



# Marketing in the Age of Touchscreens, Skimmers and Scrollers

Article by Roxanne Hawn

## Strategies for getting people to slow their scroll.

After the internet was created, a handful of technological advancements caused shifts in how people consume online content. The first shift came with high-speed access that's always on versus the early days when people accessed the internet with the clock always ticking. The second came with mobile devices which gave people the internet on the go. The third shift also stems from the explosion in more advanced mobile devices with touch screens, which are now also available on tablets, many laptops, and even some desktops.

Using a finger or thumb to scroll on a touchscreen is so much faster and easier. It presents the need for much less clicking and much more flying through content presented via endless scroll—like chasing the horizon. For many people, scrolling has become almost mindless, where they tune out much of what spins by. Clearly, this scrolling and skimming mindset presents challenges in the modern marketing landscape.

Thankfully, veterinary practices enjoy an inside track that other types of businesses will never have. Dogs, cats and other pets remain so beloved and so meme-worthy. They provide the perfect attention-getters for online and other forms of marketing, and veterinary practices can legitimately use them—unlike others who toss them into marketing purely for attention to promote the cars, baked beans, vacuums, insurance, allergy meds, snack chips, TV providers, or beer they are selling.

## Why people skim and scroll

Eunice Kim, Ph.D., assistant professor of marketing from the Smeal College of Business at Penn State University, explains that skimming and scrolling is a way for people to prevent information overload.

“Scrolling and skimming can be so compelling for people for various reasons. A good place to start is by acknowledging that scrolling and skimming are necessary given our cognitive limitations as human beings,” she says. “Our brains can only handle so much information and so much stimulation before we feel overwhelmed.

Scrolling and skimming can be a strategy for processing ‘just enough’ information in our surroundings. We call that a satisficing strategy where we use just enough information to make decisions that will be satisfactory. We may not be making the absolute best decisions but, for many types of decisions, a satisfactory decision is good enough.”

Kim adds that confirmation bias also plays a role in skimming and scrolling. She explains, “This confirmation bias causes us to scan for information that is consistent with our preferences, attitudes, beliefs, goals, etc. And because we are looking for those types of information, we are more likely to notice and remember information that is consistent with our preferences, attitudes, beliefs, goals, etc. and skip over or not pay attention to all other information. So, when we are scrolling and skimming, we are searching for content that supports our preferences, beliefs, goals. We will continue to scroll until we find what we’re looking for.”

This is true across all media—online, TV, radio or podcasts, reading, and even in conversations with others.

Since veterinary practices share a love of pets with clients, and typically have much stronger bonds than other businesses may have with the same people, you’re probably already within their circle of trust and like-minded thinking.

## How the attention economy encourages scrolling

Online venues from shopping portals to social media landscapes want people to keep scrolling. Social media plays upon FOMO (fear of missing out). That’s what drives people to keep checking their feeds. How many people liked my post? What are my friends doing? What’s the latest news or viral thing? Did you see what so-and-so just posted?!

Online venues also actively trigger the brain’s novelty reward centers. Look at that. *Look at that! Look at that!* Infinite scrolling means there is no stopping point. There is always something new just ahead.

Some in the online marketing world compare scrolling to slot machines and other forms of gambling since many people find it almost impossible to stop flipping through content—sometimes to the detriment of their relationships in real life.

Kim disagrees with this comparison. She says, “I do feel that scrolling and skimming can be pleasurable and enjoyable, but I wouldn’t compare it to gambling.”

## How to get noticed

With everyone operating on information overload, how do any marketing efforts grab attention and get people to slow their scroll long enough to consume what your veterinary practice has to say?

Kim outlines two approaches to getting attention for your marketing efforts:

**1. Perception.** She explains, “When people are scrolling/ skimming and are exposed to various content, marketers can design or create messages that will naturally cause people to notice it. An element of surprise, an unexpected image, an unexpected sound, an unexpected conclusion, can draw attention. Movement, such as flashing, moving text, moving images, is always attention grabbing. Contrast, whether it be visual in terms of color, size, or auditory in terms of sounds and music, catches people’s attention. Having a marketing message that is interactive, asking people to click on an image, play a mini game, any way of getting people to interact with the message can also draw attention.”

**2. Motivation.** Kim says, “People have to be motivated to slow down and process information carefully. People are motivated to slow down and process carefully when they feel that the information is personally relevant and interesting. Marketers can play a role in reminding people as well as creating a sense that the message is relevant.”

