

Making a Marketing Plan

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Before building a new veterinary practice, an architect is hired to create a plan and a roadmap for the new structure. The same applies to marketing for a hospital. A plan needs to be generated in order to achieve the best results and to have a stable “structure.” Otherwise, money is spent unwisely, optimized results are not generated, and the whole marketing concept can come crashing down.

Just like the construction of a new building, there are steps to follow when constructing a marketing plan. More work needs to be poured into the beginning of the project and then ongoing work is less strenuous. Here are some key milestones to help you create a marketing plan that works for your business.

Step 1. Find the right person for the job

Typically, the owner of the hospital delegates a person either because said person is *always* the person the doctor dumps things on or the young front desk person because they know social media. It may be that neither is the right fit. To create and implement a successful marketing plan, it typically needs a person who:

- is trusted by the owner(s) of the practice. The owner(s) needs to allow feedback from the internal marketing contact and not micromanage his or her work.

- has time in his or her schedule. Marketing is not a 1–2-hour-a-week job, nor should it be done at home. Marketing is a *job*. The designated person needs to have established marketing-focused hours in the workweek.
- has knowledge of the business, which is essential. Marketing is telling the world what is wonderful about a veterinary practice and what services it offers. If a person does not understand the business, they should not be marketing it.
- has the ability to learn and figure out puzzles. Marketing is not a given. Google and Facebook change constantly and neither giant gives out “how-to” manuals. A change is made and someone has to figure out what happened. Working with an external marketing company is key to keeping abreast of these changes. However, the internal marketing contact still needs to be fluid enough to change with the times and to convey these changes to the owner.

Step 2. Set goals

Goal-setting is essential to a marketing plan. It doesn’t make sense to just go helter-skelter with a hospital’s marketing and hope something works. Money has yet

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to grow on trees! Focusing on 1–3 goals per quarter helps define the marketing plan. For example, increase appointments for one service (dental, boarding, etc.), increase brand awareness in the marketing place, or let people know of a new service that is being offered. Goals should and will change over time. A good way to figure out goals—if you are scratching your head—is to run reports on the practice information system to see what services could use a boost.

Step 3. Keep track of inventories

Having a grip on the services offered, the software used in the hospital, and the platforms that are set up and available for marketing are key to efficiency. One has to be the admin on all online marketing areas such as Facebook, Google Analytics, Google My Business, Twitter, AdWords, etc. A good rule of thumb is that all owners of the hospital should be admins, in addition to the marketing coordinator. One needs to be an admin to read reports and create marketing messages as the marketing plan unfolds.

Step 4. Generate reports, reports and more reports

Why run a blood panel if the practitioner does not see a report? The same goes for marketing. When a marketing program is initiated, numbers are generated which should be monitored and adjusted on a weekly, if not daily, basis. Every marketing platform now has reports from the website, Facebook, search engine optimization, AdWords—everything! If you are working with a marketing provider who does not give access to reports, it is time to see if that provider can provide those numbers, or switch marketing agencies.

Step 5. Know your demographics

Who is the demographic? Finding out the demographics of the clients who visit the practice is helpful for several reasons. One is to understand who is spending the most money with the practice. Is this 35- to 55-year-old women who like cats? Or is it 25- to 35-year-olds with their first puppy? The second reason is that maybe there is an age range or demographic that is being underserved. Maybe marketing to that group of people will help encourage them to bring tails through the hospital doors.

Now the pieces are accessible to make a plan. An easy way to make a plan is to use a spreadsheet or download marketing master plan templates from Google. On the plan should be the goals and how one would determine if the goal is met. For example, “increase in dentals by 10 percent.” A column should be made with the starting point (let’s say 50 dentals per month) that can be used as a baseline of future growth caused by the marketing. Then, each platform should have details laid out for each day of the week for every day of the month. For example, determine which day is going to be a funny post on Facebook. Or which week are ads going to be run on both Facebook and Google. The more detail that can be crafted into the plan in the beginning, the more time saved down the road.

Beyond Indigo has been conducting internet marketing for 21 years. Our CEO and COO have each been working in marketing online for 23 years. Our team knows the old and the new, as well as how to generate revenue and tails through the door. We focus on results first and discuss costs second. We deeply know how Facebook and social media work, are Google AdWords Partners, and we know how to build Google mobile-friendly and fast websites. Need help creating a marketing plan? 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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Kelly Baltzell, M.A. is President and CEO of the Beyond Indigo family of companies which she founded in 1997. Beyond Indigo is a full-service marketing company focusing on Search Engine Optimization, is a Google Adwords Partner, Social Media Marketing, Online Reviews and websites. She has been a monthly columnist for MWI Animal Health since 2011. She has also presented and been published in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the UK.

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.