



innovative
PETCARE

Insider's Guide to Responding to Online Reviews

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We want you to know...

... that always, no matter what, your clinic is worth 5 stars to Innovative Petcare. Heck, you're worth 10 stars on a scale of 5! Your practice is dedicated, resourceful, compassionate, and fair. We see the work that your clinic does behind the scenes, and we know that your work is so, so much more than a single online review.

Responding to online reviews can be intimidating. It can feel like your practice is in a public trial where you're not allowed in the room. We understand that clients can overreact, underappreciate, and let emotions get the best of them from behind a computer.

However, we also know that monitoring and responding to online reviews can be an opportunity. A single 5-star review can catapult your clinic into a new public category of excellence. A single recommendation on Facebook can be the deciding factor of someone bringing their pet to your practice. A single review can explain how wonderful your practice is in ways that a website or word of mouth can't.

This guide is brimming with everything you need to know about maximizing your review management strategy. We'll review how to deal with negative reviews, how to encourage positive ones, and tricks of the trade to help your practice present its very best public front.

We hope the potential of your online presence thrills you as much as it does for us!

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Who's who of review sites

Between NextDoor, Angie's List, and Foursquare, the review world can feel like a mad scramble to "win" on every channel. Based on careful research, the Innovative Petcare Marketing Team recommends focusing efforts on these three review sites:

Yelp

Like a business directory and social network, Yelp helps users discover local businesses and services. A user can rate a Yelp business listing on a scale of 1 star to 5 stars. Your Innovative Petcare Marketing Team helps claim and enhance your Yelp business listing.

Google My Business

Have you ever searched for a restaurant and seen a listing, rating, and photos show in your search results? That's Google My Business, which is Google's version of Yelp. Any business can create a free business profile, and users can rate the Google location from a scale of 1-5 stars. Your Innovative Petcare Marketing Team helps claim your business profile.

Facebook

If you have a Facebook business page, you'll see that users can either "recommend" or "not recommend" your page. Facebook used to have a 5-star rating system, but the platform switched to a simple thumbs up or thumbs down in 2018.

An opportunity

A 2018 Brightlocal study found that **86%** of consumers *read reviews* for local businesses. If you've got 10 people in your practice's waiting room, there's a solid chance that almost 9 of those individuals used Yelp, Google, or Facebook to find your veterinary practice.

If your practice, like most businesses, have received a negative review in the past, this statistic might scare you. However, there is another statistic from the same study that presents an incredible opportunity:

89% of consumers read the *responses* to reviews, in addition to the review itself.

The way your practice replies to a negative review could arguably help a potential client choose your practice more than the original review!

Instead of thinking about your review pages with dread, we encourage you to shift your perspective and consider the review sites to be an opportunity. There's an opportunity to make your favorite clients feel even more positive about visiting your clinic. There's an opportunity to show that your practice is logical, fair, and compassionate in response to negative feedback.



The reason behind a review

It's important to remember that clients leave reviews as a form of expression. Generally, reviews are placed when someone feels an extreme emotion. That individual might be thrilled with the received service, angry about payment, sad from a diagnosis, or underwhelmed because they were having an off day. There are an infinite number of reasons why someone might leave a negative review, and it's not always personal.

As veterinary practices, we're in the business of animal healthcare, but we're also in the business of client management. And while your clients' feelings absolutely matter, in the review site world, your response to their feelings matter a little bit more. By responding to a review in a way that reflects the professionalism and compassion of your practice, you'll have the opportunity to win over potential clients, even if you're responding to a negative review.

The fine art of review replies

We've mentioned a few times that your practice's replies to reviews really matter. To help you craft the perfect review response, here are a few rules to live by:

Make every reply special

Whether the review you're replying to is positive or negative, few things in the review management world make a reviewer feel less validated than a generic response. Every single response, even if brief, should be unique so your client feels unique. Avoid cliché statements, excessive formality, or any tone that feels robotic.



Acknowledge instead of apologizing

There are some rare circumstances where a negative review escalates beyond Yelp or Google. At Innovetive Petcare, we want to ensure your practice is adequately protected and prepared on the off-chance that such a situation occurs. In case a negative review spirals into something much worse legally, we discourage your practice from ever publicly apologizing (or specifically, saying sorry) in a review. Apologies suggest “guilt,” and we don’t want context to be misconstrued.

