & Answers	17.1%
Have a GMB Description	35.6%	Average number of GMB questions	3



# GOOGLE MY BUSINESS



## GOOGLE REVIEWS

**115** GOOGLE REVIEWS  
FOR THE AVERAGE  
VETERINARY HOSPITAL

**PRIOR YEAR STATS**  
2018: 73  
2017: 40

**NOTES**  
The industry saw a 57% increase over last year, part of a promising 187% increase over the past two years. iVET360 clients average at 125 reviews.

### The What:

Reviews matter for so many reasons. They give you a good idea of how your clients see your services, and they give potential clients a first-hand look at the care their pet will receive at your hospital. Google Reviews also play a major role in where your business is located on the Google search results page.

Google Reviews are the first thing that show up under the name of your hospital in the Google Knowledge Panel. The more reviews you have, and the higher the average number of stars, the more likely you are to appear more attractive to potential patrons, and Google knows that. It's easier to trust the quality of a veterinary hospital that 40 people agreed deserved 4.6 stars than one that 6 people agreed should have the full 5.0 stars, and while Google's algorithm for search results is rather complicated, it is this that is taken into account more than anything—along with proximity to the person searching.

That being said, if the veterinarian with only 6 Google Reviews is only five miles away, it will be placed after the practice that has 40 reviews, yet is 10 miles away.

The good news is, local pet-owning communities are becoming more involved and leaving veterinary hospitals more reviews. In fact, the average practice received 3.5 new reviews every month during 2019. That may not seem like much, but from our data, it sings to the tune of 57 percent growth over last year. As a whole, too, Google continues to lead the pack of business listing services in average number of reviews; this makes sense, considering it's the first thing your client sees when they Google "vet near me."

### The How:

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

# GOOGLE MY BUSINESS



## GOOGLE ADS (FORMERLY ADWORDS)

11.8%

OF HOSPITALS  
ARE UTILIZING  
GOOGLE ADS

PRIOR YEAR STATS  
2018: 10.7%

### NOTES

The industry saw a 10% growth over last year's first data collection. 96% of iVET360 clients utilize Google Ads.

### The What:

Much like a chain bookstore where the books near the front are more likely to be sponsored rather than organized to be set there, when you search the web for a veterinary hospital, the frontmost results are more likely to be practices that paid Google for preference so that pet owners would be able to find their site easier without having to browse shelf after shelf of similar domains. These hospitals have wisely chosen make use of a service called Google Ads, which has constantly been proven to be successful in the veterinary industry.

Google Ads has a surprisingly large learning curve. They want to make sure that the content they are promoting doesn't look like it was written by a second grader—which is fair—so they created an online course outlining the details of this service. Individuals who complete the course are designated as "Google Ads Certified." A small business may try to navigate the world of Google Ads for the first time by themselves, but we very much warn against this. Oftentimes, the hospitals that choose the DIY path end up giving up by the end.

In 2018, the Veterinary Hospital Managers Association (VHMA) revealed that new clients are down 13 percent in the veterinary industry, which is even greater than the 9 percent decline seen at this time last year—however, hospitals that are utilizing Google Ads have continued to increase their clientele. Our data has also revealed that the discrepancy in client growth/loss 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.

### The Why:

Hospitals that utilize Google Ads saw a 19 percent increase in number of reviews over those that did not. For iVET360 clients in particular, Google Ads are currently the leading contributor to new client generation.

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

# GOOGLE MY BUSINESS



## GMB CLAIMED

**92.5%** OF HOSPITALS  
HAVE CLAIMED  
THEIR GMB LISTING

### PRIOR YEAR STATS

2018: 91.7%  
2017: 90.8%

### NOTES

The industry saw a slight 1% growth over last year, evening growth to just 2% over the past two years. 100% of iVET360 clients are verified on GMB.

### The What:

By verifying your practice with Google My Business, you gain control of how 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 “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. There’s no reason a practice should not be verified on Google, and thankfully the percentage of practices who are has continued its slow growth.

With unverified practices that have not updated their Google listing, information as elementary as their holiday hours are often inaccurate online. 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 will describe more in-depth later 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.” Google will then 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 then be sent an email, which contains the “Verify” button.

To verify your business listing by snail mail, sign in to Google My Business. 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.



# GOOGLE MY BUSINESS



## GMB APPOINTMENT LINK

**22.6%** OF HOSPITALS  
HAVE A GMB  
APPOINTMENT LINK

PRIOR YEAR STATS  
2018: 14.7%

### NOTES

The industry saw 54% more hospitals using the appointment link over last year. 100% of iVET360 clients utilize this tool.

### The What:

The goal of your Google Knowledge Panel is for it to be so chock full of genuine information about your practice that clients would feel comfortable making an appointment then and there. Thankfully, there's a feature right in your Knowledge Panel specifically for that purpose! This appointment link is not available for all businesses, so consider yourself lucky that the entire veterinary industry gets to keep this efficient little button in the same area as the map, phone number and hours of your hospital.

Consumers like having multiple options to get in contact with the services they'll be partaking in (or that their animals will be). This is especially true for people who are searching for a veterinary hospital using a mobile device. In fact, according to Google, 68 percent of consumers value the option to either call a business or interact with them online while using their smartphone, and we at iVET360 can only see this percentage going up as the handheld device becomes more and more functional for tasks that are usually saved for a laptop or desktop computer. Adding the appointment link is a step toward that functionality, making it much easier for people on the go to schedule a visit for their pet.

