

54% of the UK has a Facebook account. Does YOUR practice?

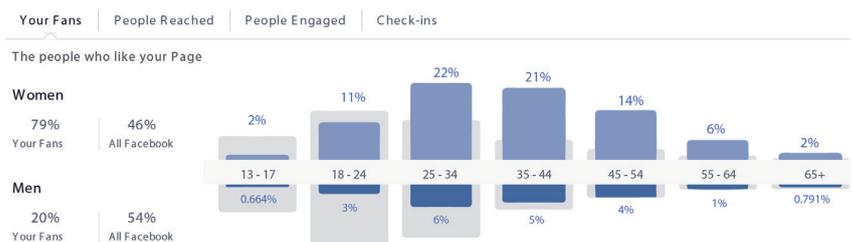
Marcelo Alves, of Vet Inflow, talks about the tools they provide to engage with your online audience

Marcelo. Tell us about Vet Inflow.

Vet Inflow provides a range of digital marketing services to vet practices, primarily through harnessing the power of Facebook to reach out to and engage with local pet owners. We started up in Aug 2012, and began working with our first customer in Dec 2012 – our brief was to manage their Facebook page, working with them to discover how best to engage their existing clients, and to attract and retain new customers. We have gradually added new services, and today we provide a unique offering to our customers, tailored to the very specific needs of the veterinary sector. There are countless companies out there who offer the same services, but few that work exclusively in this sector, and our experience sets us apart from other companies with a less ‘bespoke’ offering for practices.

Why Facebook?

Facebook is the perfect social media platform for vet practices, because the way that it works makes the all-important two-way conversation very easy. In very basic terms, if a practice has a Facebook page, it has the facility to push out content that customers will want to read, be it technical content, presented in a simple, easy to understand format, or pictures of the latest cute puppies to visit the practice. Customers can comment on anything the practice posts, and they can also engage with the practice by posting their own questions, or pictures, and communicate via the messaging function. Practices can engage with a wider audience through their existing customers, whose posts are visible to their friends, and also through specific date gathering activities, such as competitions and special offers.



So where do you come in?

There are a few factors to be considered when looking at using social media to engage with customers. One is time – using practice staff to manage social media platforms may seem cost-effective, until you factor in the amount of time that they have to spend to make it effective. One hour a week equals four consultations for a vet, which soon adds up to a significant amount of time that could be better spent focusing on hard revenue. We take the majority of this time off the

shoulders of the practice staff, thus freeing them up to do what they do best.

The other is expertise. We are digital marketing specialists, who do this every day. We know what works, we understand why it needs to be done, and we know all the techniques and tools that make your Facebook page work as hard as your staff.

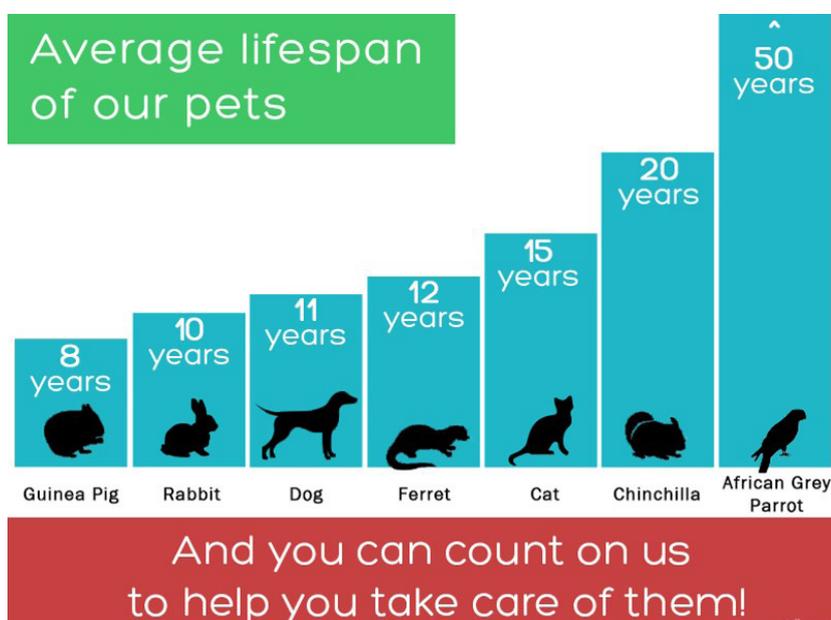
Can you explain the process? What can practices expect when they engage you to manage their Facebook page.

