

SOCIALLY ACCEPTABLE

Your Best Marketing Tool Is Free

Here's how to optimize every feature of your Google Business Profile.

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surfaces about local businesses is pulled heavily from GBP data. In other words, if you want to control what AI says about your practice when someone types, “Best cat veterinarian near me,” your GBP is one of the most direct levers you have.

Best of all? A Google Business account is completely free, and you probably already own it. Let's talk about how to use it.

Start With the Basics, Then Go Further

Most practices have claimed their Google Business Profile, filled in an address and phone number, and called it a day. That's necessary but not sufficient. A well-optimized profile requires more:

- **Keep the information updated:** Ensure your name, address, phone number, and hours are accurate. Google uses your profile data to answer direct questions; if your hours are wrong there, they'll also be wrong in AI-generated answers.
- **Write a keyword-rich description:** You have space to include who you are, what you offer, and what makes you different. Use plain language that mirrors how pet owners actually search: “Best veterinarian in St. Louis,” “Wellness exams for dogs,” or “Same-day vet appointments.” And be specific. Don't just say, “We love animals” — that's every practice.
- **Thoroughly complete your services list:** Google allows you to list individual services with descriptions and prices. The more detail you provide, the more signals you send to Google's algorithm about what you offer, and the better chance you have of appearing when someone searches for a specific service like “cat dental cleaning” or “puppy vaccines.”

Make It Easy to Reach You

One of the most underused features of the Google Business Profile is the

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ability to add a booking or appointment link directly to your profile. This allows a potential client to find you in a Google search and book an appointment without visiting your website. All you need is a link. If you don't have a real-time appointment booking platform, link to an online appointment request form. This significantly reduces friction, and friction is the enemy of new clients.

If your practice management software has an online booking portal — or if you use a stand-alone scheduling tool — add that link to your GBP. For practices that field a high volume of appointment-booking calls, this single change can meaningfully reduce phone traffic while improving the client experience.

Do this: Go to your GBP dashboard, select “Edit Profile,” and look for the “Appointments” or “Booking” field. Add your scheduling link there. Test it from a mobile device to ensure it works smoothly.

Similarly, if your practice has text messaging capability, consider enabling the Google Business Profile chat feature. This allows clients to send you a message directly from your Google listing. It's low-stakes for them — no phone call required — and shows up in whatever messaging platform you already use. Practices that have enabled this feature often report that it's particularly popular with younger clients who actively avoid phone calls.

Do this: To enable messaging, go to your GBP dashboard and select “Messages.” You'll be prompted to turn it on and set a welcome message. Only do this if your team can realistically respond within a few hours — Google tracks your response time and displays it publicly.

Change Your Photos

Here is my most passionate plea of this article: Please, please update your photos. And don't lead with a picture of

your building. Google Maps has a street view of your exterior and likely pulled in a photo of your facade automatically. No one — and I mean no one — chooses a veterinarian because they like how the building looks. Instead, use photos that convey warmth and competence:

- A doctor treating a senior dog with dignity
- A technician holding a nervous cat with gentleness
- A puppy's first visit, wide-eyed and curious
- Your treatment area, clean and calm
- A smiling receptionist

These images do real emotional work. They answer the unspoken question every pet owner is asking: “Will my pet be OK here?”

Google heavily weighs profiles with frequent, recent photo updates. A profile with 40 photos added over the past year will outperform one with 10 photos from 2019 every time. Assign someone on your team to upload two or three new photos per month. It takes five minutes and compounds significantly over time.

Do this: Mix it up with team photos, patient moments (with permission), treatment areas, equipment, and community

Ask most veterinary practice owners what their top marketing priority is, and you'll hear about social media, email newsletters, new artificial intelligence tools, and maybe a website refresh. Rarely does anyone mention their practice's Google Business Profile, and that's a big missed opportunity. Your Google Business Profile is the most powerful — and often most neglected — marketing asset in your practice's arsenal. Here's how to make it work for you.

What Is a Google Business Profile?