As hospitals are devoting more time to their Google My Business profiles, free opportunities such as the appointment link are surfacing, as well as the benefits of these simple solutions. This would account in great measure for the 54 percent increase in veterinary hospitals making use of this free and convenient feature.

### The Why:

Hospitals that have set up their appointment link also saw a 4 percent increase in number of reviews over those that have not. We also found that adding the appointment link [drove 15 percent of the clicks on a business listing](#), equaling more booked appointments.

### 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, and add an appointment link to the correct field.

# GOOGLE MY BUSINESS



## GMB DESCRIPTION

**35.6%** OF HOSPITALS  
HAVE A GMB  
DESCRIPTION

**PRIOR YEAR STATS**  
2018: 12.7%

### NOTES

The industry saw a solid 180% increase in hospitals with this description. 100% of iVET360 clients have their description on the Google My Business listing.

### The What:

A description of your practice is an easy thing to create as a person who's intimately familiar with their hospital, but just because it's easy doesn't mean it isn't effective. Google has an optional section at the bottom of your hospital's Knowledge Panel that allows you to use up to 750 characters talking about your practice in anyway you choose—this is the Google My Business Description. If you don't want to add a general overview of your practice, you can include your mission statement, more information about your doctors or really anything else you see fit!

Your Google Description is worth an entire 15 percent of your profile when Google is calculating how complete your hospital's profile is. This is big, considering the less complete a profile is, the lower your practice's search listing is ranked. This means it won't show up in internet searches as often as those that have a more fleshed out profile.

If you don't see the option to add a description on your Google My Business page, it's possible your business is inappropriately categorized within Google My Business. This can often be rectified by simply reducing the number of categories your hospital is claiming to be under. Keeping the category to the most accurate will remove any confusion Google may have about your business, and the Google Description feature should become available.

### The Why:

Hospitals that have a Google Description also saw a 10 percent increase in the 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 look for a section labeled "Add business description." Click on the pencil icon next to that field, which will bring up a menu that will let you enter a brief description of your business.

# GOOGLE MY BUSINESS



## GOOGLE SHORT NAME (NEW)

8.3%

OF HOSPITALS  
HAVE A GOOGLE  
SHORT NAME

### NOTES

100% of iVET360 clients have a short name to their Google Knowledge Panels.

### The What:

We've already talked quite a bit about the Google Knowledge Panel, home to your business's Google Reviews, Appointment Link, Questions and Answers, Posts, Offers and Description, on top of the more basic contact, location and website information. In order to fully complete your Google My Business Profile, though, you need to have claimed a Google Short Name, which will direct current and prospective clients straight to this Google Knowledge Panel, where they can then take part in Offers, ask Questions and see this amalgamation of great information you've compiled for them.

The Short Name is a unique, simplified URL that can easily be recalled, and therefore easily shared. The key here is to claim your Google Short Name ASAP, before another business with a similar name, wherever they may be around the world, takes yours out from under you. As of right now, the URL for your Knowledge Panel is an unnecessarily long string of letters and numbers, like a code that needs cracking. To be more accessible and visible, it is pertinent that you go into your Google My Business Profile and change it to one that starts with "g.page/" and ends with the name of your hospital or some adaptation of it that fits within the 32 character limit—with nothing in between.

An example of a Google Short Name would be "g.page/CityVet/"

### The Why:

Hospitals that have a Google Short Name also saw a 14 percent increase in number of reviews over those that did not.

### The How:

**How to claim a Google Short Name:** If you're on a computer, sign in to your Google My Business account, then open the location that you want to create a Short Name for. From the menu, click "Info" and then "Add profile Short Name". Now you can enter your Short Name (If your name isn't available, it will prompt you to choose a different name.) and click "Apply." Your Short Name will show as pending at first, but it'll eventually show up on your Business Profile when it's ready.

If you're on a mobile device, you'll first need the Google My Business app. Once you have that, open it and click on "My Business." Next, tap "Profile" and "Add profile Short Name." This is where you can enter your desired Google Short Name before pressing "Save." Just as with the computer method, your Short Name will show as pending at first, but will eventually show up on your Business Profile when it's ready.

# GOOGLE MY BUSINESS



## GMB POSTS

**21%** ARE UTILIZING  
GOOGLE MY  
BUSINESS POSTS

**PRIOR YEAR STATS**  
2018: 10.2%  
2017: 1.7%

### NOTES

With a growth of 106% over last year, the industry has increased its use of Google Posts by a whopping 1135% over the past two years. 68.5% of iVET360 clients make use of this tool.

### The What:

Google Posts are a great way to share content with people searching for your hospital. The posts are situated within your Google Knowledge Panel and, in addition to the space for up to 300 words of content, they can include an image and a link with a call to action. This link could send viewers to a blog post, appointment form or contact page among other destinations, and allows Google Posts to work as a strong marketing tool worth having on hand.

For example, if somebody had heard about your hospital, but they weren't sure if they wanted to make an appointment, you could use a Google Post to share your "Free First Exam" offer with them and provide a link to your website. For them, this simplifies the process of scheduling an appointment, while also providing incentive to do so, and to choose your hospital in particular.

In this way, Google Posts are 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 is likely to make their appointment with the former. Plus, Google itself will reward the business that chooses to utilize their free tools, meaning your practice will actually be more readily found when prospective clients are searching for a new veterinary hospital in their area.

If it isn't intuitive that visibility makes a business money, the fact that the use of Google Posts has grown by 1200 percent over the past two years should be evidence enough. People are noticing the benefits of posting straight to their Google Knowledge Panel, and it's worth jumping on the trend now while only 21 percent of the industry is participating in this growth strategy.

