

iVET360°

2020

VETERINARY MARKETING
BENCHMARK REPORT



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IT'S BEEN A YEAR LIKE NO OTHER

You know all too well that practices like your own have had to adjust, react, and rethink not only daily operations, but both short- and long-term goals. While many practices have seen business grow exponentially in the wake of higher adoption rates, the fact is that marketing has never been more important—or more complex.

As communities grapple and evolve with the pandemic, radically changing demographics, and an overwhelmingly digital marketplace, it's more important than ever that your practice have a clear idea of what works and what doesn't. [Here's where you start.](#)

It's been four years

since we released the first Veterinary Marketing Benchmark Report (VMBR) as a way for you to gauge how your practice was performing in all aspects of digital marketing. We analyze data from over 1000 accredited independent veterinary facilities across 50 states, collecting 48,000 data points so you can see:



HOW your practice is performing in comparison



THE TRUTH behind why certain platforms are more effective than others



WHAT YOU CAN DO to improve your practice's performance on these platforms



A GUIDE to successfully market your practice

Since the first VMBR was published

we've updated the stats and information annually to reflect the latest trends and make real-world recommendations. This year, we have included metrics and insights on 13 new categories and platforms that reflect the significant changes and additions to the digital marketplace. That means certain metrics in the following report were not evaluated in previous years, and so will have no comparison data.

It's also worth noting that there's been many changes in the practices used for this survey. 30 hospitals used in the 2019 report were sold to corporations in the last year and were removed from this study of independent hospitals. We have also removed hospitals that have closed their business and/or joined iVET360. Thus 42 new hospitals are included in this data. In addition, nearly 10% of those used in the 2019 report have changed digital marketing providers during the same calendar year. These developments have an impact on the results this year, as you will see in the platform breakdowns.

One final word: Just as in years past, we based all checkpoints on yes or no questions and factual data with no judgements. The result is a comprehensive, bias-free look at the best practices of some major marketing players in the industry—all absolutely free, because we believe that helping you ultimately helps more pets. And like you, that's why we do what we do.



Overview

Your website is your practice's digital home, and just like a physical domicile, it has an address, a personality, and should aim for some curb appeal. It also needs good "bones"—which in this case are things like fast loading speed, relevant content, easy navigation, and solid SEO. Most importantly, your website must be optimized for mobile use, because that's where the majority of your clients will access it.

Key to remember is that you should avoid falling for flashy sites that are trendy outside the veterinary industry. Instead, compare your website to other local animal hospitals. Is it fast, friendly, and informative with lots of contact points? Then you're likely already a step ahead of your competition.

Here's a birds-eye view how the data stacked up for websites in the industry.



WEBSITE DOMAIN SET UP CORRECTLY **86.9%**

MOBILE RESPONSIVENESS **94.1%**

SECURE WEBSITE **83.3%**

SEO OPTIMIZATION **18.2%**

GOOGLE ANALYTICS INSTALLED **83.4%**

ADA COMPLIANCE **52.2%**

4.2s

WEBSITE LOAD TIME

37

WEBSITE EXPERIENCE: PERFORMANCE

83

WEBSITE EXPERIENCE: ACCESSIBILITY

73

WEBSITE EXPERIENCE: BEST PRACTICES

86

WEBSITE EXPERIENCE: SEO



86.9% [▲]

OF HOSPITALS HAVE THEIR
DOMAIN SET UP CORRECTLY

83.3%
2019

84.2%
2018

Bottom Line

After a dip in 2019, there was a 4% increase in 2020 in the number of practices that have their URL set up correctly, mostly owing to Google's penalizing of those who do not. 100% of iVET360's clients have their domains done right.

The What

It's one of the most basic—but important—must-haves: a website domain that is set up correctly. Luckily, it appears most practices have accomplished this, but still too many have not.

When your site's domain isn't set up properly, you essentially have two versions of your website on the internet competing with each other. One has a "www." in front of the URL, the other does not. Google sees this is duplicate content and lowers the value of your SEO.

The Why

It's likely the 13% of practices with a faulty domain set-up did not install their SSL certificates correctly. That usually results in a "separation of domains", where one is secure and the other is not. Neither will redirect to the other, unfortunately.

The How

Check and make sure your website domain is set up correctly by typing 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. 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.

Both 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 [Tribulant](#) 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.



94.1% ▲

OF HOSPITALS HAVE A MOBILE
RESPONSIVE WEBSITE

93.9%
2019

93.2%
2018

Bottom Line

Google punishes websites that aren't mobile-friendly, so it's no surprise that the numbers inch closer to 100% every year. 100% of iVET360 clients have a responsive website.

The What

Mobile searches have increased by a consistent 50% every year. This means your current and potential clients are most likely going to look for, and find, a veterinarian using their phone or tablet.

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 “look right” and be easily navigated whether someone is using a cell phone, a tablet, or plain old desktop. For you, this means that the backend of your website needs to be adjusted so that it is responsive—meaning it can change depending on the device used.

If that wasn't enough, Google has also been penalizing non-mobile-friendly sites since 2015. This means that not only is the user experience poor, but search rankings will suffer as well.

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. This simple-yet-important step is critical in our digital, phone-driven age, and while it seems the industry has plateaued again this year, we still believe every veterinary practice should have a responsive website.

The How

To check if your website is responsive, visit [Google's mobile-friendly test page](#) and enter your veterinary hospital's website address. Google will do the rest.



83.2%▲

OF HOSPITALS HAVE A
SECURE WEBSITE

73.4%
2019

44.6%
2018

Bottom Line

The industry saw a 13% increase in SSL certificate compliance, which is not surprising given the increased emphasis on website security. 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.”

Encrypted (secure) websites are guaranteed safe for people to visit without fear of being attacked by viruses. Without encryption, visitors on your site are vulnerable to online hackers who can access their personal information. To help the public determine whether 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.

If that pops up when pet owners go to your site, it could seriously hurt your client growth and retention. Not only will the visitor avoid entering any information (whether in a comment box or appointment portal), they may also conclude that you don’t value the safety or privacy of others. If that’s the case, then how could they trust you with a pet they love?

The Why

While our numbers show a dramatic increase in secure websites for the fourth year in a row, there are still a number of hospitals who have not taken the important step of encrypting their website. Thankfully, major website providers in the industry now usually add the SSL certificate on their client’s sites without charging an extra fee. We expect SSL compliance to be near 100% by next year.