Kim explains that common messages people find relevant that may slow them down include the following:

- Information that affects their personal well-being (physical, emotional, psychological, financial, social)
- Information that affects the well-being of those for whom we’re responsible

“So, you can see that messages for pet care products almost have a built-in motivation for people to slow down and process carefully because pets are of personal interest, relevance, and we are responsible for their well-being,” she says.

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In addition, Kim says that messages that offer people ways to reach goals also provide motivation to slow down. Think about what goals people have for their pets that you can address in your marketing messaging.

### How to draw the eye

The amount of content and how it's presented visually also plays a role in whether people slow down enough to consume your messaging. Mary Makowsky from Max Media Solutions specializes in content design and eye-catching templates that help focus consumer attention.

**Keep it short.** "Only give them the content they really need and make it as simple as possible," she says. "Make it as tightly focused and as brief as possible and avoid complex language."

**Check contrast.** Use fonts that are easy to read and make sure there is enough contrast between the text and the background.

**Make it skimmable.** "Present content in bite-sized portions," Makowsky says.

- Shorter paragraphs that don't overwhelm with too much blah-blah
- White spaces to give the eye a rest
- Numbered or bulleted lists

- FAQs
- Pull quotes that highlight the most compelling information, draw the eye, and encourage further reading
- Hierarchical headings and organization rather than just changing font size and using bold (also important for accessibility for people who use assistive technology)

**Use visuals.** Photos, illustrations, graphs, charts, memes, videos, gifs, and other interactive tools help people connect and consume content.

**Be interactive.** When it makes sense, invite interaction with things such as calculators, sliders, and toggles to reveal additional content in a more participatory way.

**Feature real people.** Use testimonials from real people and stories of real patients to draw people into your community of pet lovers. "If these can come from the endorser's personal social media post(s), that can be even more convincing," Makowsky explains. "Today's consumers are skeptical of reviews that might be fabricated."

### How to address TL/DR

The abbreviation TL/DR means "too long, didn't read." If your marketing efforts online, via email, in print, or otherwise feel daunting to clients at first glance, then a lot of them will simply skip it entirely. They'll keep scrolling or delete the message without reading.

## Reading Online vs. Reading in Print

There are some indications that how people consume content online also affects how they read on paper. Educators, in particular, look at screen time and its possible relationship to falling proficiencies in reading processes and comprehension in children—both of which declined again in the 2019 National Assessment of Educational Progress in students in grades 4 and 8.

According to a November 2019 article from *Education Week*, "A study of reading behavior changes found that as

students move to reading online, they tend to read faster, browsing and skimming more and looking for key words. They read less of a longer text and tend to reread less, and as students spend more time reading digitally, they become more likely to read print the same way. By contrast, the habits associated with print reading, such as deeper and more concentrated periods of reading, with students annotating and highlighting as they read, did not transfer to reading digital text as easily."

"Consider your clients' perspectives and motivations in crafting your marketing messages, then present the information in ways that feel more inviting, less intimidating and more actionable."

Consumers are increasingly impatient and desperately want marketers to get to the point quickly. Think about any time you fell for so-called click-bait and what you found there did not provide what you expected to find, or at least not in an easy-to-skim way to figure out. Frustrating, yes?

Consider your clients' perspectives and motivations in crafting your marketing messages, then present the information in ways that feel more inviting, less intimidating and more actionable. For example, use those puppy and kitten photos on social media to get attention, but be sure to do it with a purpose to drive business for your practice.

If a topic truly does require a heavy dose of information, consider ways to add a TL/DR section at the beginning. Think of it like a veterinary journal abstract. Summarize the key points right away, including your marketing call to action (CTA). Then provide any necessary details down below or one click away so that those who want the detailed information will feel satisfied too.



Roxanne Hawn is a professional writer and award-winning blogger based in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. A former writer/editor for the American Animal Hospital Association and the American Humane Association, she has written about veterinary medicine and pet topics for nearly 20 years. Her work has also appeared in The New York Times, Reader's Digest, Natural Home, [Bankrate.com](http://Bankrate.com), WebMD, The Bark, Modern Dog, and many high-profile outlets. Her first book is called *Heart Dog: Surviving the Loss of Your Canine Soul Mate*.