### The Why:

Hospitals that utilize Google Posts also saw a 10 percent increase in the 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. On the "Create post" screen, choose which type of post you'd like to create based on the available options, then enter any relevant information. Click "Preview" to see a preview of your post and, if you're happy with it, click "Publish" in the top right corner of the screen.

# GOOGLE MY BUSINESS



## GMB OFFERS (NEW)

3.4%

ARE UTILIZING  
GOOGLE MY  
BUSINESS OFFERS

### NOTES

56% of iVET360 clients are utilizing this tool.

### The What:

Google My Business Offers are much like the Posts. In fact, they're really a subset of this effective tool. What makes Google Offers different, though, is where they're placed, specifically when people are searching for your practice on mobile. Instead of sitting at the bottom of the knowledge panel like the rest of the Google Posts, Offers are positioned right beneath the standard business information (i.e. address, hours, phone number etc.). This is only for mobile devices, however, and the desktop version will sort the Offers down among the Google Posts.

Google Offers can be used to promote, well, offers to new clients. We typically recommend the somewhat counterintuitive strategy of placing a Free First Exam offer here. These are proven to be quite profitable in the long run, and they are extremely attractive to the pet owner in search of a caring and affordable veterinary hospital.

Only 3.4 percent of the industry is currently making use of both Google Posts and Google Offers, so we're hoping you'll make use of the deficit to increase client growth and engagement. With the incredible amount of time people are spending on their phones instead of laptops or other desk computers, it makes sense to invest in a form of community engagement that is so specifically catered to small products.

### The Why:

Hospitals that have utilized Google Offers also saw a 32 percent increase in number of reviews over those that did not.

### The How:

**How to create a Google Offer:** First, follow the instructions for making a Google Post. Make sure you pick the kind Post that reads "Google Offer" instead of something more simple. When entering information, you'll be able to add a description of the deal, a coupon code, any terms and conditions that apply to the promo, a phone number and/or a link to a form on their website. We suggest using a tracking number or link here so that you can keep track of how many people contact you simply because of that Offer, thus getting an idea of how effective such a tool would be for your hospital.

# GOOGLE MY BUSINESS



## GMB QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

17.1%

ARE USING GMB  
QUESTIONS &  
ANSWERS

3

AVERAGE  
NUMBER OF  
QUESTIONS

PRIOR YEAR STATS  
2018: 5.3%

### NOTES

The industry saw a serious growth over last year of 223% more hospitals paying attention to Google Questions and Answers. 42.6% of iVET360 clients make use of this feature.

### The What:

Displayed within your Google Knowledge Panel, Google Questions and Answers allows any user to easily ask questions related to your practice. This is a very useful tool for informing and interacting with the public. If ignored or employed improperly, though, this forum-style feature could easily have negative consequences.

To use Google Q/A as an effective marketing tool, you could populate the section with your own questions and answers—almost like an FAQ. Not only does this get information out faster, it is also a good way to push services or features of your hospital you want the public to be more aware of. For example, if your hospital has avian services, you can submit a question as if it came from a bird owner in the community asking whether or not you do see birds. From there, you can go back in and respond with a strong, marketing-oriented answer to let them know that you do, in fact, treat birds.

The problem is, if you aren't actively replying to the questions people leave, anyone else can answer them. This could leave the question askers trusting the wrong parties and the wrong information. By being proactive and answering these questions right away, you can prevent this issue from the get-go, while also making current and potential clients feel valued.

The spike in Google Q/A metrics comes mainly from the consumer. People are getting more used to using this platform to find answers to their questions. In fact, the average hospital has no less than three questions posted and ready to answer, and people who receive responses are statistically more likely to call the practice to follow up on their questions.

### The Why:

Hospitals that answer Google Q/A also saw a 23 percent increase in number of reviews over those that did not.

### The How:

**How to manage Google Questions and Answers:** Once you're signed into your Google My Business account, navigate to your Google Knowledge Panel by searching or simply using your Google Short Name. After clicking into "See all questions" under the "Questions and Answers" section, you will be able to reply to questions, ask your own and upvote the accurate and relevant questions and answers about your hospital.



# FACEBOOK



## OVERVIEW

Facebook: you either love to hate it or you hate to love it. No matter which category you fall under, though, there's no arguing its overwhelming presence on the internet. It seems that everything goes right back to Facebook these days, so imagine how much traffic your hospital's Facebook page could get if you made use of the extra features Facebook has set up for you to use.

The first step to Facebook is creating one for your practice, but that certainly isn't the last. We've outlined some tips and free features that could leave your practice in the best shape possible for today's social media climate.

Average number of reviews on Facebook **69**

Have a branded Facebook page **63.1%**

Average number of recommendations **155**

Are using Facebook Messenger **86.1%**

Have verified their Facebook page **35.6%**

Have a Facebook Story **25%**

Have a Facebook Vanity URL **80.1%**



# FACEBOOK



## FACEBOOK REVIEWS

**69** FACEBOOK REVIEWS  
FOR THE AVERAGE  
VETERINARY HOSPITAL

### PRIOR YEAR STATS

2018: 86  
2017: 58

### NOTES

The industry technically saw a 20% decline in reviews over last year, which brought down its two-year increase of 19%. iVET360 clients have an average of 77 reviews on Facebook.

### The What:

Facebook Reviews have gone through a lot of changes over the past three years, making the numbers a bit hard to follow.