The How

Check if your website is secure by pulling up your veterinary hospital’s website. If there is a lock symbol in front of your domain name in the address bar, you’re good. This will be present on all major browsers, including Chrome, Firefox, and Safari. 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](#)



18.2% ▾

OF HOSPITALS HAVE AN SEO
OPTIMIZED WEBSITE

18.5%
2019

17.5%
2018

Bottom Line

Prioritizing the look of a website over performance as well as the prevalence of DIY sites means that SEO is often neglected. 100% of iVET360's clients have websites with optimized SEO.

The What

No matter how great your site looks it won't matter if it never shows up in a top position when people are searching for a vet in their area. SEO is about making sure that happens.

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.

When it is optimized, SEO can ensure your page gets maximum visibility and there are two parts to it: [title tags](#) and [meta descriptions](#). Not only do they need to be set up, but they should be in some way unique.

The Why

One major reason for the stagnation and decline in the industry's SEO optimization is because many practices have changed providers. They often do this based on the promise of a flashy new website—but without the necessary back end SEO work, that beautiful site won't get any more traffic than the old one.

The increased use of free platforms such as Wix, Weebly or SquareSpace to build sites is also a culprit for the lapse in SEO. With these sites, it is incredibly hard, if not impossible, to input unique SEO modifications, which creates a major pitfall when creating sites with these platforms.

The How

This one is a bit more challenging, as you need to download a program to review these stats. [Screaming Frog](#) is a free tool for reviewing the backend of websites, including SEO. Once you've installed it, 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 many other SEO components.



83.4% ▲

OF HOSPITALS HAVE GOOGLE
ANALYTICS INSTALLED

83.2%
2019

77.9%
2018

Bottom Line

The industry saw some slight growth in installations over last year, but it's still not what it should be given the value of this free tool to your marketing efforts.
100% of iVET360 clients utilize Google Analytics.

The What

Google Analytics gives you invaluable information about your website, including:

- How many people are visiting and when
- What they searched to get to your site
- How far down visitors are scrolling
- The most popular pages

With this data, you can create an efficient and effective marketing plan based on reality, rather than just a guess. It will also show you which pages are getting more or less traffic than you'd prefer so they can be fine-tuned to get the results you're after.

The Why

Every single website should have Google Analytics installed! While there continues to be an incremental increase, the number of practices utilizing this vital—and FREE—tool is still well below what it should be. Without GA, your marketing plan will lack focus and precision.

The How

There are two ways to check to see if you have Google Analytics on your website.

Option 1: Visit the Google Analytics webpage and log into your Google account. You'll see the domains for which you control Google Analytics—unless your website was built by a third party. In that case, they will have the access.

Option 2: 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.

Option 2: [Google provides a step-by-step guide here.](#)



52.2%[▲]

OF HOSPITALS HAVE AN ADA
COMPLIANT WEBSITE

46.6%
2019

N/A
2018

Bottom Line

There's been a 12% increase in website accessibility, which is going to become increasingly important for the veterinary industry as the population ages. 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 before the advent of the internet, the rules of how it should apply to publicly accessed websites are unclear, but it is agreed that digital accessibility is an absolute necessity.

Currently, just over half of websites in the industry are ADA compliant and accessible, which isn't great when you consider that the heart of this industry is helping people and their pets—some of which may be service animals that aid in accessibility themselves.

The Why

The benefits of building a website following ADA guidelines are greater than just meeting the law. By making your site accessible, you are making it possible and easier for 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 is also a good representation of how well you'll care for their pets.

The How

Beyond ADA compliance, which covers basic functions like alternative text for images, iVET360 has created a 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.

To check if your website is ADA compliant, you can run it through this [free online tool](#).

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. We also recommend this [free website plug-in](#).



4.2s ▲

THE AVERAGE WEBSITE LOAD TIME (4G)

3.9s
2019N/A
2018

Bottom Line

The veterinary industry is currently sitting at an average loading speed of just over 4 seconds (an 6% increase over 2019). It's been found that by that time, 24% of potential visitors have left the site. The average speed of iVET360 client websites is 2.9 seconds.

The What

Data-consuming images and videos are a large reason why the veterinary industry isn't up to Google's standard. While everyone loves seeing running puppies and adorable kittens pawing at the screen, what's more important is that your clients don't wait so long to see what they really came for—information about your services and how to reach you.

The Why

In addition to losing impatient clients, a slow website load also hurts you with Google, who uses it as a metric when determining search results. Google prioritizes the speed of a site on mobile devices over desktop—a speed they'd still like to be between 0-2.5 seconds.

While that "two-second rule" is a good thing theoretically, all you need to be sure of is that your site 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. The trick is to stop comparing your website with the one for the brewpub down the street--it's apples and oranges.

The How

Check your website's speed using this [online tool](#). 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.



37

AVERAGE PERFORMANCE SCORE

Performance audits will determine how well your page is optimized for users (your clients) so they can easily see and interact with the content on your home page. How do current and potential clients perceive your website?

83

AVERAGE ACCESSIBILITY SCORE

Accessibility audits highlight opportunities to improve your website homepage's coding, labeling, and appearance so that the content on that page is easy for all users to see or hear, navigate, and utilize.

73

AVERAGE BEST PRACTICES SCORE

Best practices audits will highlight coding errors on your site that affect speed, trigger errors, and affect security. It can also tell you if your page offers a "good user experience".

86

AVERAGE SEO SCORE

SEO audits will show you what to fix so that your homepage gets the highest ranking possible on search engine results. It will tell you if your content is understandable to search engines, make sure your page can be indexed, and is mobile-friendly, among other metrics.

Bottom Line

These new auditing tools pinpoint exactly what your website needs to run fast and effectively. iVET360 client websites score above the industry average for all metrics: 72 in Performance, 92 in Accessibility, 85 in Best Practices, and 91 in SEO.

The What

These new Lighthouse Web.Dev audits from Google are specific to your website's most important page—your homepage—and measure how well that "front door" of your site is performing based on key metrics.

The How

This is all pretty technical stuff, so if you built your own site you may want to enlist the help of a web developer to run these free diagnostics and assist with correcting what you can within the parameters of the tool used to create the site.

