

Veterinary Business Development Ltd

IPSO Annual report - Period covered: 1 January 2021 - 31 December 2021

1. Introduction

Veterinary Business Development Ltd (VBD) is a publisher of B2B publications and websites for the veterinary profession (including veterinary nurses) and a provider of services to the same sector. Readers and users include veterinary surgeons (in practice or working within industry), final-year veterinary students, qualified and trainee veterinary nurses, veterinary practice managers, practice owners, additional support staff and marketers/representatives of companies or bodies working within the sector.

Based in Peterborough, we have a staff of approximately 20, including editorial staff, production, design, sales and accounts, all headed by a CEO.

Our publications are funded through advertising revenue and are supplied free of charge to qualifying readers. Titles/products falling under IPSO's remit for the qualifying period 1 January – 31 December 2021 were:

Veterinary Times: Market-leading, news-led weekly journal. Published 50 times a year (plus occasional supplements Veterinary Times Equine and Veterinary Times Livestock, each twice a year). Features news and clinical and other articles for veterinary surgeons. Business Publication of the Year 2017 at the PPA Independent Publisher Awards. Controlled, free, ABC-audited circulation for January to December 2019 (latest publicised figures in this period are for Jan-Dec 2020): **15,871**.

VN Times: News-led journal for VNs and trainee VNs. Monthly (published 12 times a year). Features news and clinical and other articles aimed at a veterinary nursing audience. Finalist in the Business Publication of the Year 2017 category at the PPA Independent Publisher Awards. Controlled, free, ABC-audited circulation for January to December 2019 (latest publicised figures for this period are for Jan-Dec 2020): **12,738**.

VBJ: Covers management and financial aspects of running a veterinary practice. finalist in the Business Publication of the Year 2017 category at the PPA Independent Publisher Awards. Not separately audited, but monthly, published 12 times a year and sent out to the full readership of Veterinary Times (plus additional practice managers).

Congress Times: Journal for the major veterinary congresses. Produced in partnership with leading veterinary associations and veterinary show organisers. Published periodically, at least 5 times a year. Sent out with pre-show copies of Veterinary Times to species/topic-relevant audience and available at relevant congresses/shows.

vettimes.co.uk: Online resource for veterinary profession, featuring daily news updates, articles from our journals, blogs, videos, additional articles/content, CPD listings. Supplemented by Facebook and Twitter accounts (some publications also have their own social media presence). Supplementary websites: vettimesjobs.co.uk

and cpd.vettimes.co.uk

The above content is also served through a downloadable app available through the App Store or Google Play (launched in June 2018).

The publications' responsible person is **Paul Imrie, Head of Content**.

2. Our editorial standards - requirement 3.1

The editorial department consisted of a full team of 6 (5 FT and 1 PT) at the start of 2020. We took on a senior reporter in April to supplement our news gathering and an additional sub editor was taken on late in the report period to take the total of employees within the editorial department to 8.

The year saw us again reacting to Government legislation and working from home when required. No one was furloughed in this period. We returned to the office and have been working a largely hybrid three days in, two at home format.

Journalists working from home do so through remote connection to their office computers. The team was in twice-daily contact with each other via Zoom, and constant contact on day-to-day tasks through communication on WhatsApp. We were able to commit to producing all publications throughout the period, again continuing to send out a weekly Vet Times every week.

We continued to produce content first for online and keep readers up to date during the continuing pandemic. We continued with our weekly podcasts.

While a B2B publisher, we have for a long time adopted a regional newspaper structure, and we continue to have editors of each publication and a chief sub. We have a content specialist and a sub-editor, who also works on digital innovations.

The structure of the editorial team encourages cross-working, closer team work, and also contributes to maintaining our high standards. Most of our team has been trained by either NCTJ or equivalent bodies, or has studied journalism or media at university/colleges. VBD also has an ethos of training. Legal refreshers are arranged when necessary, and we continue to engage the same media law provider on an annual retainer to provide us with media law advice when we require it. This has tended to be in management of complaints from readers or for pre-publication help with stories or letters on controversial subjects.

