

Standout In An Ever-Saturated Marketplace

Eric D. Garcia, IT & Digital Strategist
Simply Done Tech Solutions, LLC
Tampa, Florida, USA
ericgarciafl.com

The convenience of the internet is something we've all learned to enjoy in one way or another. Netflix, for example, makes for hours of satisfying home entertainment, especially when coupled with good popcorn. Google, as another example, allows us to index the entirety of the World Wide Web with just a keyword phrase and a vertical scroll. Facebook brings your childhood friends, college alumni, and family under a single roof.

This same convenience, however, can be dangerous at times and costly at others. Why? So much information is at our fingertips that the imagery and resources we access start to feel a lot like our own. After all, if I'm searching for new and savvy images on Google, I'm doing it on my Wi-Fi, in my home, and on my laptop.

This type of thinking, however natural, can spill over into nasty legal issues, especially in cases of copyright infringement. The situation is far more common and costly than most veterinarians and practice managers realize.

A Costly Downside

Veterinary practices using images found on the web that haven't been properly licensed or authorized can lose the credibility of pet owners and wind up liable for thousands of dollars in damages. I have seen practices paying penalties of \$500 to \$20,000 for illegally using an image.

While the repercussions might sound severe, courts are ruling in favor of image creators who made the effort to license their works and benefit from the protection of copyright law. This means that if you use a screengrab image on your website, social media, or marketing brochure, you might face a steep fine faster than you can imagine.

If you have illegally reused a web image, I wouldn't hit the panic button. In my estimate, you're like at least 99.9 percent of veterinary practices that have done it in some form or another. But know that if you keep the images live on your website or in marketing materials, you're doing so at your own risk.

What You Should Do

Are you ready to fix the problem? Here are quick tips for avoiding copyright infringement and keeping your veterinary practice squeaky clean when copyright law is at issue:

1. Comb through your practice's website, social networks, and marketing materials from top to bottom.
2. If your practice doesn't own the image or if you didn't license it yourself, delete it.
3. On Facebook, make sure to delete (not just hide) images that you didn't receive explicit permission to use. Don't worry, doing this won't hurt the success or reach of your page.

4. Pay closer attention to your business page than your personal page. While both are liable for copyright infringement, your business has more at stake and is more likely to be targeted for illegal use.
5. Memes count, too. While memes often provide a good laugh, these hilarious internet tidbits can be infringed upon.

Next Steps

OK, so you've deleted the generic pet pics and just under 200 memes. Now what? It's time to start thinking more holistically about your content and social media.

Not only are illegally-used stock images dangerous, they're flat out boring. Simply put, these images no longer make the cut when it comes to the ability of modern veterinary practices to connect with pet owners. Social media and marketing today are not simply about cookie-cutter images but instead about the personal experience and connecting your practice in a deeper way. Your clients want to see you in your element, working with real pets and clients. That's where the true story is, and that's where the true value lies.

As you start to reclaim your veterinary practice's message and imagery, it's time to implement best practices. You can't just start snapping shots with your new iPhone X. You must obtain explicit client permission if you want to show their pet in any photos or marketing materials.

An easy way to do this is to collect a consent on your client registration forms. For existing clients, you can get a signature during drop-off or, if the owner is present, before you [take a photo](#).

Don't forget that these photographs, even when authorized in a consent form, must be taken on a clinic-owned device. I recommend that you purchase a camera, perhaps an iPod Touch or a clinic cell phone, for your practice. Hospitals should go the extra mile by prohibiting the use of personal cameras for such purposes. This ensures that employees don't take home images of clients, which can cause a wide range of fallout, and that selected images are approved by the appropriate decision makers before being posted.

The Big Payoff

Another benefit of these policies is that offering to take photos of a pet is an easy way to boost [client engagement](#), as the owners are often proud to show off their adorable kitten turned Instagram superstar.

For pets that can't be photographed on the spot, invite the owner to email a photo after the visit. The key here is to boost client engagement by crafting a narrative around your veterinary practice and clients. Each pet and owner has a story to tell, and ultimately this becomes a part of your practice.

When pet owners visit your website or social media page, they're not looking for stock photos. They want the full picture. That is, they want the real story behind who you are and what your veterinary practice believes in most.

It's proven true time and time again that people gravitate toward a good story more so than just numbers or facts. We look for narrative when attributing meaning, simply because it resonates more deeply with us than an isolated statistic. Let's look at some examples below:

Approach #1 – Not Recommended

Simply Done Veterinary Clinic is a full service animal hospital. We offer state-of-the-art-care and advanced diagnostics.

Approach #2 - Recommended

Dr. Garcia founded our veterinary practice on the core belief that by enriching the lives of pets, we enrich the world around us. The staff and veterinarians at Simply Done Tech Clinic take immense pride in this philosophy, bringing this belief to action by implementing passionate, compassionate veterinary care.

While Approach #1 is technically accurate, it won't compel a pet owner to visit your hospital, and it won't help to gain interest and trust like Approach #2 does.

Let's look at another example:

Approach #1 – Not Recommended

Dr. Garcia was born in Tampa, Florida. He graduated from the University of Florida in 2000. He has 2 dogs by the name of Elvis and Penny. Dr. Garcia is excited to meet both you and your pet!

Approach #2 - Recommended

Dr. Garcia knew from a young age that pets were his passion. The joy and wonder of a happy pet immediately inspired Eric to pursue a career in veterinary medicine after completing his undergraduate degree. Now, as the founder of a successful veterinary practice, Dr. Garcia does what he loves each and every day. Stop by soon, because Dr. Garcia can't wait to meet you and your pet!

As people, we crave a good story! Make sure that your veterinary practice is telling your tale, and you'll be amazed at the results that can come from a more narrative-driven approach to marketing, social media and more.



About the Author: Eric Garcia is an IT expert. Digital marketer. Industry thought leader. When it comes to helping veterinary practices streamline their technology and attract and retain clients, Eric Garcia has a proven track record of educating the industry and producing results. Eric is an IT and Digital Marketing consultant working exclusively with veterinary practices. In addition to a long list of satisfied clients, Garcia's work has been recognized throughout the industry. He speaks regularly at conferences all throughout the world. **Facebook:** [facebook.com/EricGarciaFL](https://www.facebook.com/EricGarciaFL) **Twitter:** [@EricGarciaFL](https://twitter.com/EricGarciaFL)