Otherwise, make sure your provider runs these tests to see where your site lands for these key metrics. They may tell you that the beautiful site they built for you is at 100% performance, but the Web.Dev tools below will show you the real story.

- [Audit for Website Performance](#)
- [Audit for Accessibility](#)
- [Audit for Best Practices](#)
- [Audit for SEO](#)



Overview

Google remains the 800-pound gorilla of search engines, so as the marketplace becomes more crowded it's important you do everything possible to let Google know you matter and belong in their search results. The best way to do this is with the Google My Business (GMB) Knowledge Panel.

The GMB Knowledge Panel is kind of like a mini website that pops up on the right of the search results page when someone searches for your practice specifically. This panel shows searchers your hours, location, phone, ratings & reviews from clients, has a link to your website, and Q & A feature where you can answer questions about your practice directly.

It's no exaggeration to say that with this Knowledge Panel, Google is becoming more valuable than your practice website: Google itself has more users, a larger variety of them, and subsequently has greater visibility and gets many more reviews than other platforms. We'll spend a lot of time in this report talking about Google's features because frankly, that's how important we feel maximizing this search engine's tools are to your practice's marketing efforts.



HAVE CLAIMED THEIR GMB LISTING **89%**



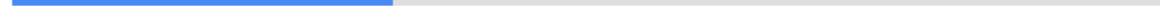
HAVE A GMB APPOINTMENT LINK **28.8%**



ARE USING GMB QUESTIONS & ANSWERS **23.9%**



ARE UTILIZING GOOGLE POSTS **32.9%**



ARE USING GOOGLE OFFERS **5.3%**



HAVE A GMB DESCRIPTION **44.5%**



HAVE A GMB SHORT NAME **23%**



ARE USING GOOGLE ADS **10.5%**



AVERAGE STAR RATING (OUT OF 5)



AVERAGE NUMBER OF GOOGLE REVIEWS



AVERAGE NUMBER OF GMB QUESTIONS



165 ▲

THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF GOOGLE REVIEWS

115
201973
2018

Bottom Line

The industry saw a 43% increase in the number of reviews over last year, part of a promising 125% over the past two years. iVET360 clients average 155 reviews and a 4.7 rating.

The What

Reviews and ratings matter for so many reasons. Ratings give you and your potential clients an at-a-glance idea of how your practice is perceived, while reviews give you details. Ratings and reviews also play a major role in where your business is located on the Google search results page, as the rating and a link to reviews are at the top of the Knowledge Panel. The more reviews you have, and the higher the average number of stars, the more attractive you'll appear to pet parents...and Google knows that.

While Google's algorithm for search results is complicated, the number of ratings and reviews—along with proximity to the person searching—weigh heaviest when it comes to determining your placement in search results. That being said, a veterinarian with only 6 Google reviews who is only five miles away will be placed after the practice that's 10 miles away but has 40 reviews.

Also keep in mind that while most social media platforms have a ratings and/or reviews feature, Google is likely to be more accurate in its assessment of your practice. This is because Google has the largest number and variety of users, and therefore a greater number of reviews--the average practice received 4.2 new Google reviews every month during 2020. That's a 20% increase over last year.

The How

How to gain more Google ratings and reviews: Ask your clients. Your hospital sees many people every day, and a simple request to review your services goes a long way in growing your online reviews. You can do this one-on-one, or with in-hospital reminder signs in waiting areas and on statements.

4.6

AVERAGE STAR RATING (OUT OF 5)

89% 

OF HOSPITALS HAVE
CLAIMED THEIR LISTING

92.5%
2019

90.8%
2018

Bottom Line

There's been a 4% decline this year and that's likely due to practices switching providers and not requesting their local listing login credentials. 100% of iVET360's 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, there are several ways you can verify—or “claim”—your listing. There's no reason a practice should not be verified on Google, and thankfully the %age of practices who are has continued to grow.

The Why

When practices fail to claim their listing on GMB, basic information such as changes in hours of operation—something that has been very common during the pandemic—are often inaccurate. With a claimed Google listing, you can edit your hours whenever you need, instead of leaving your clients guessing. There are also other important features you can add for clients that we'll discuss later in this report.

The How

You can verify your Google listing easily by phone, email or even snail mail. 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 regular 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.



28.8%▲

OF HOSPITALS HAVE A GMB
APPOINTMENT LINK

22.6%
2019

14.7%
2018

Bottom Line

The industry saw an over 27% increase in the number of hospitals using the appointment link, which is a must-have feature in a world dominated by cell phones. 100% of iVET360 clients use this free 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. Luckily, there's a feature right in your Knowledge Panel specifically for that purpose!

People like having multiple options for contacting a business, and that's especially true for those who are searching for a veterinary hospital by cell (these days, that's most people). In fact, Google's research shows that 68% of consumers value the option to either call a business or interact with them online while using their phone. Adding the appointment link makes it that much easier for them to go ahead and schedule a visit for their pet.

As hospitals devote more time to their Google My Business profiles, awareness is growing about free opportunities and benefits of simple solutions like the appointment link. This would account for the 96% increase in veterinary hospitals making use of this free and convenient feature in the last two years.

The Why

Hospitals that have set up their appointment link also saw a 2% increase in number of reviews over those that have not. We also found that adding the appointment link drove 15% of the clicks on a business listing, equaling more booked appointments.

The How

Adding an appointment link couldn't be easier. Sign in to your Google My Business account and choose the "My Business" listing. Then click on the URLs section, which should show you fields where you can add relevant links, including a link to your appointment or contact page.



23.9%▲

OF HOSPITALS ARE USING
GMB QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

17.1%
2019

5.3%
2018

Bottom Line

This feature has shown a nearly 40% growth in the last year, and 351% in the last two years. There's also been an increase of 75% of average number of questions asked. 46.7% of iVET360 clients make use of this tool and average 5 questions.

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 useful tool for informing and interacting with the public. If ignored or employed improperly, though, this forum-style feature could easily have negative consequences.

One way to use Google Q&A as an effective marketing tool is to populate the section with your own questions and answers—almost like an FAQ. Not only does this get information out faster, it also creates awareness about specific services or features of your hospital—such as the fact that you treat birds or offer acupuncture.