His services were utilised in 2021 when required for pre-publication checking of news stories and some letters. Depending on scenario, content was either not published or cut to ensure compliance with the editors' code. We received no significant post-publication complaints during the period.

All editorial staff and the wider company are aware we are members of IPSO. The "IPSO regulated" logo appears in our publications and on our website vettimes.co.uk

All staff have been informed of our official complaints procedure (hosted online at

<https://www.vettimes.co.uk/veterinary-business-development-editorial-complaints-procedure/>)

All new starters in the editorial team receive a copy of:

- The IPSO Editors' Code
- VBD's editorial style guide (*copy enclosed, not for publication*)
- VBD staff handbook (*copy enclosed, not for publication*)

All editorial staff are reissued with these when updates are made. Additional to these, reporters are given one-to-one guidance as necessary.

We strive to ensure all news items are fair and balanced, with parties given full right to reply. Veterinary Times, VN Times and Congress Times are magloid format, VBJ is B5 in format. All contain news, largely at the front of the publications, but also elsewhere as space allows. Our website carries news items daily, many expanded later for print publication, and abstracted news items from our print publications.

The editor has extensive news experience, and is fully immersed in the profession. He and I handled a lot of the news writing during this period. We took on a new fully trained senior reporter in April of the reporting period. He was given internal training and guidance throughout the year on story ideas and contacts, and on aspects of the veterinary profession. He verified stories and checked quotes back with contacts where necessary.

If necessary, wider discussions are held with the subbing team on story angles and legal issues. Discussions take place routinely on best choices of headlines to ensure full accuracy. Our retained media law expert is also contacted if needed, and he also supplies media law updates or information on relevant court rulings as necessary, which are then passed on to the wider team as appropriate.

We will go to multiple sources if necessary for verification or quotes for lead stories, and always seek to get as "expert" an opinion as possible. Our ethos is to be questioning in our stories, but not sensationalist in our approach.

We have a **style guide** that is worked to by all editorial staff. The **chief-sub** refreshes this as necessary, and it underwent a full revision in 2015. The guide was resupplied to all editorial staff. Revised updates are made and notified to all staff (*copy enclosed*).

All feature content is from independent veterinary professionals working in practice or academia. In the past few years, we commissioned the majority of articles on our features lists from specialist vets. All commissioned authors are sent guidelines about how to write and submit features.

A panel of around 100 readers was set up in this period to be approached when necessary for views on the profession and our content. We are in the process of reconstituting our editorial board of vets for Vet Times, although a new board is in place for VN Times.

As part of work to ensure company-wide compliance with new GDPR legislation, during 2018 we revised our author agreement and resent to all existing authors, among other reasons to ensure we were still able to keep their contact details. We continued to send this form to all new authors in 2019.

We do not shy away from covering difficult news topics that may affect existing or potential advertisers.

We carry advertising features paid for by companies, both in print and online. These are always clearly marked as such, in line with ASA guidance. Guidance on the standards we expect are supplied to advertisers enquiring about advertising features. Sponsored/native content appearing online is also clearly marked "sponsored".

Finally, as a requirement of the Government's Veterinary Medicines Directorate, we supply, on request, to any advertiser a pre-publication version of any feature they intend to advertise against (up to two features per issue are on our pre-publication features list and available for advertisers to buy space against). This is to ensure we and advertisers comply fully with the strict animal health legislation regarding correct use of veterinary medicines. It is also an additional check of information within articles, and while we retain editorial control of all articles and authors are not duty bound to make amendments, such checks have previously revealed errors in information, specifically product and dosage information supplied to us.

Copies or updates of the Editors' Code are supplied to the full editorial team, and our membership of IPSO is reiterated to each team member. Relevant updates as supplied by IPSO are also conveyed to the team.

Each member of the editorial team understands we must adhere to the standards of responsible journalism at all times and adhere to the Editors' Code. All stories are fully researched and verified before publication, where necessary with quotes from multiple sources, to ensure accuracy. As some of our stories can be clinical and complex in nature, to ensure factual accuracy, contributors are allowed sight of quotes pre-publication on request, on the proviso we retain copy approval.