Before 2018, Facebook only allowed users to contribute starred reviews to the pages of local businesses, like your animal hospital. Around mid-May of last year, however, they decided to switch things up by allowing users to comment on their starred reviews. This personalized content was classified as a “recommendation,” and played a role in calculating a “recommendation score” which, according to Facebook, was “based on how many people recommend or don’t recommend the Page, as well as any past ratings and reviews it may have.” This should explain the jump in numbers from 2017 to 2018.

As of 2019, Facebook reclassified every starred rating as a “recommendation,” saving the word “review” for those recommendations that also include that personal content mentioned earlier (hence the dramatic decrease in what Facebook qualifies as reviews for the industry this year).

To make this development a little simpler, we’ve included in the metrics both the review and recommendation (see following page) numbers for 2019. This should give a clearer picture of how many review-type interactions Facebook users have had on average with veterinary hospitals around the country.

### 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



## FACEBOOK RECOMMENDATIONS (NEW)

**155** FACEBOOK RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR THE AVERAGE VETERINARY  
HOSPITAL

### NOTES

iVET360 clients average at 133 recommendations per practice.

### The What:

Facebook Recommendations are currently created by users answering a simple yes or no question as to whether they recommend a hospital. If the user in question wants to, they can also leave a “review,” which is more of a written explanation for the recommendation or lack thereof. Together, the binary answers are averaged, with the antiquated starred reviews of previous years taken into account, resulting in a solid “recommendation score.”

The recommendation score remains the same as it was in 2018 (calculating the average amount of times people do or don’t recommend a practice out of five), but is focused more on the simple opinions Facebook users have shared. This recommendation score is not only in a prominent position on your practice’s Facebook page, but it’s featured on your Google Knowledge Panel as well, showing anyone searching for your hospital just how many other pet owners would vote for your practice as a good place to take their pets.

### The How:

**How to gain more Facebook Recommendations:** Once you have verified your Facebook business page and created a cohesive brand, send your clients to check out the page and ask politely if they wouldn’t mind leaving a recommendation to help show the rest of your community how much you care about veterinary sciences and, more specifically, their pets.

# FACEBOOK



## FACEBOOK VERIFIED

35.6%

HAVE A  
VERIFIED  
FACEBOOK PAGE

### PRIOR YEAR STATS

2018: 32.2%

2017: 23.1%

### NOTES

With an 11% increase over the last year, the industry has seen a 54% growth in verified Facebook Pages over the past two years. 83% of iVET360 clients are verified.

### The What:

Becoming verified on Facebook is very similar to becoming verified on Google, which is also very similar to finally learning to whittle with a whittling knife instead of the old longsword you had been attempting to use before. This would obviously result in much greater control over the image that's shown to the public and allow for finer detail to be chiseled into the profile, like properly displayed business hours, varied contact information, a link to your website and more.

In addition to the control of information, Facebook verification helps people find you on the site, and increases your hospital's credibility when they do—you wouldn't trust a whittler who claimed they could create the finest wood-worked art when all they had was a rusty sword would you? Both clients and other facebook users will see integrity and professionalism when they look at your Facebook page. Verifying your page also avoids any potentially nefarious competitors who would create a false Facebook page under your hospital's name and run it to the ground.

### The Why:

Hospitals that have a verified page also saw a three percent increase in number of recommendations 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.

# FACEBOOK



## FACEBOOK VANITY URL (USERNAME)

80.1%

HAVE A  
FACEBOOK  
VANITY URL

### PRIOR YEAR STATS

2018: 78.9%

2017: 75.6%

### NOTES

The industry improved by a slight 2% over the past year, and a full 6% over the past two years. 100% of iVET360 clients have a unique vanity URL for Facebook.

### The What:

A Facebook vanity URL is a customized web address your clients can use to find your Facebook page (much like Google's new Google My Business Short Name we addressed earlier in the report). When you first create your hospital's page, Facebook assigns you a randomized URL with lots of numbers attached at the end. By adapting it into a vanity URL, you are simplifying your address into a username, thus making 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, meaning your business can be found or tagged within Facebook. For example, at iVET360, the vanity URL of our Facebook page is: facebook.com/ iVET360. Now, in addition to being much less confusing than what it would have been before (something like, facebook.com/pages/iVET360/839408), our URL can be adapted so that anyone could find us on Facebook with @iVET360.

This is a simple, minimal thing for your practice to do, but it would make a big impact on the ease with which your clients find and communicate with you.

### The Why:

Hospitals that have a vanity URL also saw a 4 percent increase in number of reviews/recommendations over those that did not.

### The How:

**How to set up a Facebook vanity URL:** If you're an admin of your hospital's Facebook page, you will see on the left side of the page a button that says "Create Page @Username." Clicking this, you can enter your desired username/vanity URL, or variations of it until you find one that's available, and select "Create Username."

It's also important to make sure the URL you're trying to create adheres to [Facebook's username guidelines](#).

# FACEBOOK



## FACEBOOK BRANDING

**63.1%** HAVE A  
BRANDED  
FACEBOOK PAGE

### PRIOR YEAR STATS

2018: 62.8%  
2017: 61%

### NOTES

In the past year, the industry saw a mere 0.3% growth as a part of the 3% growth of the past two years. 93% of iVET360 clients have their Facebook page branded.

### The What:

As the internet continues to expand, your Facebook page's visibility naturally dwindles, so having your brand stand out within the newsfeed is a must.

So that your clients and other members of the community can recognize your hospital on Facebook immediately, the practice's visual branding should extend to your Facebook page. Think of it this way—your practice will be listed in a user's newsfeed along with their friends, so you want your content 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 another identifiable marker that makes your hospital stand out.

### The Why:

Hospitals that have a branded page also saw a 1 percent increase in the number of reviews/recommendations over those that did not.

