



Dr Lopez named Veterinary Thought Leader 2020



Newly graduated veterinarian Dr Marlena Lopez was recently named 2020 Veterinary Thought Leader of the Year at October's Veterinary Business Group Summit.

The award recognises an individual that has challenged the status quo, stimulated industry debate or become a force for change in response to the challenges facing veterinary business.

"Congratulations to Marlena Lopez who is at the beginning of her veterinary career, recently completing her final year of a DVM degree at the University of Melbourne. Her studies have not been a barrier to her displaying an incredible degree of leadership, foresight and innovation throughout her time as an undergraduate student", said Dr Steve Pryor, Chair of the **Veterinary Business Group**.

"Her social media presence 'Veterinary Adventures', has over 70,000 followers and is an inspiring example of how our profession can help shape and influence the public discourse on all manner of animal health, welfare and social issues. Marlena is an inspiring role model and advocate for women and minorities, particularly in our veterinary industry".

Ms Lopez created her **Instagram blog** and **website** to share her experiences in veterinary medicine with the goal of creating content that would be of interest to aspiring veterinary students. She has since become the most followed veterinary student on social media and in the top eight of veterinary pages globally.

"I'm incredibly honoured and humbled to win this award. Throughout the Veterinary Business Group Summit, I was so inspired by the speakers and their accomplishments. To be awarded such an accolade alongside people that I greatly admire was an incredible privilege", said Ms Lopez.

"This award is a snapshot of many moments defined by support, kindness, and investments from many others. I've always been passionate about helping animals, but my journey to becoming a veterinarian has not been straight-forward, and I've had to overcome many obstacles and low points to get to where I am now. So, to be here, graduating as a veterinarian and receiving this incredible honour is probably the most validating experience I've had since starting this journey".



In utilising her social media presence, Ms Lopez raises awareness of the obstacles women and minorities face in pursuing STEM degrees, as well as educating others on animal welfare issues to empower them to take action to help suffering animals throughout the world.

"Over the past few years I have tried to be honest and open about my veterinary school journey and offer advice and tips to pre-vet students as well as assist with university applications. I have also shared my personal struggles with mental well-being to reduce the stigma around mental health", said Ms Lopez.

"Many veterinary businesses have trepidation about using social media because it's a more recent societal venture; however, it can be a great business tool when used correctly. The greatest advice I can offer those in the industry seeking to build a social media following is to remain authentic and be consistent. I think the best social media strategy to have, is to choose a few platforms to have a presence on, and create a post at least once a week. Whether you're an individual or business, don't be afraid of being different - if you show what makes your clinic or work unique you will create a stronger bond with your audience".

With the increasing prevalence of social media in today's society, there are both positives and pitfalls to its use, and Ms Lopez believes it can be a positive tool that allows individuals to create a public profile and personal brand, and to connect to the community like never before.

"I knew that I wanted to be a veterinarian since a young age but growing up I didn't see a Latina representation in the veterinary industry, and I wished that I had someone to contact for advice and guidance. So, I created a public social media page to show young women that you can achieve your dreams and to serve as a mentor to others", said Ms Lopez.

"The biggest social media issue facing the veterinary profession is battling misinformation on pet healthcare. The downside of social media is that anyone can have a platform and share pet health information, despite not having many qualifications to do so. Veterinary medicine is in a way a victim of its own success; preventative health strategies have been so effective at controlling diseases, that many people are less aware of the danger of the diseases. A large part of the role of a veterinarian is client education, so individuals in the industry are already equipped with the tools to teach pet owners how to best take care of their loved ones".