All feature content is subbed thoroughly, read by the sub-editor, and then by a colleague (i.e. chief sub), corrected/amended where necessary by the original sub-editor before going through to a final read by the relevant editor. Further checks for accuracy of headlines and content are done before print at the PDF stage.

We did not contact IPSO for pre-publication guidance in 2021, but we would do so whenever we are concerned about adherence to the code, and most likely specifically for any guidance on privacy or public interest issues.

All news content, including for online publication, is read and subbed by the news editor before being made available to a sub-editor and going through the aforementioned processes. If copy is amended or corrected online, this is pointed out within the content.

We use the WoodWing Content Station programme, which saves versions of all

content (for print and online), and therefore allows to check fully all content and investigate any complaints. WordPress also logs who has worked on content published to the web. WoodWing was in the process of being updated late in the period of this report and new computer equipment purchased.

3. VBD's complaints handling process

The company has guidance for handling external complaints (*copy enclosed*). This refers to "customers", but this term applies equally to readers as well as advertisers or suppliers. It lists the process for handling complaints for the first person taking such calls. The guidance is included in the VBD Staff Handbook, copies of which are available to all members of staff (*copy enclosed for information purposes only*).

Editorially, people with a concern will either ring or email the reporter they originally spoke to or the editor of the publication. Concerns/complaints are therefore noted, investigated and outcomes are reached. Editors are expected to reach a satisfactory conclusion as soon as possible. Concerns received in this period covered minor factual errors in print, usually in supplied feature content where either the submitting author has made an error or a subbing error was made. Wherever something has appeared incorrectly, we always try to correct this error by the next available issue. For more serious errors involving dosage or product inaccuracies, where necessary we will reprint the information in full.

In line with IPSO rules, we have developed and published an Editorial Complaints Procedure (*copy enclosed*). This explains we are members of IPSO, how to complain and the full processes. Details of the policy and our IPSO membership are included in the journal information panels, where they are pointed online to <https://www.vettimes.co.uk/veterinary-business-development-editorial-complaints-procedure/> The guidance also features links to the IPSO website and the Editors' Code. An example of the information panel from Veterinary Times is enclosed. Staff were also notified of this procedure. The "Ipso regulated" logo was added to the panels later in the period covered by their report.

Pre-publication guidance issued by IPSO would be heeded and taken into account by all editors. Editor James Westgate or Head of Content Paul Imrie would be first points of contact for sharing such guidance. They would then speak with the team to discuss the guidance and implement any actions. All staff would be advised of policy changes via email or staff meetings.

vettimes.co.uk has additional terms and conditions that cover contributions to message boards, plus an acceptable use policy Available at <https://www.vettimes.co.uk/terms-and-conditions/>.

4. Our training process

The company has an ethos of providing **on-the-job training** when necessary. It also sends members of staff on external courses or has external course providers in-house to run sessions.

These cover specific skills or staff's personal development, for example a confidence-building/assertiveness session to aid a reporter in interview techniques.

No formal legal refresher took place in this time period, although we did call on our retained media law advisor to assist with specific complaints, as needed, or for guidance on handling sensitive subjects in the news section (for instance, court proceedings). He also supplied us with as and when updates, for example around Brexit. Editorial staff are advised we can call on him for assistance as needed. We have not needed to seek formal legal help from solicitors.

Staff are immediately informed of any style guide or editorial policy changes via email or in meetings.

5. Our record on complaints – requirement 3.2

No complaints received by, or ruled on, by IPSO's complaints committee were received by VBD during this period. Where IPSO finds against any VBD publication or online content, we will comply with the findings and any actions required by the regulator in full.

We received no **formal complaint under our Editorial Complaints Procedure** during this period.

Clarifications for minor inaccuracies (complaints not made formally, but clarifications sought by concerned parties) were published as necessary during the year.

6. Appendices

Appendices and enclosures should be treated as confidential supplementary documents to this report and are not for wider distribution or publication without consent.

1. VBD Style Guide

2. VBD Staff Handbook

3. Author guidelines

4. External complaints in handbook

5. Editorial Complaints Procedure