



**MEET THE AUTHOR**

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# Instant Connection: Tapping Into the Power of Social Media

**S**ocial media is nothing new. It's been around in one form or another for many years, and we use it to connect with others personally and professionally in our everyday lives. Businesses are increasingly turning to social media in order to market their goods and services. People don't interact with businesses face to face like they used to, but we still need to connect with our clients—now more than ever with the recent events surrounding COVID-19.

Sandy is a veterinary practice management consultant, instructor, speaker, and advisor with over 35 years of experience in the veterinary field. She is dedicated to improving hospital operations through coaching and sharing appropriate practice management techniques to the whole team. Sandy still works in a small animal practice and is an active member of the Veterinary Hospital Managers Association, NAVTA, VetPartners, Sacramento Valley Veterinary Practice Managers Association, Sacramento Valley Veterinary Technician Association, and the CVMA. She is an instructor for Patterson Veterinary University and a former hospital inspector for the California Veterinary Medical Board.

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The intent of social media as a business tool is to connect and engage with your clients on a regular basis. Once you identify your target clients and know how to reach them, it's time to get social.

Clients have a lot of choices on where to take their pets, and the average client might have face-to-face interactions with a hospital just a few times a year. That isn't a lot of contact time. It's important to do whatever you can to solidify that client bond with your practice. Your goal is to have clients pass every other practice in town to get to yours. It's about your brand and practice reputation. Social media can be the differentiator if you engage on a regular basis. Start with the basics and then expand your platforms. Here are some ideas to consider.

## REVIEW YOUR WEBSITE

Start here as you evaluate your social media presence. Think of your website as your “digital brochure.” All things should lead to your website, so it's critical that your site checks all of the boxes: visually pleasing, informative, accurate, current, and up to date. Regular updates and maintenance of the site are critical. Considerations for building and maintaining a valuable website include:

- **Who you are:** Practice name and logo should be front and center.
- **Where you are:** Location is the great equalizer. Highlight your location. Include contact information and hours of operation.
- **What you do:** Highlight your practice type. Focus on what makes you unique rather than a laundry list of services. Include the species you treat or special services you provide.
- **Somewhere for visitors to go:** Pages on your website should be informative and easy to navigate. The most visited page on virtually every practice website is the About Us page. Here is where you highlight your team (doctors, veterinary nurses, reception, assistants—the whole team). Photos and short bios are essential. Just make sure to keep them current. The more informative your pages are, the more time clients and potential clients will spend on your site.
- **Relevant links:** Include your online store or pharmacy, patient portal, blog, and other businesses with whom you support or partner. You can also link out to local emergency or specialty practices, animal services, poison control, etc.
- **Social media links:** Add only those with which you regularly engage.

Social media engagement will not replace your website. It will, however, help deliver and reinforce your target message and solidify your practice reputation. The goal is to channel traffic to your website so clients and potential clients can gain further information about who you are, what you do, and what you offer.



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## EMAIL AND TEXT MESSAGING

Yes, this is a form of social media. More and more clients prefer direct communication via email or text message over a phone call or traditional mailing. Have your clients opt in for these services and utilize your Practice Information Management System (PIMS) for delivery. These communication methods can be utilized for service and product reminders, appointment confirmations, and other communication such as visit follow-ups, surveys, and newsletter delivery. Ensure your client's contact information is correct and current, especially the email address and cell phone numbers as those tend to change periodically. Ask your clients how they prefer to communicate for optimal compliance.

## MOBILE APP

Digital practice apps are another popular business-building and client-bonding tool. Clients have access to you virtually 24/7. Customized to your practice and brand, the apps integrate with your PIMS. Some of the features include:

- Patient portals
- Prescription refill requests
- Appointment requests
- Online store access
- Loyalty programs

You have options when it comes to choosing a mobile app. Look for a completely customizable app that can



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include your practice branding, such as the Vet2Pet platform ([vet2pet.com](http://vet2pet.com)).

## FACEBOOK

Facebook continues to lead the social media pack in terms of users, so it's a good place to start. The goal is to build a community of practice followers. This is a great platform to share information and solidify that bond between your practice and clients.

There are so many opportunities to engage on a daily basis, so be creative—especially when in-person interaction with the practice may be limited due to health or safety considerations. Many practices turned to Facebook during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep their clients updated on changes at the practice, including access to medical care, hours, and new policies. Consider alternating your posts with patient stories, interesting or fun cases, relevant and timely medical facts, contests, trivia, or pictures of your team in action. Facebook has a long list of features that you can use to market your business. Check out and like the Facebook Business page ([facebook.com/marketing](https://facebook.com/marketing)) for ideas that meet your practice needs.

## INSTAGRAM

Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, does not have as many features to offer, but it's still a powerful business tool. Especially popular with 18- to 29-year-olds, it's all about the sharing of pictures and short videos.<sup>1</sup> A picture is worth a thousand words and clients love them.

Stock images are not what they are looking for, so make them personal—patient of the day, interesting cases, new puppies and kittens, and your team in action. It's important to have a recognizable brand when posting to Instagram. Filters, frames, or a watermark are

essential. This platform can also be utilized to exemplify your reputation and reach target clients. To stay up to date with Instagram business features and ideas, visit [business.instagram.com](https://business.instagram.com).

## TWITTER

Twitter is an online news and social networking service known for its real-time interaction. It's about what's happening now. Users post and converse using tweets, short videos, photos, or messages that are limited to 240 characters.

Twitter can be used to create interest with a short message in order to drive followers elsewhere: your website, blog, online store, etc. As with all your social networks, your Twitter profile should be branded as well. To stay up to date with Twitter business features and ideas, follow [@TwitterBusiness](https://twitter.com/TwitterBusiness).

## NOW WHAT?

There is no such thing as “set it and forget it” when it comes to your social media presence, regardless of the platform. Social media can be a daunting, overwhelming, and time-consuming endeavor, but it allows you to continually connect with your clients. The good news is, you can utilize a social media dashboard. Services such as Sendible, AgoraPulse, e-clincher, and Hootsuite, to name a few, will allow you to post to all the platforms you utilize with 1 click.

Keep in mind that quality is more important than quantity when it comes to social media engagement. Choose wisely when deciding which platforms to engage with and how often you will post. Work with your team to create a social media calendar and identify who will be responsible for maintenance of your website and coordinating the posts. There is a fine line between posting enough and posting too much. More than once a day is likely too much for routine posts. Fewer than 3 times per week is probably not enough to keep your clients engaged. Consider your client demographics and communication preferences and then get social. It's one of the best business tools in your toolbox. **TVN**

## Reference

1. Perrin A, Anderson M. Share of U.S. adults using social media, including Facebook, is mostly unchanged since 2018. [pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-social-media-including-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-social-media-including-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/). Accessed June 2020.