### The How:

**How to brand your hospital's Facebook page:** As an admin, go to your page and hover over or tap on your profile picture. Click "Update", then select an option and follow the on-screen instructions.



# FACEBOOK



## FACEBOOK MESSENGER

86.1%

ARE USING  
FACEBOOK  
MESSENGER

### PRIOR YEAR STATS

2018: 87.6%

2017: 89.6%

### NOTES

The industry has seen a 2% decline in the past year, contributing to the 4% decline over the past two years. 96% of iVET360 clients actively use Messenger.

### The What:

In our increasingly digital age, having a platform where clients can easily reach you without having to speak—whether as a face-to-face or over the phone, is ideal. The chat feature in question is known as Facebook Messenger. While it's perfectly set up for group chats or sharing Facebook posts with a friend, it is also perfect for individualized messages and quick conversations with businesses.

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.

It's likely that the mixed bag and added hassle of Facebook Messaging have played a large part in the past two years of declining industry usage, but the fact is, this feature can often do more good than bad. Having Messenger turned on doesn't necessarily mean you have to answer medical questions or respond to every single message. In fact, some businesses, including many veterinary practices, will utilize Messenger by leaving an auto-response with their phone number or a link to make an appointment on their website, which both encourages clients to engage further and streamlines the points of contact that require maintenance.

All in all, by making your hospital available on Facebook Messenger, you open your practice to more conversations, which leads to more appointments—and your office staff doesn't even have to keep up on it if you set up the automated message.

### The Why:

Hospitals that utilized Facebook Messenger also saw an 11 percent increase in number of reviews/recommendations over those that did not.

### The How:

**How to set up or dismantle Messenger:** As an admin of your hospital's Facebook page, first look at the top of the page for the "Settings" button. From "General," click on "Messages." Here, you should see the statement, "Allow people to contact my page privately by showing the message button," beside which is a box you can check or uncheck depending on your preference. Then, click to save changes.

# FACEBOOK



## FACEBOOK STORY (NEW)

25%

HAVE SETUP  
THEIR FACEBOOK  
STORY

### NOTES

83% of iVET360 clients have their Story displayed on their Facebook Page.

### The What:

In late 2017, Facebook rolled out with a new feature where those with Facebook Business Pages could basically extend their “About” section by adding their “Story,” otherwise known as “Our Story.” The Story is simply a more detailed look at your hospital, focused on history, culture, values or really anything else you want. You could even re-purpose copy from your website if you’d like to keep things simple.

By developing your hospital’s Story, you are providing potential clients with an inside look at how your practice is run and what they can expect from you and your staff. You can even provide a picture that will sit on top of the Story (much as a cover photo would) to set the vibe.

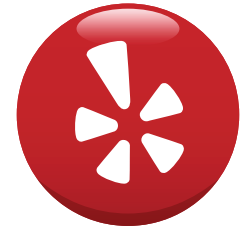
We know not everyone will have a good story to tell, but filling out all of Facebook’s suggested features helps not only you, but your clients as well. The Story, as any other recommended section, will help people find you and get to know you—making them increasingly more likely to set up an appointment with you. This is especially true now that the “Story” feature can be viewed on both Facebook’s desktop and mobile app versions.

### The Why:

Hospitals that utilized Facebook Story also saw a 59 percent increase in number of reviews/recommendations over those that did not.

### The How:

How to set up your Facebook Story: After logging into your Facebook Business Page, you should see an empty section titled “Our Story.” Within that section, click on “+Tell people about your business,” from which you should be able to add a photo, rename the title and write a description of your business.

