

(Nearly) Free Marketing Tricks

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Driving Tails Through the Door

Without a doubt marketing costs money but, done correctly, it should bring tails through the door. Fortunately, there are a few tricks that can be carried out that are nearly free and help to increase brand awareness and the bottom line. When the word “free” is used, one should always put “nearly” in front of it because there is always a cost. In this case, the “free” marketing ideas need someone to implement them, which cost time.

Being found is important

People are unable to visit a practice unless it can be found on Google. Not showing up on Google can mean that a business doesn't exist. Making sure that a veterinary hospital can be seen quickly in search and “win the click” is key. Here are a few items to increase a brand's visibility that just cost a person's time and only require a basic technology skill set:

- **Turning on Google My Business** (www.google.com/business). Google has turned its Google My Business Area (GMB) area into a mecca for information about a business: hours, location(s),

map, reviews, and questions and answers. People can message a business directly from this space, find out the practice's busiest times, and more. Making sure the data in this section of Google is correct can be the difference between having the correct driving directions to your location and not being found.

- **Posts on Google My Business.** Currently, there is a GMB section with a free post that has a shelf life of one week. Basically, it is a small ad that is shown on the Google My Business “card,” or section, on Google. This space would be well-used to promote a special happening within the hospital that week, or for an upcoming event.
- **New reviews each week.** At least one new review a week on Google and Facebook helps keep the hospital viable in the minds of searchers. People tend to give less credence to reviews that are older than six months. The fresher the review, the more power it has to assist a pet owner in choosing your hospital to click through to from Google's search. One must simply ask happy clients to leave a review on Google or Facebook, or both. It is the biggest bang for a hospital's marketing buck for gaining

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traction in the digital marketplace.

- **Google-friendly website that passes the speed test.** It is free to run a website through the Google speed test at <https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/>. Google is now using speed as an indicator for placement in search. If a website fails the Google speed test, it is at risk of a lower placement in search. With the test comes handy and free suggestions on how to pick up the page speed load times. Fixing a hospital's website most likely will cost some money, but not being found will cost the practice money as well.

Offline "free" marketing ideas

Marketing is both online and offline. There are many free or low-cost creative ideas to attract new pet owners to the business and to keep your brand fresh for current clients. Consider these:

- **Participate in a town parade.** Many towns have parades—especially the smaller towns. Walking in a parade is a very low-cost way to gain visibility. Ask pet owners to bring their pets and walk in the parade as a unit. Optional is to buy matching t-shirts for everyone participating in the parade. Give out dog treats and flyers about the business. Even have free dog watering stations around the town events that are in conjunction with the parade.
- **Go to the pet owner.** If a practice is fully digital, with a cloud-based PIM system, it can go to where the pet owners are in the summer. For example, offer nail trims and ear checks in conjunction with another business. That business might be a grocery store, dog park, pet-friendly business, etc. Put up a tent and/or a banner and be ready to talk to people while using an iPad to access records or create them.
- **Bring in the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts.** The Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts have badges they earn by interacting with veterinarians or the pet community. A call to the district leadership for your area can set you up as a

resource for these groups. The Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts bring parents who have checkbooks.

- **Offer free "how-to" classes.** Either at the clinic or through an organization like Community Ed, offer simple care classes for the animals you serve. Be it how to trim nails, how to give appropriate baths, why a pet owner needs to groom their dog, how to brush teeth, etc., it enables the pet owners to engage with the hospital. More engagement builds relationships, and that most likely will increase visits to the practice.

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 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 has 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.

