

Local Competition: What to Do?

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Hot buttons—we all have them. Before we know it, we ratchet from zero to 60 with no in-between with a display ranging from fear, anger, concern and worry to OMG, now what, etc. Have you noticed that all of these emotions tend to be negative? When a competitor arrives on scene, in my 23 years of marketing, I have yet to hear: “I brought a plate of cookies over to my new competitor and welcomed them to the neighborhood.” (Which really wouldn’t be a bad idea—work together to help the animal population, not against each other, right?!) But, what should a business do when local competition becomes a concern?

Don’t dive into the negative

Really focus on these next sentences. Jumping into negative thought processes and fear are the biggest saboteurs to your business—not the competitor. Repeatedly, veterinary practices that embrace the downward thought spiral and refuse to let go of it, lose. Why? Because thought processes are compromised. Consider these points:

- Owners look for the magic bullet everywhere instead of having one thoughtful and planned process.
- Fear locks up the brain so advice from marketing professionals (and others) is no longer absorbed.
- Quick, non-productive choices are made that make the situation worse, not better.
- Owners become crabby and, therefore, are difficult

to work with, both at the hospital and with outside resources.

- Energy is used to blame competitors and others for lack of success instead of using that energy to build a constructive plan.

Take five to 10 minutes and have a freak-out if it helps. Then, set it aside and start concentrating on a thoughtful, planned approach to working with a local competitor.

Use a planned approach

Embarking on the planned approach requires data. With information at hand, strategy can be formulated that will target the weak points. Find the answers to the following questions:

- What are the services that the competition offers? How is it different than what your hospital provides? Make sure to list costs as well as intangibles, such as follow-up calls to check on the animal.
- Where is the competition marketing their services? Where are you marketing your veterinary hospital? Think about everything, including the local paper, radio, Girl Scouts, Google Ads, Facebook Ads, Google My Business, a website, Twitter, etc. Make a couple of lists, including one for each of the competitors in town and one for your practice.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

- Have you noticed the competition taking a bite out of your bottom line? Meaning, is the fear real and money being lost or is it only a perception? If losing money, how much? Is the loss to any particular service, such as new puppy/kitty visits or spays and neuters?
- Run a report from the hospital practice information software to find the top services and the least services being sold. If the competition is aiming at a service that a practice traditionally sells very few of, then the chance of losing a significant amount of dollars is less.

With the data in hand, now a marketing plan can be created. Using the example of losing money from new kitten and puppy visits, let's look at some options. These are listed from quickest, easiest and least cost to more complex solutions:

- 1. Google My Business (GMB).** Make sure to utilize Google My Business (www.google.com/business) to the fullest. First, set up and claim your listing. Google has really sunk time and money into this platform and is churning out weekly updates to this area. Now, services can be listed, appointments made straight from this area, pricing of services listed, woman- or veteran-owned notation options and free advertising cards are possible. All of these options are free (for now) on Google My Business. For example, on the free advertising cards, a promotion for X% off a puppy/kitten visit can now be placed. It will stay on Google, in the Google My Business area, for a week. Google will give statistics on how many people *do something* with this promotion. GMB is also where Google lists review information.
- 2. Online Reviews.** Six-plus years after they became a factor, reviews still give businesses the jitters. Reviews are inexpensive to ask for and easy to manage. They build confidence in current and potential clients. A majority of people rely on reviews when making a purchasing choice. Plus, "68 percent of consumers left a local business review when asked—with 74 percent having been asked for their feedback" (<https://www.brightlocal.com/learn/local-consumer-review-survey/>). The moral of the story is to ask your happy customers to leave a review. It's hands-down the fastest, quickest way to bring tails in the door.
- 3. Ads on Google and Facebook.** Depending on the boost your business needs, either Facebook Ads or Google Ads, or both at the same time, will do the

trick. Google and Facebook reach audiences differently and, therefore, are used differently in marketing. The evolution of ads has grown to the point where a professional should be managing them for you. It will save time and money to have a person who just does ads all day long manage your promotions. For example, the normal click-through rate (CTR) is 1 percent but, at Beyond Indigo, we average 7 percent CTR. This means that \$1 spent goes seven times further. Plus, the cost per acquisition tends to go down as well, saving money on the overall cost of the campaign. We have seen clients waste *thousands of dollars* trying to manage their own ad campaigns before they come to us.

Managing emotions is something only each individual can do. Managing marketing campaigns is what marketing agencies like Beyond Indigo excel at every day. 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 are committed to staying up-to-date with the changing online environment, such as ADA Compliance. Plus, we are Google Ads 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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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.