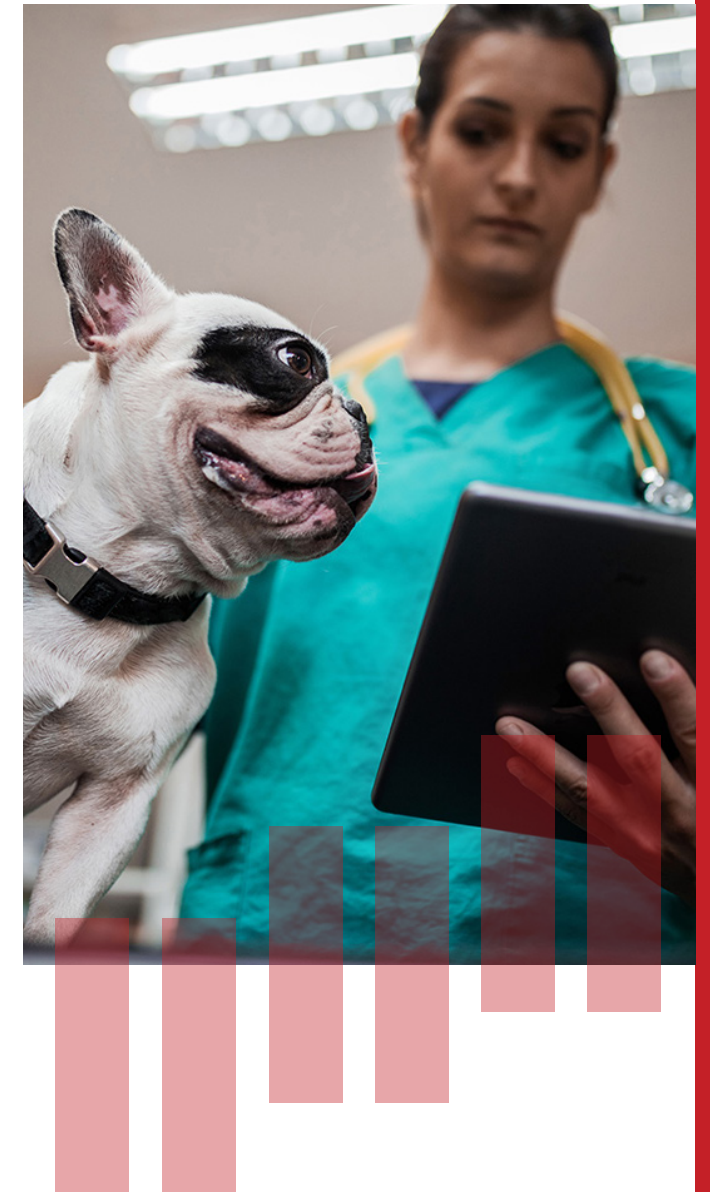


## OVERVIEW

We hear it from the managers and practice owners of iVET360 hospitals on the daily: Yelp is no fun. Okay, maybe they don't use those exact words, and maybe the sentiment isn't expressed on a day-to-day basis, but the distaste for Yelp is definitely there. And we understand. With all the business listing websites and the innovative newcomers (\*cough\* Nextdoor), it's hard to feel the need to continue using Yelp and its features—especially with their evidenced monthly decline of users.

BUT, as long as Yelp still takes up such a large section of internet real estate, we'll have to set aside our annoyance with their filtered reviews, and continue to partake and appease them—and all the other humans who use Yelp more regularly than other platforms. With 114 million unique users every per month, Yelp is still a powerful tool for gaining new clients and managing your reputation. Much like your website, Facebook page and Google page, it is essential to properly utilize the tools offered by Yelp to maximize and maintain your hospital's online presence.

Average number of reviews on Yelp	30	Are offering a Yelp Deal	1%
Have claimed their Yelp listing	89%	Are using Yelp Ask The Community	3.2%
Are utilizing Yelp Ads	13.9%	Average number of Yelp questions	.2
Have a Yelp Check-In offer	9.3%		





## YELP REVIEWS

**30** YELP REVIEWS  
FOR THE AVERAGE  
VETERINARY HOSPITAL

### PRIOR YEAR STATS

2018: 27  
2017: 23

### NOTES

The industry saw a 10% increase in reviews over the last year, and an average 30% growth over the past two years. iVET360 clients average at 55 reviews on Yelp.

### The What:

Yelp reviews are feedback written by Yelp users about your practice, and they are 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.

The industry is looking pretty sparse in terms of reviews added every year, but that doesn't mean there aren't reviews to be had. The average veterinary hospital has gained only 7 reviews in the past two years, but that's only a fraction of how many clients would have walked through their doors.

Unfortunately, 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 Why:

Yelp reviews help drive SEO. Barnacle SEO is the practice of using larger, reputable websites to promote your own business' website and gain more traffic. Will Scott of Search Influence, the man who coined the term, explains it in his original post as "attaching oneself to a large fixed object and waiting for the customers to float by in the current."

For example, a local grocery shop owner can get his business ranking well on SERPs if it's listed with a Yelp account in the correct local business category. By identifying popular sites and sites specific to your niche, you can take full advantage of barnacle SEO.

### The How:

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



## YELP CLAIMED

89%

OF HOSPITALS HAVE  
CLAIMED THEIR YELP  
BUSINESS LISTING

### PRIOR YEAR STATS

2018: 86.9%

2017: 82.2%

### NOTES

A 2% growth in the last year brought the industry to an 8% increase in claimed hospitals over the past two years. 100% of iVET360 clients have a claimed Yelp listing.

### The What:

Facebook and Google have business verifications—Yelp has claims. And just like with the other two, it is essential that you take the simple step to claiming your veterinary hospital's Yelp page. This is not only to avoid strangers and competitors taking control of a potential online profile of your practice, though. Claiming your business listing is the first and most important step toward having a complete profile, and according to Yelp, the more complete the profile, the more customer leads a business is likely to have.

With a claimed Yelp listing, your hospital has all the tools necessary to start personalizing and increasing the value of this page. Adding photos, responding to reviews and making offers are only a few of the things your practice can do to make your listing more attractive and informative for potential clients.

The industry continues to grow only slightly in the number of claimed Yelp listings, but ideally, the percentage would be at 100. This is such a simple check off the list, but it significantly strengthens the hospital's reach and credibility online.

### The Why:

Hospitals that have a claimed Yelp profile also saw an 8 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, and it will lead you through a series of 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.



## YELP ADS

# 13.9%

OF HOSPITALS  
ARE UTILIZING  
YELP ADS

### PRIOR YEAR STATS

2018: 15.9%

2017: 11.9%

### NOTES

After a 13% industry decline in the past year, the last two years have seen an overall 17% growth in hospitals using Yelp Ads. Only 15% of iVET360 clients make use of this.

### The What:

If your hospital purchases a Yelp Ad, it will appear on the pages that consumers see when they're looking for other veterinary hospitals or similar businesses. This means that not only will your ad be included in relevant search pages, but on the Yelp business pages of competitors as well. The ad will also get promoted across all Yelp platforms, including online and on the app, and encourages potential clients to visit your page.

A Yelp ad could also be anything from adding a call-to-action button on your business page (taking clients directly to an appointment page, coupon image etc.) to restricting competitors' ads from appearing on your Yelp page.