Instead of apologizing, we recommend **acknowledging** how the negative reviewer feels. For example, if someone left a negative review arguing that their pet passed away and “it’s your fault,” we’d recommend replying with:

*We know how much you loved [dog’s name], and we know how painful it is to lose a pet. We’re committed to providing exceptional veterinary care, and this review makes us very sad. We did everything possible for [dog’s name] and his loss is painful for us as well. We’d like to discuss this with you further. Could you call our practice manager [Practice Manager’s name] at XXX-XXX-XXXX?
Thank you.*

See how that message feels sincere but never takes ownership for the loss? Strive for this with any negative replies that come your way.

Keep your practice's name out of your reply

Writing your practice's name in your review response would logically seem like a good idea, but the act can have dangerous repercussions for your practice's SEO. To avoid any negative reviews surfacing when someone Googles your practice, leave out your full business name from negative review replies.

Reply promptly

Studies have shown that reviewers expect very quick responses to any review left for a business. We recommend replying to all reviews within one business day using the YEXT dashboard. If your clinic is overwhelmed, assign one of your best CSRs or Team Members to help. The Innovative Marketing Team is also here for you.



Report controversial review content to the Innovative Marketing Team

In an ideal world, your practice would only receive positive reviews. After all, you deserve it! But negative reviews are a reality of a business in the modern age, and some replies might include controversial subjects. If any of the reviews you receive comply with one of the controversial topics below, please contact an Innovative Marketing Team member before replying.

Controversial subjects include:

- Animal abuse
- Medical malpractice
- Slander of an employee by name
- Threats of violence
- Threats of legal action
- Mention of misuse/misadministration of pharmaceutical product
- Any other subjects that could damage the reputation or affect the safety of your practice's employees

We want to keep you and your employees safe, and we want to make your life easier. By contacting the Innovative Marketing Team about any review that gives you pause, we'll be able to work together to decide the perfect next step.

With a few rare exceptions, review replies are an opportunity to make your clients feel appreciated outside of your clinic walls.

Yelp: Facts to know

While the review management sites might seem similar in concept, there are many factors that affect your presence on each site. Yelp is particularly a “game of wits” and can often be finessed to work favorably. Here are a few facts to better understand Yelp:

Yelp reviews are rounded

Hoping to push the needle from a 3.0 star rating to 3.5 star rating? On Yelp, this can be easy to do! Sites like Google My Business give ratings to a decimal point (for example, 3.2 or 3.4 rating), but Yelp rounds to the half star.

Keep this in mind if your Yelp rating ever feels volatile. The less reviews you have, the greater chance of Yelp rounding your rating up or down.



You can use Yelp's content guidelines to your advantage

Yelp has very, very strict content guidelines that can work favorably for businesses. If you're determined to improve your Yelp score, we recommend [reading these guidelines in full](#) so you know your rights for removing content.

Here are a few things Yelp will let you report (and remove):

Mentions of a competitor

If any review on your page mentions a nearby clinic, there's a high likelihood that you can get the review removed by Yelp. Just the name of a competitor will do the trick!

Photos of employees

If someone uploads a photo that shows the face, profile, or recognizable feature of an employee or client, you can report the photo to Yelp and state the photo wasn't taken with permission.

Ideologies

If a review criticizes or draws attention to an ideology, it can be reported and likely removed. This includes vegetarianism or religious beliefs.

Payment or refund demands

Let's say someone isn't happy with the final bill from visiting your practice. If they post a review demanding a refund, you can get this flagged and likely removed.

Not all of your reviews are seen

This can be both a good thing and bad thing for a business. If you scroll to the bottom of your Yelp page, you'll see that there are "reviews that are not currently recommended."

Yelp has a filter that tries to authentically reflect the experience at a business. If a Yelp user leaves a single review for a business and doesn't use Yelp again, it will likely be filtered. There are tricks around this, which are referenced in the next section.



