

Social Media - Beyond the Hype a Very Special Tool Exists

Dave Nicol, BVMS
Dave Nicol Veterinary Services
Sydney, Australia

Who should come to this session?

- Managers
- Owners
- Senior vets/nurses/technicians with direct reports
- All staff who want to learn how to use social media as an effective business tool.

Part 1: What is social media?

Social media is a phenomenon that is only really beginning to break into the veterinary business consciousness. It is without a doubt this year's buzz management concept and rather sadly, as with most buzz concepts, being used poorly so is soon likely to be written off by many practice owners as a time wasting irrelevance.

This is not helped by the fact that so many people claim to be social media experts!

Social media (SM) facts (according to Dr. Dave)

- SM is the missing link of the Internet
- SM has changed the rules for business
- SM is happening to your practice right now
- SM gives unprecedented power to the consumer
- SM is changing the world
- SM is not a FAD
- SM can change your business for the better
- SM can ruin your business
- SM is about sharing and connecting

Social media platforms to investigate

1. Facebook – the most commonly used.
2. Twitter – great for connecting and conversations.
3. Foursquare - good for advice and tips.
4. Google Local Business – for recommendations and directions to your hospital
5. Google + - hmmm, something Google is trying hard to promote. Do we need another facebook?
6. True local - another recommendations site for Australia – there are tons in the US. Which ones are well used in your area?
7. Pinterest – new sharing photos.
8. LinkedIn – facebook for business.
9. Blogs - to be covered in a later lecture but my secret weapon
10. Apps - will become relevant.
11. And many, many more.

Which social media platforms you choose to be on should be determined by where your audience is and what your demographic is.

Part 2: Why does social media matter?

People are talking are you part of the conversation? You have to be a player in the game to influence the game.

Why you shouldn't fear social media

1. People have been talking to us forever!
2. We used to use face to face, the phone and postal service.
3. Now we text, IM, email, tweet, facebook each other...

Whatever the platform people are using to communicate though there is a common denominator that links all of them. The message! Each is just a tool for building relationships and getting our message across.

The problem for practices that do not get involved with social media is that they are missing out on where an increasing part of the action is happening.

Fundamental changes have occurred in the way we communicate...but the messages are remarkably similar.

Part 3: Using social media

Rule for using social media:

1. Be aware that people have a finely tuned 'Bull Crap Radar' that will filter out your marketese spin.
2. Get involved in conversations with meaning.
3. Use your own voice – the internet has allowed the gatekeepers to be circumvented so free speech is not just encouraged, it is essential for the authentic conversations that matter to people.
4. Give. Give. Give. Don't Sell. Sell. Sell.
5. Build relationships.
6. Talk and talk often.
7. Use the knowledge you have of what pet owners want to shape your communications
8. Spend 15 minutes a day searching twitter for pet related stuff in your area and see how you can help with free advice. Watch what happens.

Part 4: Examples of social media

Dr Dave will show/did show you (depending on when you read this) you some live examples of social media done well and badly from within the veterinary profession and also out with. Can't share them here though...you have to/had to be there.

Final destination

Delegates will understand that social media is more than a fad. It represents a fundamental shift in the balance of power in the consumer market and a fantastic opportunity for vets to build wider, faster and stringer relationships with their local communities. They will also be able to ring fence their own digital real estate.