While we did see a slight increase in hospitals choosing to push this feature in 2018, 2019's decline seemed to even out the difference between the two previous years. This is likely because it's harder to see a return on investment when it comes to Yelp Ads; in fact, the percentage of practices who are using the feature is slightly skewed as it is. Some hospitals were offered somewhat complementary Yelp Ads after investing in ads for Yellow Pages and choosing the cross-platform option. Choosing the most effective avenue for your marketing budget to go toward is important, and it's likely that much of the industry has hospital locations in less competitive areas.

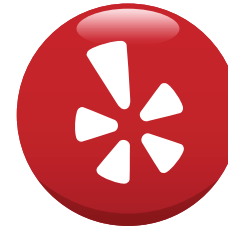
### The Why:

Hospitals that utilize Yelp Ads also saw a 92 percent increase in number of reviews over those that do 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.](#)





## YELP CHECK-IN OFFERS

9.3%

OF HOSPITALS  
HAVE A YELP  
CHECK-IN OFFER

### PRIOR YEAR STATS

2018: 9.6%  
2017: 5%

### NOTES

Despite a 3% decline over the past year, the industry has still seen an 86% growth over the past two years. 48% of iVET360 clients have Check-In offers.

### The What:

When clients use Yelp Check-In at your hospital, they're essentially broadcasting to their friends that they chose you for their pet's veterinary needs. This opens up the situation for both digital and person-to-person advertising. To encourage your loyal clients to "check-in," or report their location, often businesses will digitally offer small discounts, free items or other special deals.

The feature is available both on desktop and with the mobile app, and you can track how many people checked-in as well as how many people redeemed an offer if you have one in place at the time.

Though there was a tiny decline in the numbers for 2019, this feature clearly helps drive reviews for the hospitals that are choosing to take part in this niche feature. The most successful hospitals practice this Yelp feature/hospital deal combination, as seen in the fact that they have over twice as many reviews as those that don't take part.

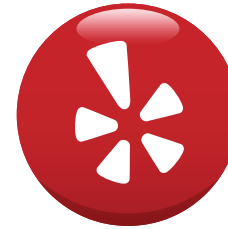
### The Why:

Hospitals that utilize a Yelp Check-In offer saw a 124 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," and then "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 description details, such as: "Check in at [Hospital Name] to receive [offer]." Click "Create Offer." 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.



## YELP DEALS

1%

OF HOSPITALS  
ARE OFFERING A  
YELP DEAL

PRIOR YEAR STATS  
2018: 1.1%

### NOTES

The industry has decreased usage by 9% since last year's first data collection. Only 2% of iVET360 clients offer Yelp Deals.

### The What:

Similar to Groupon, Yelp Deal is a feature that encourages clients to purchase coupons or discounts. For example, they may be able to spend \$20 to receive a \$40 voucher for services. This would create a simple incentive for pet owners to pick your hospital over others if they see the deal while searching.

Our data shows that the already small percentage of hospitals who used this feature last year got even smaller in 2019. It seems that the Yelp Deals are still a rather flat marketing strategy for many hospitals, even leaving some to lose money over it, considering Yelp takes up to 30 percent of the revenue straight from the client. Yelp Check-In actually seems to be much more valuable.

### The Why:

Hospitals that utilize a Yelp Deal did saw a 123 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.



## YELP ASK THE COMMUNITY (NEW)

**3.2%** OF HOSPITALS  
ARE USING YELP ASK  
THE COMMUNITY

**.2** AVERAGE  
NUMBER OF  
QUESTIONS

### NOTES

5.6% of iVET360 clients are active with Yelp Asks, with an average of less than one question asked on each hospital's listing.

### The What:

Similar to Google's Questions and Answers, Yelp's Ask The Community allows their users to ask public questions to your business. Also like Google, this needs to be a feature you keep track of, as it allows other users in the community to respond without authority.

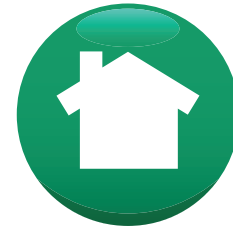
### The Why:

With less than one question on average per hospital, the data says that Yelp users aren't really utilizing this feature at all—outside of California. However, that doesn't mean your hospital shouldn't pay attention to it. Be aware the feature exists and be ready to answer when the questions do come. You'll want to control the narrative and provide the correct answers.

### The What:

**How to respond to Yelp Asks:** After logging in to your Yelper account, go to the "Ask the Community" section on the business page. Scroll down to find the specific question you'd like to respond to, then click or tap the "Answer" button. Your response will be posted shortly after submitting it.

# NEXTDOOR



## OVERVIEW

No longer a “nice to have,” Nextdoor has become a must have for your hospital. With the number of recommendations growing by 77 percent over the course of last year, the time is now to claim your Nextdoor Business listing and start interacting with your neighbors on this incredibly successful platform.

Think of Nextdoor like Yelp, but with content limited to people that actually 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. But it actually gets deeper than that. There are 243 neighborhoods in Portland, OR and 28 in Portland, ME, each with unique conversations happening, a lot of which are about the vets their neighbors love and ones to stay away from. Nextdoor bills itself as a platform that lets neighbors connect online and make their neighborhoods better, including the local businesses. While everyone has heard of Facebook and Yelp, Nextdoor has quietly been making their presence known. In fact, it has become important to ask: has your hospital been active on Nextdoor?

Regardless of whether your practice has been active or not, your hospital already has a Nextdoor business listing, and it’s clear that the people are talking. This makes it crucial that you not only have your listing claimed, but that you are monitoring the conversation.