The problem is, if you aren't actively replying to the questions people leave, anyone else can answer them. 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 Why

Hospitals that answer Google Q&A saw a 5% increase in the number of reviews over those that did not. The spike in Google Q&A metrics comes mainly from the consumer. People are getting more familiar with this platform as a place 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 How

To manage Google Q&A, sign in to your Google My Business account. Then navigate to your Google Knowledge Panel by searching or simply using your Google Short Name. After clicking into "See all questions" under the "Questions & 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.



32.9%▲

OF HOSPITALS ARE USING
GMB POSTS

21%
2019

10.2%
2018

Bottom Line

The industry has shown a 57% increase in the use of GMB Posts this year, as due to COVID-19 practices are finding this tool. Use has more than tripled in the past two years. 72% of iVET360 clients make use of this tool.

The What

Google Posts illustrates another example of how practices and their clients are using Google more and more. It's simply easier and faster to update and access information about your hospital there.

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 is a strong marketing tool.

Most importantly, Google Posts are a way for practices to stand out from the competition. When a client is looking through a listing of hospitals, they're much more likely to make an appointment at the practice with an offer and an appointment link posted on the Knowledge Panel. Plus, Google rewards the businesses that utilize their free tools, meaning your practice will be found more easily when prospective clients are searching for a new veterinarian in their area..

The Why

Hospitals that utilize Google Posts saw a 2% increase in the number of reviews over those that did not. If it isn't intuitive that visibility makes a business money, the fact that the use of Google Posts has grown significantly 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 a third of the industry is participating in this growth strategy.

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.



5.3% ▲

OF HOSPITALS ARE USING
GMB OFFERS

3.4%
2019

N/A
2018

Bottom Line

A significant 56% growth for the Offers tool, but it is still underutilized in our industry. 41.2% of iVET360 clients make use of this tool.

The What

It's all about placement when it comes to GMB Offers, which are really just a subset of Posts. Instead of sitting on the bottom of the Knowledge Panel, Offers are positioned right beneath the standard business information (i.e. address, hours, phone number etc.). This is only for mobile devices, however—the desktop version will sort the Offers down among the Google Posts.

This effective tool can be used to promote offers to new clients, making them much more likely to choose your practice over another in their vicinity. We typically recommend the somewhat counterintuitive strategy of placing a Free First Exam offer here.

The Why

Only 5.3% of the industry is currently making use of both Google Posts and Google Offers, so we're hoping you'll take advantage 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 How

To create a Google Offer, follow the instructions for making a Google Post. Make sure you pick the kind of 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 monitor how many people contact you because of that Offer, which will give you an idea of how effective it is for your hospital.



44.5%[▲]

OF HOSPITALS HAVE A GMB
DESCRIPTION

35.6%
2019

12.7%
2018

Bottom Line

The industry saw a 25% increase in the number of practices using this easy and effective tool to increase search engine visibility. 100% of iVET360 clients have their description on their Google My Business listing.

The What

Google has an optional section at the bottom of your hospital's Knowledge Panel that gives you up to 750 characters to talk about your practice in any way 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 think is important for clients to know about your practice.

The description should be easy for anyone familiar with your hospital to complete, and it is wonderfully effective—it's worth an entire 15% of your profile when Google calculates the completion of your profile. The less complete your profile, the lower your practice's search listing is ranked.

Pro tip: If you don't see the option to add a description on your Google My Business page, it's possible your business is incorrectly categorized within Google My Business. This can often be rectified by simply reducing the number of categories your hospital is 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 saw a 4% increase in the number of ratings and reviews over those that did not.

The 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.



23% ▲

OF HOSPITALS HAVE A
GOOGLE SHORT NAME

8.3%
2019

N/A
2018

Bottom Line

The industry saw an increase of over 177% in the use of the short name URL.
100% of iVET360 clients have a short name for their Knowledge Panel.

The What

To fully complete your business profile, you should claim a Google Short Name, which will direct current and prospective clients straight to the fabulous Google Knowledge Panel you've created.

The Short Name is a unique, simplified URL that can easily be recalled and shared. Initially, the URL for your Knowledge Panel is a lorem ipsum of letters and numbers. To be more accessible and visible, it's 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. Oh, and there's a 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 saw a 12% increase in number of reviews over those that did not. The key here is to claim your Google Short Name ASAP, before another business with a similar name takes yours out from under you.

The How

To claim a Google Short Name 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."

If you're on mobile, 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." Whether you're on computer or mobile, your Short Name will be pending at first, but will eventually show up on your Business Profile when it's ready.



10.5% ▾

OF HOSPITALS ARE
UTILIZING GOOGLE ADS

11.8%
2019

10.7%
2018

Bottom Line

The number of practices using the Ads feature remains flat, and will probably stay that way due to cost and the time involved to create them. 96.2% of iVET360's clients utilize Google Ads.

The What

No surprise—if you pay for advertising on Google, you're more likely to get preferential treatment when it comes to search engine results. These hospitals have wisely chosen to make use of a service called Google Ads, which from our experience has been consistently successful for veterinary practices.

In addition to cost, another possible reason for the stagnation in usage numbers for this platform is that Google Ads has a surprisingly large learning curve. They want to make sure that the content they are promoting looks professionally written, so they have developed an online training course. However, it's an investment in time and energy that many practices don't have right now. You can try to navigate the world of Google Ads for the first time by yourself, but research shows us that hospitals choosing the DIY path give up before they ever placed their first ad.

The Why

High adoption rates during the pandemic may have substantially increased your new client numbers, but keeping yourself in front of your clients and at the top of search engine results is an investment in the continuing financial health of your practice.

Hospitals that utilize Google Ads saw a 5% increase in the 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

If you want to dive in to Google Ads (and we strongly suggest you do) we recommend finding someone who has completed the Google Ads training course—a [Google Certified Partner](#). If you'd like to venture out on your own, [here's a checklist](#) to get you started.

By the way, if you're looking for Google Adwords Express as an easy way to do this, it is now part of Google Ads as a "Smart" campaign and no longer exists as a standalone option.



Overview

Facebook is so ubiquitous that it's almost a shorthand for social media, much like how the name Kleenex is used when talking about facial tissues. Despite some bad press in the last year, this media giant remains a major online platform—and it's one you don't want to unfriend because a significant number of your clients still live and communicate here. Effectively using Facebook and the extra features it offers can make a huge difference to your bottom line.