Firstly, and probably most importantly, what we don't do is take over your page and control it rigidly with no input from the practice. You wouldn't hand us the keys to your Ferrari, and let us loose with it, and the keys to your practice Facebook page are just as precious. We work with your "practice champions" to ensure that the content on the page reflects the ethos and opinions of the individual practice. Whilst we provide virtually all the content, nothing is ever posted without the practice first reviewing it. We create around 15 pieces of content per month, including technical content, which is written by our in-house vet, and more general "feel-good" posts, which can be anything from a viral share, to a heartwarming "Lost kitten found" update, and once everything has been reviewed, we post it on behalf of the practice. We also monitor the page carefully, reading every comment and every message, before feeding back to the practice for responses, which again, we can post on their behalf. This means a process that could take hours before practice staff are able to read, discuss and respond, can be sorted out in minutes with a quick call to the practice. For instance, if a customer posts a question asking about the cost of a bitch spay, we immediately call the practice, ask the question, and post the answer straight away.

You mentioned ways that a page can be used to attract new customers?

The bottom line is all about data. It's easy to draw potential new customers in by packing your page with interesting content, but once you have them - what do you do with them? This is the surprising truth about social media for business – it needs great content to be successful, but the success is measured not in how many people "like" your picture of a puppy, but how many of them are compelled to give you their contact details – data which you can then use to encourage them to register with your practice. One of the most effective ways to gather data like

this from Facebook users is to run competitions. We develop them using webapps (small mobile websites) which require entrants to provide their details before they can enter the competition. One example is a competition that we developed for a client during the summer, Entitled "Pets' Summer Moments", it was a photo competition that asked entrants to post their favourite pet pictures. Once they had entered, they were encouraged to "share" the page, and ask their friends to vote for them. As you can imagine, this was a really effective way to harvest data, but done in a way



that made everyone happy!
Once you have this data, we can send out email shots, newsletters and other marketing materials, all designed to encourage the recipients to register with your practice.

This sounds like it could be expensive!

Not at all! Our basic package costs £159 per month, and includes 15 prepared posts, all the monitoring, practice liaison, and 3 competitions per year. There is no minimum contract, although we recommend that you give it at least 6 months to see the benefits. We can also help out with Facebook ad campaigns, essential if you have special offers to promote, and subject to reasonable usage, this is usually absorbed in the monthly fee.

What's next for Vet Inflow?

We plan to carry on doing what we're doing, reinforcing our position as preferred digital marketing providers to vet practices. We have our fingers firmly on the digital pulse, so as and when new opportunities and platforms present themselves, we'll be there, holding our customers hands during the transition phase to new social media platforms.

If you had 5 minutes to bend the ear of every vet in the country, what would be the message you wanted them all to take away?

Facebook is an incredibly powerful tool for building awareness and for working on customer loyalty. People love to engage with the professionals who care for their animals, and sometimes, a 15 minute consultation just isn't enough. Customers who can speak to their vet via Facebook, and be assured of an answer are far more likely to remain loyal to the practice, and also to be the most influential marketing tool in the practice's arsenal. A happy customer is the most effective brand ambassador, and a customer who feels valued by their practice is the happiest customer of all.

And finally, any anecdotes that might convince social media refuseniks that it might be an idea to reconsider?

Of course! Here's a story that perfectly illustrates the power of social media – not only to make good things happen, but also to create great, positive PR for a practice. Quite recently, a truck driver found a lost kitten hiding in his engine. He took it straight to his nearest vet practice, which just happened to be one of our first customers. The kitten wasn't microchipped, so there was seemingly no way to reunite it with its owner. They posted a picture on Facebook, asking if anyone recognised it, and asking them to share it. Within 6 hours, the picture had been seen by 20'000 people, and the owner was found. The family brought their small boy to the practice to collect the kitten, and a photo was taken with one of the practice partners, and posted on Facebook. The local paper spotted it, and also ran the story in their next edition. The practice got plenty of on and offline exposure, and the kitten was reunited with his people – although we don't know whether the practice got them registered and microchipped him. That would have made a perfect ending even more perfect!

