

Local Search and Being Found: It's a "Thing"

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A veterinary hospital is considered a local business in the Google Universe. It is a service that people search for and use locally. Pet owners typically look for a practice within a five-mile radius. Google knows this. It also has data to show that most people search for a local business on a mobile device. In fact, Google published in Google/Ipsos Connect, Rising Consumer Expectations in the Micro-Moment, U.S., Dec. 2016, that: "Compared to just a year ago, smartphone users are significantly more likely to purchase from companies whose mobile sites or apps customize information to their location."

Google wants people to use Google. Therefore, modifications and updates have been made to assist people in finding local services immediately when/while they are seeking to use it. Local search is now a "thing" that is separate from traditional search engine optimization. Practices need to make sure to optimize their local presence on Google. Here are the top two action ideas to position your business to be seen by pet owners.

1. Set up Google My Business

Google has consolidated many of its platforms into one area called Google My Business. It is an essential priority to set up this area for your hospital. Go to <https://www.google.com/business/> to start the process and verify the information Google has about your business. Google repeatedly states that it looks at Google My Business (GMB) for information for search purposes. Google expects a business to make sure the information in this area is correct. Make sure to at least do the following within GMB:

- **Create a description.** Be sure it contains the flavor/tone of your practice, details about which services are offered, animals seen, etc. It should be a long piece of content, not a few quick sentences.
- **Choose a category.** Google counts on the practice to choose the category that best illustrates the type of services offered. Typical categories would be Animal

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Hospital, Emergency Veterinarian Service, or Veterinarian for a veterinary practice.

- **Double check, cross reference information.** The “devil is in the details” is true for local search. Google searches the internet to match the information it has on a practice to all of the information “out there.” For example, is the street address of a hospital posted exactly the same way on every local platform? Other items to check are business name, phone number, times of operation, accepted payment information, and the types of animals treated.
- **Upload photos—happy photos.** People want visual information and cues about a business. Make sure to have at least five to seven photos uploaded to GMB that showcase the practice. Remember, no photos of blood, surgical sites or medical procedures. Happy pets and happy people should be the focus of the photos.

2. Manage reviews

Yep, it is true—reviews matter—and they are the *most important* ranking for local search. At least five reviews are needed in order for them to be seen publicly on your Google My Business page. People read and trust reviews that are current. If a hospital has a slew of reviews from a year ago, they hold less relevance to the reader than reviews left a week ago. Google looks at volume of reviews when placing businesses in ranking order for local reviews. Reviews have been a factor in digital marketing for almost six years. Still, veterinary practices struggle with the tending of reviews. Remember, a good review management system includes:

- Claiming, with a username/password, a hospital’s listing on every review site.
- Making sure the demographic information on all review sites is consistent across the board.
- Asking happy pet owners to leave reviews. Remember to never give a reward (e.g. receive \$10 to leave a review).
- Responding to all positive reviews with a personalized message—not a generic canned message.
- Embracing, not ignoring, negative reviews. Control the flow of conversation by responding to a negative review within 24 hours. When responding, do not forget that you are addressing the angry person as well as everyone reading the review and your reply. Everyone has a bad day; it is how you handle it that matters to people.

Why does my business not show up?

Many times, practices are dismayed that their hospitals do not show up on the front page of Google in the local search box. There are a few reasons that this could happen. One to keep in mind is the proximity of search. Google knows where the pet owner is standing (literally) and knows exactly where the business is geographically.

One factor Google uses when it shows results for a local search on “veterinarian” is proximity. This means that the business that meets the search query and is close will be shown. Businesses that are farther away will receive less consideration. Of course, the search result will vary based on the location of the pet owner.

The other two factors were already covered above—Google My Business and volume of online reviews. Also important is the quality of website the business owns. Because mobile is the driving factor today, Google has set specifications for how a website should be built.

If you wonder if your website passes the Google mobile requirements, or if you need your Google My Business established correctly, reach out to us. We have been on the cutting edge of digital marketing for the last 20 years. We deeply understand how Google works, how to manage reviews, and how to build effective websites. Call Melissa Neff at 877.244.9322, ext. 100, or email her at Melissa@BeyondIndigo.com to have us assist you!

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Beyond Indigo is an MWI Animal Health Distinct Advantage™ program partner. To discuss how your practice can qualify for a free Distinct Advantage program membership, contact your MWI Territory Manager.