



2019: What is Your Marketing Plan?

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Blink. How did 2018 just happen? It seems like time is speeding up for everyone. Nowadays, if you are not ahead of the curve, you are running like crazy to catch up to life. January is the standard time of year to take a breath, regroup from the holidays, and think about the next year. Marketing works best if it is a planned approach versus a mad-dash scramble. What might be the focus for your veterinary hospital(s) this coming year? How should you plan?

Gather data first

We live in a data-rich environment. The key is honing in on the information that is needed. When gathering data, it is important to look at the following areas:

1. USA/world economic stability. Even though individual veterinary practices are local businesses, they are influenced by national and world economies. At the end of 2018, the world is not exactly stable. The stock market is volatile this year, but the stock market struggle is not the only area of concern.

“The challenges for investors don’t stop with stocks. Bonds, gold and oil are among the assets down this year; in fact, 90 percent of the 70 asset classes tracked by Deutsche Bank were posting negative total returns in dollar terms through mid-November, according to *The Wall Street Journal*. There hasn’t been this much red for investors in nearly 100 years.” Source: <https://www.nerdwallet.com/blog/investing/stock-market-outlook/>

During hard economic times, a business has to market *more*, not less, to stay viable. People need to know that a practice is there for them and understands it is hard for

everyone right now. People still have dollars to spend—they will just make more conservative choices. Factor into your 2019 marketing plan the services that could be marketed if hard times hit.

- 2. Practice management software (PIM).** Practice management software is a treasure trove of information. If no one on staff knows how to pull the reports needed, call the PIM provider. The key is to know what is pulling in the most revenue currently. What area could use a boost to generate more tails through the door? To start, narrow down the list of services to three to five.
- 3. Seasonality of visits.** Make a list of factors that affect tails coming through the door by season or national promotion. For example, most hospitals focus on dental month. Since many hospitals and national veterinary businesses promote it, ride the dental wave and offer specials for dental care in February, too. Is the practice north of the freezing line in the USA? Then, spring is a good time to think about yearly check-ups, flea and tick prevention, and heartworm testing. Think about running Google and Facebook Ads as soon as it looks like the snow is melting.

Once you have a list of services that should be promoted, seasonal services and veterinary care and ideas around the economy, next is understanding the changing online digital marketplace. What have Google and Facebook done lately that will affect a business?

Focus on these digital marketing areas

The digital environment tends to drive veterinary owners over the edge because of its fluidity. Everything changes moment to moment and what was the “rule” yesterday is now the “penalty.” Keeping up is difficult, which is why it is recommended to hire a marketing firm that keeps a pulse on the digital marketplace.

2018 has been no exception, with the dizzying amount of changes that Facebook and Google have made. Both of these companies are part of the declining FAANG stocks (Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google) which are watched closely in the financial arena. When digital companies are struggling, they tend to make more changes, not less, to their platforms in order to get revenues up. Keep that in mind for 2019.

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- **Facebook.** Facebook has had a year of scandals and issues. As of November 2018, its stock was down 40 percent (<https://www.cnbc.com/2018/11/20/facebook-scandals-in-2018-effect-on-stock.html>). We have seen this reflected in the changes Facebook is making. A key piece of information to remember is that Facebook *owns* everything on Facebook. Many businesses and organizations have been kicked off Facebook this year. Why? Because Facebook can. I have seen some hospitals put all their marketing eggs into Facebook, which is problematic for many reasons. But, keep in mind, Facebook can turn your Facebook page off at any time and for any reason.

Facebook should be a piece of a businesses' marketing, but not the entire puzzle. This last year, Facebook has been changing how a hospital's content is seen, by whom, when, etc. The bottom line is that Facebook wants dollars. The best strategy is to have a mix of posting and ads, and to encourage your followers to engage with your content.

- **Google.** Google has focused on local search this year, especially with Google My Business (GMB). The amount of changes to the Google My Business area is astounding. To learn and/or review what it has been doing for 2018, check this website: <https://www.sterlingsky.ca/google-local-changes/>. All the changes are listed in chronological order going backward from December to January.

The overall meaning for a veterinary practice is that Google My Business is a key focus for 2019. It is an area that should be updated regularly and monitored for current and future client engagement. Google is even working on enabling people to make appointments straight from GMB.

There are a few companies in the veterinary space that

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are working on creating a Google My Business integration with Practice Information Software systems. Keep an eye out in 2019 for this possibility. Overall, Google is pushing local businesses to focus on GMB, utilize Google Ads and play by the rules it puts out for websites. More and more, Google is taking over the job of a business website. Make sure your business does not fall behind.

Create an overarching plan

With data in hand and knowing that Google and Facebook are very fluid, it is solid business practice to create a master overall plan for the first half of 2019. Focus on Q1 and Q2 marketing goals. Limit the goals to three a quarter at the most. An example might be:

Q1 Marketing Plan Focus

- Increase dental revenue
- Prepare for heartworm testing in Q2
- Winter awareness

Under each of these goals, list how to drive tails through the door and increase revenue. Make sure to gather a benchmark before a marketing initiative is launched. How much do you want to see dentals increase? What are they now? How many heartworm tests do you want to conduct in addition to what you have now? Then, after a marketing push happens, check to see if the goal was reached and if it was more than the benchmark.

Ready to start focusing on 2019? It is time. Give us a call and we will focus on your goals and sending tails through your doors. 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. We focus on results first and discuss costs second. We are committed to staying up-to-date with the changing online environment, such as ADA compliance. Plus, we are a Google Ads Partner, and we know how to build Google mobile-friendly and fast websites. Need help creating a marketing plan? Call 877. 244.9322, ext. 100, or go to <https://www.beyondindigopets.com/contact/>.

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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.