Average number of  
Nextdoor recommendations

82

Average number of  
neighborhoods favorites

6

Have claimed their  
Nextdoor listing

29.3%

Are utilizing Nextdoor  
Local Deals

.3%





## NEXTDOOR RECOMMENDATIONS

**82** RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR THE AVERAGE  
VETERINARY HOSPITAL

PRIOR YEAR STATS  
2018: 46

### NOTES

The industry saw a 77% increase over last year's first collection of data. iVET360 clients average at 108 reviews per listing.

### The What:

Wouldn't you rather know what people are saying about you than guess and hope that the reviews are positive? Or maybe you don't even know that people are talking at all—and how could you possibly manage to moderate the conversation or interact with these reviewers? This situation could very well be the case for your hospital. And the worst part, is that the people talking are the clients that live right in your own community, the ones who know you best, who may even call you a friend—they're your neighbors!

This is why it's so important to claim your Nextdoor listing—whether they're singing praises, or spouting unfair, negative reviews, it can only benefit your practice to be aware and ready to respond. Unfortunately, the majority of hospitals remain unaware and defenseless to what people are saying about them on this the fastest growing local listing service out there. Luckily, it's really easy to join the Nextdoor party.

### The Why:

With recommendations nearly doubling in the last year and already sitting at almost triple the amount of Yelp reviews, it's easy to see why your hospital needs to be active on Nextdoor...like, yesterday.

### 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 chosen 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.



## NEXTDOOR CLAIMED

29.3%

OF HOSPITALS  
HAVE CLAIMED THEIR  
NEXTDOOR LISTING

PRIOR YEAR STATS  
2018: 15%

### NOTES

The industry saw a promising 95% increase in claimed hospitals over the past year. 100% of iVET360 clients have claimed their listing on Nextdoor.

### 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 follow it up with 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; this shows up in the same feed as the recommendation comments, and is usually how users will post negative reviews of your hospital.

While this negative feedback can’t necessarily be avoided, there are ways to resolve the situation. You can 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, but the violation must first be noticed and reported to the company before they can take the users off the site.

### The Why:

Despite the possibility of negative comments, Recommendations are incredibly valuable to the practice itself, as well as its visibility and, ultimately, its client count. Just like with Google Reviews, the more that people recommend your practice on Nextdoor, the higher you show up on search results in your network.

Speaking of Google, it’s a sure testament to the extreme growth of Nextdoor that the average veterinary hospital has already received 71 percent of the reviews that practice might currently have on Google, which has been around much, much longer.



## NEXTDOOR FAVORITES (NEW)

5

AVERAGE NUMBER OF  
NEIGHBORHOODS A  
HOSPITAL IS A FAVORITE IN

### NOTES

iVET360 clients are favorites in an  
average of 6 neighborhoods.

### The What:

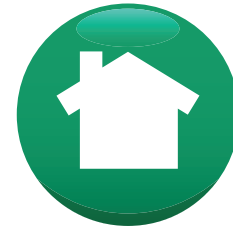
Since 2017, Nextdoor has encouraged neighbors to vote annually in over 30 categories for the small businesses that mean the most to them in their particular area. Depending on the reach of a business, or of your veterinary hospital, it could become a Favorite in quite a number of surrounding neighborhoods.

The ranking of “Neighborhood Favorite” gives your hospital a certain amount of marketing in and of itself, considering a list of each neighborhood’s 30 small businesses of choice is sent to each person community. Besides that, though, the prize for gaining this title is a free month of advertising, which is the source of the most explosive growth we’re seeing through Nextdoor this year.

### The Why:

Nextdoor Favorites is free advertising, with the clients in your community ready to share with their friends how great your hospital is. Committed clients will tell even pet-less friends why they should vote for your practice as a neighborhood favorite veterinary hospital. And that’s not even starting to touch on the free month of digital advertising offered if you do become a neighborhood favorite.





## NEXTDOOR LOCAL DEALS (NEW)

**3%** OF HOSPITALS ARE  
UTILIZING NEXTDOOR  
LOCAL DEALS

### NOTES

Over 37% of iVET360 clients make use of Nextdoor's Local Deals.

### The What:

Created as a response to local businesses wanting to interact more with their most valued and invested clientele, Nextdoor has brought forth an ad-based tool called "Local Deals." These can be used by veterinary hospitals to promote discounts or specials on services to both existing and potential clients in specific neighborhoods. Keeping the audience of these ads within driving distance creates a level of intimacy with the community, and shows your neighbors that you really do care about them and their pets—enough to give them certain deals or incentives to visit your practice.

As this is a brand new feature, there isn't any data to compare this year's numbers with, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't be paying attention. With such a wide open space for your hospital to climb into, there's no reason not to claim a spot and start using this feature to get a leg up and beat any local competition to the punch.

### The Why:

These days, everyone is online, and most of these people care a lot about their community. This care shows through their interactions on Nextdoor. And one of the best parts of Local Deals, is that they're able to be seen in so many of those interactions: in residents' feeds, featured on business pages and the Business section, in a neighborhood-specific Local Deals area, and as a sponsored listing in search results.

The reach of these deals, shows, too. Nextdoor keeps track of users who save and who redeem deals that you've chosen to advertise, and the numbers speak for themselves. As an example, [some of our iVET360 hospitals](#) that ran the Local Deal for a month had a return on investment of over 400 percent. Even within their inaugural year, these deals could not be more of an obvious investment.

### The How:

**How to create a Local Deal:** After claiming your business on Nextdoor, you can [watch this video](#), created by Nextdoor, that walks you through the process of picking neighborhoods to appeal to, the length of time you want your Local Deal to be featured etc. Or, you can just follow the incredibly user-friendly ad creation wizard on the site.

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 2018. 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 animal hospital's benchmark breakdown, 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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**iVET360°**