

# Social Media Use in Farm Practice

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Social media usage and farm vet practice has been a good fit here at Acorn Farmvets and this presentation will review the important points to this date as well as positives and pitfalls in SM usage.

## How it started.

This started back with an early interest in tech in practice, in fact a 1999 AABP practice tip was given on the Palm Pilot down in Nashville which allowed picture-taking, documentation, communication and notation just made it easier to work on farms. But it was sort of the with email that came in on it was the early pre social media built on existing networks such as the wonderful asset that AABP-L, the listserv, which was invaluable in practice in learning and building colleague community.

From there, the first start to it after smartphones, true smartphones came around 2010, for me in using Twitter. It was an easy way to build essentially a global network particularly with colleagues in both vet and the farm community. Also made easy to transition conversation off social media to events and conferences whether they be local or national or international vet meetings. Easy to conduct direct messaging with colleagues and farmers to work with that - example in point was meeting with Canadian cow vet colleagues at a Manhattan presentation on bovine repro, in the group was Cody Creelman, someone who has done so much on SM to speak to what large animal veterinary medicine really is.

For me, Instagram's been the app that has had the most impact to me and it is kind of my daily story. I always carried a phone, a camera right alongside me in the car even with film in it. But it was a way to capture the visual and verbal record of the day. I'm not a writer like Herriot and I always liked his quote about "*I love writing about my job because I loved it. It was a particularly interesting one when I was a young man as it was like holidays with pay*". All of us here know that is how farm practice can be on so many days. And for me, Instagram does truly lend itself to the daily visual record via photography.

## **Instagram and other platforms - how do they fit?**

So what is the reach and audience? Instagram has really a lot of, for me, a lot of focus on vets and vet students. I'm fortunate enough to have over 20,000 followers now on this which is just great (and bewildering). I learn equally in writing posts and seeing those of others - but it just lends itself to other opportunities. A lot of direct conversation with potential extern students, involvement with vet groups such as the Sheep Veterinary Society, AETA, and other vets around the world occurs, and it's been tremendous for that as well as just the audience in general and talking about what we do every day as farm veterinarians.

And the experience has kind of been in this graphic that shows intersecting concentric circles. In the center the vet community of colleagues, students, organizations like AABP, ASSRP and clients along with that and then you can kind of work outward to the farm animal enthusiasts. There's a lot of people that are very interested in what we do since agriculture is such a small part of the population or people's interest with veterinarians and then you reach the general population.

But for an official online presence, building one of those, of course traditional websites are important but really it seems that how Facebook has worked for me as a business page is that think local outreach directed at clients whether it's meetings we're going to have or seasonal reminders of that it is time to start treating for lice or think about pregnancy toxemia and sheep or just kind of being part of the community.

And we all know how close the ties are in the farm and farm vet community; being a farm veterinarian is really being that individual within that community. Use the Facebook page to build community, make clients aware of timely issues and celebrate them for their accomplishments and other achievements.

Offshoots from Instagram that I've used, for example TikTok.. The thing that's fit in there for me and moving forward is the sharp increase in mini-cows! I've decided to embrace them since they are, there's so many people with them around and they are generally new to cattle and need help. The idea with posting on Tiktok is if people have those animals are aware - Acorn Farm Vets is the veterinarian practice that can help me!

On a side note with Instagram, a side project page @thesheepdoc where I'm really looking to focus posts, stories, and engage with subject matter to the followers that are interested in sheep. And finally getting the opportunity to manage the AASRP Instagram page and just let people know you know what this organization has to offer which is always a positive

## **What I've learned.**

Keeping audiences engaged is a key thing - how do you put up content - in a way it is often alternating, where you keep the medically relevant info coming and interspersed with more general 'entertaining' or 'day in the life' items which can appeal to all groups. Like the post about a fetal mummification and story that day showing a local farmer with his four dogs. Both have a role and appeal, for different reasons.

Which is how it is for each platform, this is one of the important slides to emphasize that each has a specific job to do even though there is overlap in a way with all apps. Building an audience, starting out with Twitter/X and building up that whole network of people that moved over and also I moved over to them also on Instagram where you have a different audience there and really build a with education and visuals. Facebook for me as mentioned has been really good to engage local communities and then using Reels and TikTok to create dynamic video content. Another side thought is to think about where the people are; it's not really 'social media' but worth a quick mention of seeing how many farmers(local and intl)are on WhatsApp - and utilize that both for day to day local and for outreach to other groups. Anything that can make it easier to communicate is a plus.

What I've learned - it takes hard work, commitment, and ongoing effort. You can't say "well okay I'll come back to this in three months". Also, I don't like to cross post the same thing over to different platforms. I like unique content for each. It needs to be timely and interesting and edited. Looking at the comments that you get on the daily, keeping people engaged with daily questions or stories or questions and quizzes, live Instagram lives helps out.

## What people like and dislike.

It's an important thing to navigate client confidentiality. Think about what you're posting, get permission and some things you are better leaving off. Always ask and get client permission on medical cases. I've only had one instance where someone wanted me to take something down. It was a surprise, I didn't think was a big deal - a cow post claw-amputation.. But it's THEIR farm and animal. And then be aware that content can be viewed by anyone anywhere and anytime. It is so easy to take things out of context. Think of tie stall barn chains("oh are they there 24/7?") Or hot-iron dehorning. There's *no* way you can make a really great imagery of smoke coming out of an animal's head no matter everything you've done that's right - sedation, local, NSAID . And always always remember do NOT to give out medical advice because you're outside of an active VCPR.

And the benefits to the practice have been it just opened up opportunities. Building relationships like Sheep Veterinary Society in the UK and being on their board, meeting people, going to places - a picture from Uruguay that essentially came from being involved with AETA but just being involved online on IG with people in South America also helped make it happen.

It helps to build new services & procedures. I'm learning from other vets all around too. Doubtless we all have learned from AABP and ASRP but this has been a really good teacher too as well as having some top hosted students. And, two associates for the practice came initially from Instagram contact.

But the benefits also, just to build awareness of what the practice offers, what we do, don't do proactively in a way to prevent disease or enhance performance with RAM testing or advising on seasonal conditions that help prevent problems, such as lately w/ HPAI updates and protocols.

Things can be monetized. That's not my priority but it has been an opportunity. I've gotten some nice coveralls and some other products too that I've helped promote. And I believed in them though and it was just a good win-win for both sides.

So that's how it's helped me in practice and if you have more questions message me @thecowdoc on Instagram or TikTok and or acornfarmvets on Facebook.

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