Here's a breakdown of some of those features, how much they're being utilized by the veterinary industry, and an assessment of their effectiveness.



HAVE A FACEBOOK USERNAME **81.6%**



HAVE A BRANDED FACEBOOK PAGE **64%**



ARE USING FACEBOOK MESSENGER **83.3%**



ARE USING FACEBOOK OFFERS **7.4%**



ARE USING FACEBOOK ADS **8%**



AVERAGE STAR RATING (OUT OF 5)



AVERAGE NUMBER OF RECOMMENDATIONS



FACEBOOK LIKES & FOLLOWERS



AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHECK-INS



40*

THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF RECOMMENDATIONS

69.3
201986
2018

Bottom Line

Facebook has recently changed their format for ratings, reviews, and recommendations, which probably accounts for the large drop off in number. iVET360 clients average 39 reviews and a 4.7 rating.

The What

Facebook gave itself a facelift this past year which included revamping the way they present reviews and recommendations. Although there is still a “Reviews” tab, an actual written review only comes into play after someone leaves a “yes” or “no” recommendation. At that point, they are invited to leave a review.

This change was also accompanied by several others that account for the decline, including:

- Past ratings that had no accompanying review are no longer counted by Facebook in their tabulations of your star rating
- Star ratings are determined by a new algorithm that combines Recommendations and Reviews
- The new Facebook layout allows you to put the Reviews tab anywhere you like, so on many pages, it is no longer visible

You can opt to turn off the reviews/recommendations option, which some practices do after receiving negative feedback--in fact, we found that 8.3% of practices surveyed have them turned off. We strongly advise against this, because you need Facebook ratings and recommendations for your SEO.

The Why

In addition to affecting your search engine results, ratings and recommendations give you and your potential clients an at-a-glance idea of how your practice is perceived.

The How

To increase your number of Facebook ratings and recommendations, it's important that you have first verified your page—more on this later. Once that's done, you can send your clients to check out your page and suggest that if they've had a good experience at your practice to leave a recommendation and review to help other pet owners in your community.



1403 | 1439

THE AVERAGE NUMBERS OF
LIKES VS FOLLOWERS FOR
VETERINARY HOSPITALS

Bottom Line

It's nice to be liked. It's even better to be followed. iVET360's clients have an average of 1585 likes and 1628 followers.

The What

Ok the truth is “likes” on Facebook are a dime a dozen, but they do give you a good sense of how many people might see your posts—about 5% of them. When someone clicks “Like” on your page, by default they also automatically “Follow” your page, which means they will see updates about your page in their newsfeed.

So why aren't Likes and Follows always the same number? Because someone who likes your page can also manually decide to unfollow you because they don't want to see your content. Someone can also decide to follow you without liking your page.

The Why

It's obvious that getting as many people as possible to like your page is a good thing—because the more likes, the more potential followers to see your messages. The key here is to make sure they don't unfollow you, so your content needs to be relevant to them, entertaining, or informative.

With all the concern about the pandemic, some practices have made it a point to keep their clients informed about health issues and changing hospital protocols via their social media. But others are overwhelmed by the challenges and have let their content slide. The large disparity in likes vs. followers may be the result of that inattention.

The How

Increasing likes is easy—you can simply ask clients to like your page in person, via the “invite” button, post signage, or run a Facebook “like” campaign. But take a look at those follower numbers! If they are considerably lower than your likes, it's time to rethink and refresh your content, which can be time-consuming. Think about your clients and what their concerns are related to their pets. How can you help them keep their pet healthy? Save them money? Learn about local pet events? In addition to relevant content, posting consistently matters as well.



733

THE AVERAGE NUMBER
OF HOSPITAL CHECK-INS

N/A
2019

N/A
2018

Bottom Line

Check-ins may be one of the unsung heroes of Facebook marketing. iVET360 clients have an average of 506 client check-ins.

The What

This easy, simple feature allows your clients to alert their friends that they're at your practice. In doing so, they also supply your practice location, a link to your Facebook page, business rating, and even a clickable map. If they view it on mobile, driving directions are easily accessible as well.

Facebook also enhances check-ins by highlighting photos and reviews of other friends who have been to your practice and gives you the opportunity to promote an offer as well.

The Why

At first, a check-in may not seem like much—it's just a client posting that they are currently at your practice. But this free, quick post gives you a lot of bang for no bucks! Consider that anyone who checks in at your practice is assuming this is information their friends and acquaintances want to know, and it comes with vital info about your hospital. In effect, it is a soft-sell, person-to-person recommendation, which as anyone can tell you is the best kind of advertising there is.

It's estimated that typically about 200 friends of the person checking in will see this type of post. Consistently promoting check-ins for your practice is a great way to increase likes and potential followers and show them vital information about you at a glance.

The How

It's important that your page be configured correctly to allow Check-Ins. Make sure your page's category is set to "Local Business" by navigating to Settings at the top of the page, clicking Page Info in the left column, then selecting Category > Local Business. You will then need to choose a category for your business. Don't forget to add your business address, and to check the boxes for Show Map, Star Ratings, and Check-Ins and click the button to save your changes.



81.6%▲

OF HOSPITALS HAVE A
FACEBOOK VANITY URL

80.1%
2019

78.9%
2018

Bottom Line

There's steady growth in the number of practices taking this step to make their Facebook pages easier to find. 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, making it easier for your clients to find you on Facebook.

The vanity URL also allows for better 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/iVET360/839), our URL can be adapted so that anyone could find us on Facebook with @iVET360..

The Why

Anything you can do to make it easier for clients to find and communicate with you is worth doing. Hospitals that have a vanity URL also saw a 5% increase in number of reviews/recommendations over those that did not.

The How

Setting up a Facebook vanity URL is simple. 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. Once you do, click select "Create Username." It's also important to make sure the URL you're trying to create adheres to Facebook's [username guidelines](#).



63.9%[▲]

OF HOSPITALS HAVE A
BRANDED FACEBOOK PAGE

63.1%
2019

62.8%
2018

Bottom Line

Awareness about the importance of branding has motivated more hospitals to make the effort when it comes to the look of their social media. 91.8% of iVET360's clients have branded Facebook pages.

