**[SAMPLE] Social Media Guidelines for [practice name]**

[date created or modified]

Our social media channels allow us to put our best foot forward and connect on a new level with our clients and prospective clients, and it’s the responsibility of our entire staff to ensure that our practice is portrayed in the best possible light.

**Web addresses (URLs) for social media channels:**

[insert name of channels and direct URL for each channel]

**Staff member(s) approved to maintain social media channels, and degree of oversight and authority:**

[insert names, contact information, level of authority and hierarchy, if applicable]

**Tone of all interactions made on behalf of our practice:** all posts, comments, etc. made using our practice’s social media channels must be professional, respectful and compassionate in tone. Humorous posts are welcomed, but they must not be offensive or insulting. If you have any questions whether or not a post is appropriate, please consult [name].

**Guidelines:**

The following are general guidelines for conduct on our social media channels. If you have any doubt about a post or content for our social media channels, please consult with [insert name] prior to posting.

***Posts made by staff***

1. *Text-only posts mentioning client-owned animals, clients, or staff* 
   * Posts are not to be made without permission from the client and/or staff member involved.
2. *Images or videos of client-owned animals*
   * Staff will not post any images or videos of client-owned animals without permission from the client;
   * Images or accompanying text must not include any information regarding the client’s full name or any contact information.
   * Ideally, all text accompanying the image should be approved by the client.
3. *Images or videos showing a client’s face*
   * Staff will not post any images or videos of clients without the client’s permission
4. *Images or videos showing a staff member’s face*
   * Staff will not post any images or videos of staff or volunteers at this practice without permission from that person.
   * Any images of staff engaged in a procedure (including surgery) must be approved by the attending veterinarian.
5. *Images or videos showing a procedure (including surgeries)*
   * Images or videos of procedures, including surgeries, are not to be posted without the permission of the attending veterinarian and the client.

***Comments made by staff***

1. *On our social media channels*

* Only staff members who are approved to post on behalf of the practice may do so, and must comply with these guidelines.

1. *Sharing of images or videos obtained at work, or practice-related posts or comments posted on private social media by staff*

* We want you to be proud of where you work, and we understand that your work and career play big roles in who you are. Remember, however, that your conduct during work as well as outside of work is a reflection on our practice, and keep this in mind as you decide what to post or share.
* We recommend that all staff members regularly evaluate their privacy settings on social media, and keep these settings in mind as they decide what to share.

***Sharing of images or videos by clients***

To protect the privacy of our clients and staff, we request that recordings (including audio, video and photographs) not be made without the consent of the veterinarian or practice manager. However, we realize that we may not be able to stop a client from recording images of their own pet when staff is not present; therefore, it’s critical that all animals receive high-quality, compassionate care at all times in our practice. If you observe a client recording an event without permission, please politely ask them to stop. If they refuse, contact the veterinarian in charge or [insert name].

Hidden-camera video demonstrating misconduct by anyone on our staff will be taken seriously, and may result in disciplinary action. Always behave in a professional manner, and never give someone reason to film your conduct for the purpose of exposing wrongdoing.

**Responding to posts and comments on social media**

* Only staff members who are approved to post on behalf of the practice may do so, and must comply with these guidelines.
* Remember that the person posting cares deeply about their pet and wants the best care possible. Acknowledge the individual person and their pet, the value their pet provides to them, and emphasize your commitment to compassionate, high-quality care.
* Appropriate responses should be made as soon as possible, even if the response is to simply acknowledge that their comment/question has been read and that you’re checking into it. If you respond that you will obtain information for them, you must follow through on that promise.
* Where possible, include the person’s name and the name of their pet (if known).
* We do not provide veterinary advice online.
  + Clients with questions about their pet’s care should be directed to contact the practice directly, out of respect for their privacy. Public discussions concerning a pet’s care should be avoided. Sample responses:
    - *[name], out of respect for your privacy and to provide [pet’s name] with the best care possible, please give us a call at [number] to discuss your questions and concerns.*
    - *[name], we’re sorry to hear that [pet’s name] is having problems. We know [his/her] health and well-being are very important to you, and we’ll do our best to help [him/her]. Please contact us as soon as possible to talk about your concerns and questions.*
  + Non-clients seeking veterinary advice should receive prompt, courteous replies directing them to contact our practice. Sample response:
    - *[name], thanks for your question. We don’t provide veterinary advice online because there is no substitute for a hands-on examination and face-to-face discussion with our veterinary team. If you have any concerns about your pet’s health, a veterinary exam and consultation are the best places to start. We’d be happy to set up an appointment for you if you can give us a call at [insert number].*
* Simple questions from non-clients, such as inquiries about our hours, location or the services we provide, should be answered promptly and should include a prompt to contact us as well as methods for doing so. Sample responses:
  + *[name], thanks for asking. [answer to question] If you have any other questions, don’t hesitate to give us a call at [number] and we’ll be happy to help you.*
  + *[name], thanks for asking. [answer to question] If you have any other questions, or would like to set up a visit to tour the practice or set up an appointment, don’t hesitate to give us a call at [number] and we’ll be happy to help you.*
* Comments or posts that violate our community guidelines:
  + Hide the violating post and politely ask the person to edit their post. Sample response:
    - *[name], we understand the passion you have for this topic and we respect your right to an opinion, but your post violates our community guidelines because [reason]. We’ve hidden your post for now. Would you please edit your post to [address problem]? If so, we’ll unhide it after you’ve edited it. Otherwise, we’ll be forced to delete it. Thanks.*
  + If the person refuses to edit their comment/post or repeatedly violates the community guidelines, delete the post. Sample response:
    - *[name,] your comment was deleted because it’s a violation of our community guidelines. We welcome open discussion, but we want this to be a respectful and family-friendly environment. You’re welcome to repost your comment without the [problem].*
  + If a person repeatedly violates our community guidelines, it may be necessary to ban them from our channel (if possible). However, this decision should not be made lightly, particularly if the person is a client. Decisions to ban someone from our social media will be made by [name].
* Attacks on our clinic’s reputation:
  + Posts of this nature include, but are not limited to,
    - comments from terminated staff;
    - comments from terminated clients;
    - comments from clients turned away because they could not or would not pay for care;
    - clients complaining about the bill or the quality or outcome of their animal’s care;
    - clients alleging negligence or malpractice that may have led to the death of their animal; and
    - threats made against the practice or members of our team.
  + Contact [name] immediately to set in action our response plan to mitigate the problem.

**Consequences**

Making inappropriate or unauthorized posts on the practice’s social media channels; or making social media posts that impact and reflect poorly on the practice may subject you to disciplinary action, ranging from removal of ability to post on behalf of the practice to termination.

If you are aware of another staff member’s violation of these guidelines, please contact [insert name] or [insert name].

**Responding to Crises**

If you detect any activity that violates our guidelines or suggests a developing problem, please follow this chain to notify our team members, regardless of the hour at which you detect a problem.

Primary contact: [name and contact information, including how to contact in an emergency]

Duties:

[name] will craft the response

[name] will approve the response

[name] will post the response

[name] will monitor the situation and make regular reports to [name/names]