BVA guide to tackling online abuse in the veterinary sector

Create social media house rules for your business
Make sure you don’t respond in haste. Agree rules and the actions you’ll take if individuals don’t follow those rules in advance.
Make these rules visible on your social media channels or website

Keep a record of the abuse
Screenshot or copy all examples of online abuse and keep updated records. This can be used to escalate your response or back up any decisions you make about banning people or reporting and deleting comments

Make use of each platform’s reporting tools
Each platform has rules that all users must follow. You can mute, block, and report accounts on Twitter. You can hide, delete, and report comments and accounts on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram
Social media businesses can remove content and accounts that defy their rules

Escalate and take action where appropriate
Threatening, abusive, or offensive language on social media may be a criminal offence
If you need to, contact the police and the social media channel to report your concerns

Protect your own and your colleague’s wellbeing
Dealing with online abuse can be hard. Take a break and if you’re struggling, reach out to Vetlife for 24/7 support for all who work in the veterinary professions

Take complaints offline
Complaints or negative reviews can really harm small businesses. Where you receive a complaint online, reply in a professional and polite way and ask to speak to them privately to discuss the issue, either in person, by email, or over the phone. This can help control the conversation and fix the issue that’s causing complaints faster
Make your complaints policy visible and simple to use so that clients can use this route before complaining online

Protect your privacy
Regularly review the privacy settings on your accounts and make sure you’re happy with the personal information you’re making available on the internet
Make sure your staff are protected by discussing how much personal and professional information they’re happy to have shared online on company websites or social media

Follow the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons social media guidance
See Chapter 28 Social media and online networking forums of the RCVS Code

bva.co.uk/respect-your-vet-team #RespectYourVetTeam