The What

As the internet continues to expand, your Facebook page's visibility naturally dwindles. 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--and 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 2.5 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.



83.3% ▾

OF HOSPITALS ARE USING
FACEBOOK MESSENGER

86.1%
2019

87.6%
2018

Bottom Line

There's been a 3% decrease in the use of this feature, and it may be because the pandemic has hospital staff stretched to the limit. 91.2% of iVET360 clients actively use Messenger.

The What

Having a platform where clients can easily reach you without having to speak—whether face-to-face or over the phone—is ideal. Facebook Messenger (or just simply “Messenger”) is set up to host group chats, share posts, and is also perfect for individual messages and quick conversations.

You can turn this feature off if you like, but doing so limits your lines of communication to your clients. Some practices want to do that, as having so many platforms to answer can be demanding on your reception staff. But Messenger remains an extremely popular way to communicate, and having it turned on doesn't necessarily mean you must answer involved medical questions or respond to every single message. Instead, consider setting up an auto response with your phone number or link to your website to make an appointment.

The Why

Hospitals that utilized Facebook Messenger also saw a 2.5% increase in number of reviews/recommendations over those that did not.

It's likely that the mixed bag and added hassle of Facebook Messaging have played a large part in the past four years of declining industry usage. The fact remains, however, that by making your hospital available on Messenger—even via auto-message—you open your practice to more conversations, which leads to more appointments.

The How

To set up or dismantle Messenger, you must be 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.



7.4%

OF HOSPITALS ARE USING
FACEBOOK OFFERS

N/A
2019

N/A
2018

Bottom Line

This new feature shows promise because it is so easy to use. 13.2% of iVET360 clients place Facebook Offers.

The What

Facebook Offers are essentially posts that feature a special discount or promotion. Offers can be created from the sharing tool on your Facebook page, and when it appears on people's newsfeeds, there's a "Get Offer" button that encourages those seeing it to claim it. Offers can be targeted to a specific audience, and the cost tailored to your budget.

The Why

Facebook Offers seems to be a slightly more popular platform for our industry than GMB Offers, which may be more about the ease of use and pervasiveness of Facebook. What's good about hopping on board the Offers train now is that the field is uncrowded, so your message won't be buried by competition.

The How

Placing a Facebook Offer is almost as simple as regular posting. Go to the "Create Post" window and select "Offer". The Facebook tool for creating an offer will appear on your left. You can then choose the type of offer, write a headline, add an image, set an expiration date, and specify your audience and budget. Monitor the effectiveness of your offer on the Page Insights tab.



8%

OF HOSPITALS ARE USING
FACEBOOK ADS

N/A
2019

N/A
2018

Bottom Line

19.8% of iVET360 clients are using Facebook Ads.

The What

This paid feature allows you to place advertising across all of Facebook's platforms including Instagram and Messenger. Depending upon the placement and type of campaign you choose, the ads can appear directly in the newsfeed, to the right of the newsfeed, between videos, in Facebook's Marketplace, and in Messenger inboxes.

The Why

Facebook has over 1.6 billion users, and because you can hyper-target your ad's audience, we'd say this tool is worth what you pay for it. For better or worse, Facebook's value is enhanced by the fact that it knows more about its users--and what makes them "click"--than any other platform, so your advertising is more likely to give you a good return on investment.

Pro tip: Facebook ads are most effective when you include an offer of some kind, rather than just using it for general branding of your practice.

The How

Creating a good Facebook ad can be time-consuming, though the learning curve is not as steep as the one for Google Ads. Once you've created your business account in Facebook, you'll need to go to the Ad Manager to start setting up advertising campaigns. If you don't have a provider to help you place and test your Facebook Ads, you can try the DIY route with [these steps provided by Facebook](#). You can use the same tool to place ads on Facebook's other affiliates such as Instagram and Messenger.



Overview

Yelp isn't anyone's favorite social media platform, but the fact is that it's still important to Google, and in certain areas of the country it's a go-to for recommendations (we're looking at you, California.)

Even with growing user dissatisfaction, heavily filtered reviews, and declining usage, Yelp still manages to attract 114 million [check this stat] unique users every month. Google features Yelp pages on the top of search engine results and in the knowledge panel if you have an engaged client base on the platform. For these reasons, it makes sense that you take advantage of Yelp's tools to maximize your online presence—and do it sooner rather than later.



HAVE CLAIMED YELP LISTING **45%**



HAVE A YELP CHECK-IN OFFER **8.9%**



ARE USING YELP ASK THE COMMUNITY **3.5%**



ARE UTILIZING YELP ADS **17.5%**



ARE OFFERING A YELP DEAL **0.7%**



USING YELP CONNECT (POSTS) **0.2%**



AVERAGE STAR RATING (OUT OF 5)



AVERAGE NUMBER OF YELP REVIEWS



NUMBER OF NOT RECOMMENDED REVIEWS



AVERAGE NUMBER OF YELP QUESTIONS



34 ▲

THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF YELP REVIEWS

30
201927
2018

Bottom Line

The industry saw a 13% increase in the number of reviews over last year. iVET360 clients average 39 reviews and a 4 star rating.

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. Yelp relies on an algorithm based on user activity that dictates which reviews appear and in what order they will appear.

Star ratings are determined by the number of visible reviews divided by the number of stars, rounded to a .5 (1/2 star). This is ultimately helpful to businesses because it means you shouldn't stress when you get a 1-star review. While you should respond to it promptly, the fact is that because of the way Yelp tabulates these, a single 1-star post won't completely decimate your overall star rating.

The Why

Simply put, the more Yelp reviews you have, the better your search engine results will be. 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. Obviously, you have a much greater number of clients walking through your doors than is reflected in the reviews.

The How

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.

4

AVERAGE STAR RATING (OUT OF 5)



18

NUMBER OF NOT
RECOMMENDED REVIEWS

N/A
2019

N/A
2018

Bottom Line

Because they have higher numbers of reviews overall, iVET360 clients average about 19 Not Recommended reviews.

The What

Essentially, a “Not Recommended” review is a review of a review—Yelp’s judgement call about a review that is posted for a business by a customer. Some reasons Yelp might flag a review as “not recommended”:

- **The user is not well-established with a profile picture, lots of friends, and high activity on the platform**
- **The review seems biased**
- **The review is an unhelpful rant or rave about the business**

These reviews might indeed be legitimate, but because of one of the above reasons, they may mark it as “not recommended”.