Your Google Business Profile is often the first thing a potential client sees when they search online for a veterinarian near them. On a desktop, it's the card that appears on the right side of the search results or at the top of a map search. On a mobile device, it's directly beneath the sponsored and map searches, above any actual web results. Your GBP shows your hours, photos, reviews, services, and contact information. It's where people decide in about 10 seconds whether to click through to your website or keep scrolling.

And increasingly, the GBP is something else entirely: It's the direct pipeline into Google's AI-powered search features. As Google continues rolling out AI Overviews and AI-generated answers at the top of search results, the information it



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events. Avoid heavy filters or overly staged shots — authenticity always outperforms polish on Google.

Use Your Built-In Blog

Most practices have never used Google Posts, which is a shame, because they are exactly what they sound like: short, blog-style updates that appear directly on your Google Business Profile. They can include text, a photo, and a call-to-action button.

Think of Google Posts as a direct line to Google’s content indexing. When you publish a post about heartworm prevention season, dental health month, or a new service you’re offering, you’re feeding Google fresh, relevant, keyword-rich content associated with your practice. This helps your profile appear in more searches and, increasingly, in AI-generated answers about local veterinary care. Posts can be used for:

- Seasonal health reminders (“It’s flea and tick season!”)
- New team member introductions
- Service spotlights
- Community involvement announcements
- Quick educational content (“How to tell if your cat is in pain”)

They don’t need to be long — 150 to 300 words with a photo is plenty.

Each post allows you to add a free call-to-action button: “Book an Appointment,” “Call Now,” “Learn More,” or “Visit Website.” These are the same kinds of buttons that businesses pay for in digital ads, but here they’re built right into your free Google listing.

Do this: Aim for one Google Post per week. Repurpose content you’re already creating: If you send an email newsletter, those topics translate directly into Google Posts. Work smarter, not harder.

Don’t Ignore the Q&A Section

Google Business Profile includes a public Q&A section where anyone can ask — and answer — questions about your practice. Left unattended, this can become a source of misinformation. Managed proactively, it’s a powerful SEO and trust-building tool. Not to mention its ability to set expectations and proactively provide information without sending another phone call to your front desk.

Monitor the Q&A section. Set up notifications so you’re alerted when a question is posted, and answer promptly. But don’t just wait for questions to roll in. You can seed your own Q&A by asking and answering the questions your clients ask most frequently: “What are your after-hours options?” “Do you offer payment plans?” “Are you accepting new patients?”

These answers live on your profile and appear in search results. They also feed directly into Google’s AI systems as

authoritative information about your practice. You’re essentially writing the script for what Google tells people about you.

Keep Asking for Reviews

I’ve written about reviews before, and I’ll keep writing about them because they remain the most influential factor in whether a new client — or employee — chooses your practice. Your Google rating and the recency of your reviews are prominently displayed on your profile and weigh heavily in local search rankings.

The fundamentals haven’t changed: Ask every happy client to leave a review, make it easy by sending a direct link, and respond to a majority of reviews professionally and promptly. But there’s a newer wrinkle worth knowing: Google’s AI systems now read and synthesize your reviews to generate summary statements about your practice. Phrases that appear repeatedly in your reviews, like “compassionate” or “explains everything clearly,” can end up surfacing in AI-generated descriptions of your practice. Your clients’ words are becoming your marketing copy, whether you realize it or not.

The Bottom Line

Your Google Business Profile is not the set-it-and-forget-it directory listing of the 2010s. It’s a living, dynamic marketing platform that influences how you appear in search, how AI describes your practice, and how quickly a potential client decides to call you or keep scrolling.

The good news: Every tool I’ve described costs nothing but a little time and attention. In a marketing landscape where independent practices sometimes feel outmatched by bigger, better-funded competitors, this is one area where consistency and authenticity level the playing field. **TVB**



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The Socially Acceptable columnist is the founder of The Social DVM, a consulting firm helping veterinary professionals manage and grow their social media, online reputation, and marketing strategies. The former medical director for a large veterinary hospital in St. Louis, she divides her time today between practice, consulting, and writing. She is the author of “Social Media and Marketing for Veterinary Professionals.”