Improving your Yelp score

Below are some immediate steps you can take to improve your Yelp score:

Set a specific review goal

[This Yelp review](#) calculator helps you understand how many reviews are needed to achieve a certain Yelp score. We recommend doing this to set a tangible review goal over the next six months. If the calculator says that six 5-star reviews are needed to hit a 4-star rating, then your practice can strive to get one 5-star review every month.

Gently (and discreetly) ask clients to leave a review

Yelp's content guidelines advise *against* asking customers for reviews because they want to ensure that Yelp reviews are authentic and unbiased. However, we believe that (as long as no incentivizing is taking place) it's okay to professionally remind your clients that Yelp helps your business be discovered by more clients so you can help more animals.

Be cautious of matching IP addresses

Yelp's algorithm is built to guard and prevent "suspicious" behavior. If your reviews are all coming from the same IP address or location, Yelp will assume that your employees are leaving reviews and push them to the filter. For this reason, we recommend asking clients to leave reviews once they get home.

Check your filtered reviews

On a monthly basis, we recommend going to your Yelp page and checking any filtered reviews. If you see any 4- or 5-star reviews in there, chances are that the reviewer:

- Reviewed only the one time and hasn't placed any others
- Placed a flurry of reviews on one day, including yours, and hasn't done anything since



In both circumstances, it's critical for the client to place *additional* reviews for other businesses so they get removed from the filter by seeming like an active Yelp user. We recommend thanking and messaging the client that you loved their review alas, it was filtered, and encourage them to leave a few more reviews for other businesses!

Additionally, we recommend that you ask your practice's employees to 'mark' the positive filtered reviews as useful, cool, or funny from their personal accounts. This way the review may get some much-needed interaction that might pull the review out of the filter.

Managing Google My Business

The Innovative Petcare Marketing Team has you covered! We want your Google presence to reflect your practice! Here are some best practices when utilizing Google My Business:

Ensure your hours are up to date

The Innovative Petcare Marketing Team regularly audits review site pages to ensure that information is up to date. However, if an emergency arises that will change your page hours, please let us know and we'll update your Google page right away.

Use keywords in your response

Think of Google My Business as a shortcut for search engine results. If you want your clinic to show up near the top of a Google search result, consider loading up your response with keywords. For example:

*Thank you for bringing Skip to our **veterinary practice**. Your **dog** is precious, and we are happy to have provided the quick **emergency care** he needed. As an **animal hospital**, we greatly value all of our clients and patients, and this **positive review** means a lot. We look forward to seeing you for Skip's **dental cleaning**!*

In just that one response of four sentences, we managed to insert six unique search terms that will help the practice be seen on Google. Get creative with your response!

Mention veterinarians

Consider using the **full names of veterinarians in your positive review replies**. Before a big surgery, a client might Google the veterinarian's name, and we want to ensure the positive reviews are highlighted through a response.

Encourage photos

The photos uploaded to your Google My Business review are also indexed as Google Images, which will help your practice appear in search results!

Rocking Facebook

Surprisingly, Facebook is one of the most flexible review platforms out there. As a business, you have the ability to decide different courses of action if your page gets a negative review.

Here's what you need to know:

You can remove reviews entirely

While we don't encourage this, we do think it's important to know that your page has options if a worst-case scenario arises on your Facebook page. As an administrator, you can elect to remove reviews entirely from your page. This decision does have major consequences, including:

- Your business location won't show up in any search results
- Your positive reviews are hidden along with negative reviews
- If you ever decide to turn reviews back on, you'll be back at square one

It is best to keep reviews intact, but if there's a particularly aggravated client who you suspect will leave negative reviews from multiple accounts, you do have the option.

You can opt to hide review *replies*

Unfortunately, Facebook reviews cannot be hidden. If someone leaves a negative review, it's generally stuck on your page for good. Unlike Yelp, Facebook users can *reply* or comment to a review to create conversation. As a page administrator, you can hide *replies* from the public. When a reply is hidden, the user who placed the reply will think it's active and public, but in actuality the public won't even see the reply!

Closing Thoughts

We're your biggest advocates. By using your YEXT dashboard, responding to reviews promptly, fairly, and kindly, the possibilities for your clinic's review sites are endless.

If you have any questions, contact the Innovative Petcare Marketing Team. We're always here to help anytime by emailing marketing@innovativepetcare.com.