In its defense, Yelp says that 75% of reviews submitted are recommended and posted. However, many smaller businesses—like veterinary practices—feel that Yelp is penalizing them by hiding positive reviews from clients who may not be regular users of the platform.

The Why

Obviously, having a lot of positive reviews unseen in the “Not Recommended” category can degrade your rating. This has become a major bone of contention for many businesses, as in addition to being unseen, these reviews now have questionable credibility due to being designated as “not recommended”.

The How

Yelp is obviously trying to weed out illegitimate reviews and strengthen their platform by forcing people to become more active in order for their reviews to carry any weight and be easily seen. Respond to the review because that is best practice...if someone does go there to see the reviews, your response will be there. Will not help it become more visible.



45% ▼

OF HOSPITALS HAVE
CLAIMED THEIR LISTING

89%
2019

86.9%
2018

Bottom Line

Yikes—the industry has seen a nearly 50% decline in the number of claimed business listings in just the last year, mostly as a result of inactivity. 100% iVET360 clients have a claimed Yelp listing.

The What

Just as with Google and Facebook pages, it is essential that you take the simple step of claiming your veterinary hospital's Yelp page. This not only prevents strangers and competitors from taking control of your practice profile--it's also the first and most important step toward having a complete profile, which according to Yelp will mean more customer leads for your business.

The Why

Though they won't reveal specifics, it appears that Yelp has automatically begun "unclaiming" pages that have been inactive for 90 days or more. Hospitals that have a claimed Yelp profile also saw a 51% increase in number of reviews over those that did not, and as stated earlier in this report, an active Yelp page means a higher profile in Google search results.

Without a claimed Yelp listing, your hospital is essentially flying blind on this platform, which has all the free tools necessary so you can personalize and get maximum value from your page. Adding photos, responding to reviews, and making offers are just a few of the things your practice can do to make your listing more attractive and informative. Yelp has also created timely (and free) new features that can be of real help during the pandemic--they showcase "Updated Services", "Health & Safety Measures", and more so you can let your clients know the latest about your hospital's procedures and protocols.

The 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.



8.9% ▼

OF HOSPITALS ARE
UTILIZING CHECK-IN OFFERS

9.3%
2019

9.6%
2018

Bottom Line

Check-In Offers are down slightly from last year which is sad given the underlying value of this free tool. 35.7% 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 allows you to track how many people checked-in as well as how many people redeemed an offer if you have one in place at the time.

The Why

The most successful hospitals use this Yelp feature/hospital deal combination, as seen in the fact that those practices saw a 129% increase in the number of reviews over those that did not.

The Why

To set up a Yelp Check-In Offer, you'll need to first decide what to offer your clients—something like \$5 off an exam, a free nail trim, a free branded frisbee or a small bag of treats when they check in at your practice. Then go to biz.yelp.com and log in. Click "Check-In Offers," then "Create a Check-In Offer." Select the type of offer you're giving—% 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.



3.5% ▲

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

3%
2019

N/A
2018

Bottom Line

Like most of Yelp, your clients aren't using this feature. 8.2% of iVET360 clients are active with Yelp Asks, with an average of 1 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 of your business. Also like Google Q&A, this needs to be a feature you monitor, 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 utilizing this feature at all—outside of California. However, that doesn't mean your hospital can ignore it. Check in on the feature regularly and be ready to answer so you can control the narrative and provide correct answers. Hospitals that utilize a Yelp Ask The Community did see a whopping 279% increase in the number of reviews over those that did not.

The How

Responding to questions on Yelp Asks is simply a matter of logging in to your Yelper account and going 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.

.3

AVERAGE NUMBER OF QUESTIONS (2020)

.2

AVERAGE NUMBER OF QUESTIONS (2019)



17.5%▲

OF HOSPITALS ARE
UTILIZING YELP ADS

13.9%
2019

15.9%
2018

Bottom Line

Up 26% over last year, it appears* the industry is seeing more value in Yelp's advertising feature. 9.9% 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.

**9.8% of the industry are using Yellow Pages Business to manage their Yelp Page which includes a Yelp Ads budget. Thus our data shows only 7.7% of the industry is actually paying Yelp directly.*

The Why

While it can be difficult to see a return on investment when it comes to Yelp Ads, hospitals that utilize them show an estimated 64% increase in number of reviews over those that do not.

The How

Yelp makes it easy to advertise on their platform with Self Service (SS) ads. Simply [click here](#) for their detailed run down.



0.7% ▼

OF HOSPITALS ARE
OFFERING A YELP DEAL

1%
2019

1.1%
2018

Bottom Line

Use of this feature has basically stayed flat for the last 3 years of data collection.
Only 1% of iVET360 clients offer Yelp Deals.

The What

This Groupon-style feature offers clients the chance to purchase coupons or discounts—like paying \$20 for a \$40 worth of services. The idea is that it would create an incentive for new clients to try your hospital over another in the same area.

Unfortunately, our data shows that the already small number of hospitals using this marketing strategy continues to shrink and is nearly negligible at this point. That could be due to the fact that these types of offers may not be a good fit for veterinary practices—but it's most likely because Yelp takes up to 30% of the revenue straight from the client, making it a money-losing proposition for many.

The Why

Hospitals that utilize a Yelp Deal did see a 24% increase in the number of reviews over those that did not. However, a Yelp Check-In Offer might be a much better tool for increasing clients and reviews for most hospitals.

The How

To post 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 / CONNECT (POSTS)



0.2%

OF HOSPITALS ARE USING
YELP POSTS

N/A
2019

N/A
2018

Bottom Line

New to Yelp in 2020, this paid feature has yet to take off in the veterinary industry. 0% of iVET360 clients are using Yelp Posts as the return on investment doesn't seem to be there.

The What

Comparable to a boosted Facebook post, Yelp Connect is a paid feature that lets businesses post updates and news relevant to the business directly on their page. These posts will appear to all Yelpers on your business page, and also be promoted to your followers in emails and elsewhere in Yelp's app.

Yelp Connect allows for posts to stay live until you choose to take them down, or to specify dates if you are posting an update or event.

The Why

Depending on how many followers you have on your Yelp page, paying for this feature might be to your advantage, especially since it appears most veterinary hospitals aren't hip to the feature yet. Hospitals that utilize Yelp Connect did see a 85% increase in the number of reviews over those that did not.

The How

To post on Yelp Connect, you can follow these [simple instructions](#).



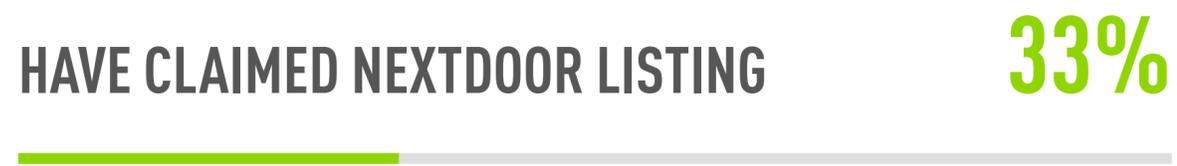
nextdoor

Overview

Nextdoor has really come into its own in the past few years—so much so that it even has its own [parody site](#) now that highlights all the neighborhood drama.

Coyote sightings and back-fence feuds aside, Nextdoor is a must-have for any business that builds its success on clientele in the immediate vicinity. Think of it like Yelp, only hyper-local, with content limited to people who actually reside in a certain area of town. Users can only see content that is from—and targeted to—where they live, so there are a lot of relevant conversations happening, including recommendations about what area veterinarian they recommend. Imagine having 90+ online reviews your hospital never knew about!

If your practice hasn't been active on Nextdoor, it's time to change that. In this next section, we'll tell you how and why to do it.



33% ▲

OF HOSPITALS HAVE
CLAIMED THEIR LISTING

29%
2019

15%
2018

Bottom Line

The industry saw a 13% increase in claimed practice listings this past year as the social media platform gains awareness. 78.6% of iVET360 clients have claimed their listing on Nextdoor.

The What

Claiming your page on Nextdoor is pretty much the same as verifying on Facebook and claiming your listing on Google—and becoming just as important. Unless you do this, you can't respond to or manage reviews, recommendations, or anything the most important people—your friends and neighbors—are saying about your practice to potential clients.

The Why

Wouldn't you rather know what your friends and neighbors are saying about you than guess and hope that the reviews are positive? This is why it's so important to claim your Nextdoor listing—but unfortunately, the majority of hospitals still remain unaware and defenseless to what people are saying about them on this fast-growing local listing service.

The How

Luckily, it's easy to join the Nextdoor block party. First you create an account, [search for your practice](#) and click "Claim"—and 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.



Bottom Line

Though the 13% growth in recommendations in 2020 seems minor, Nextdoor Recommendations have seen 100% growth since 2018. This rise reflects Nextdoor's exponential growth as a social media platform. iVET360 clients average 87 recommendations per listing.

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.

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

With recommendations on the rise and still 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

Unlike Yelp, Nextdoor doesn't frown on asking clients for recommendations and you can do so in many ways. But first you must claim your business listing. Once you've done that, you can then ask clients to leave a review on Nextdoor, in the same ways you do for Google and Facebook: a verbal ask, signage in your practice, icons on your website, etc.

5

**AVERAGE NUMBER OF
NEIGHBORHOOD FAVORITES**
5
2019

N/A
2018
Bottom Line

Growth isn't always a bad thing--with more hospitals claiming their listings this year, it equals more competition for the coveted "Neighborhood Favorite" title, giving the designation more credibility if you win. iVET360 clients are favorites in an average of 4 neighborhoods in their local areas.

The What

Since 2017, Nextdoor has encouraged neighbors to vote annually in over 30 categories for the small businesses that they think deserve recognition. 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 voting process for "Neighborhood Favorite" gives your hospital a certain amount of marketing in and of itself, since a list of each neighborhood's small businesses of choice is sent to every person in the community. Even more of an incentive is the prize of a free month of advertising if you win the title—which in past years has been the source of significant growth for the practices we consult.

The Why

Nextdoor Favorites is free advertising, with the clients in your community ready to share with their friends how great your hospital is. Even better is the free month of digital advertising offered if you do become a Neighborhood Favorite.

The How

Each year when the voting is announced on Nextdoor, you can enhance your chances of winning by reaching out to your clients and asking them to vote for your practice via email, in-hospital signage, or personal request. Pro tip: Don't forget to thank your clients if you win a Favorites title!

0.6% ▲

OF HOSPITALS ARE
UTILIZING LOCAL DEALS0.3%
2019N/A
2018

Bottom Line

While growth of this feature is slow, the 9.9% of iVET360 clients who make use of Nextdoor Local Deals find them effective, though return on investment has declined.

The What

Just like Google and Facebook, Nextdoor has a feature that allows 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 that other social media platforms don't have. It also 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.

The Why

People who use Nextdoor tend to be very invested in supporting their community. The best part of Local Deals is that they're shown to these users in so many places on the site: residents' feeds, business pages, in the Business section, on a neighborhood-specific Local Deals area, and as a sponsored listing in search results.

On the downside, more businesses are now using this feature and there's more competition in other verticals taking up ad space. That has resulted in a decline in effectiveness for ND Local Deals when compared with other social media advertising.

The How

To create a Local Deal, you'll first need to claim your business listing. Once you've done that, you can follow Nextdoor's user-friendly Local Deal creation tool [here](#).

WE CAN HELP

This report was created to establish a benchmark you can use to measure your hospital's marketing efforts. The majority of these data points show an increase from 2019, demonstrating an industry that despite the challenges of the first part of this year, is growing and evolving. That said, the results of this report also show that the veterinary field has some work to do when it comes to managing all the tools at their disposal.

We encourage our clients as well as all those in this industry to look at marketing holistically, as you would when you treat a pet. See the big picture. If your veterinary hospital is doing your own marketing, or if you rely on a provider, ask yourself—is my practice utilizing all the methods in this report that are relevant for me? Are we capable of adjusting to the new marketing trends next year, or even 10 years from now?

We are here to help with a free benchmark breakdown for your animal hospital. If you'd like to see it, contact iVET360 and tell us your hospital name, website, and email address, and we'll be happy to provide a complimentary all-inclusive digital report for your hospital within 48 hours.

