



# THE ART OF RESPONDING TO ONLINE REVIEWS



BY NAREN ARULRAJAH

Consumers have long relied on others' experiences with brands when purchasing products or services. Today, healthcare consumers have an abundant supply of ratings and reviews at their fingertips. Pew Research Center reports that 93% of Americans read customer reviews and ratings at least sometimes before buying a product or choosing a service provider.<sup>1</sup>

In its 2022 Healthcare Trends Report, Reputation notes that 72% of US adults consult with online patient ratings and reviews when considering a physician or practice.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, 65% of those

surveyed said they expect healthcare providers to respond to reviews.

## AN OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUR PRACTICE

How practices respond to reviews matters. The nature and timeliness

## PRO TIP

Respond to neutral and positive reviews. By responding swiftly and appropriately, you can win over and “wow” those patients who provide a mediocre review.

of responses can have as much of an impact on one's professional reputation as the content within the reviews themselves.

ReviewTrackers found that more than half of consumers expect a response to a negative review within a week.<sup>3</sup> One in three consumers reportedly expect responses within one to three days. Yet, it was reported that 63% of consumers never received a response from an organization to a review that expressed dissatisfaction.

This is a missed opportunity for many practices. Reportedly, 45% of consumers claim they are likelier to patronize organizations that respond to negative reviews. ReviewTrackers

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand the importance of responding to negative reviews.
- Engage with patients leaving positive reviews.
- Review opportunities for team building within your practice.

## PRO TIP

See the learning opportunities within challenging patient interactions. Here again, step back. Patients have the benefit of an outside perspective. Consider that they may have valid points.

also correlated higher overall ratings with consistently fast response times; leading auto brands in the top 90th percentile for rating performance averaged 4.31 stars (out of 5) and posted average response times of 1.04 days. Their competitors industrywide averaged 3.92 stars and took 8.8 days to respond to reviews.

You should respond to neutral and positive reviews. By responding swiftly and appropriately, you can win over and “wow” those patients who provide a mediocre review.

Good responses to neutral and positive reviews share some similarities. Thank the reviewer for taking the time to type up a review. Whenever possible, acknowledge them by name (for a personal touch). Avoid a canned “thank you.” Nothing is more off-putting than to see the same reply to each similar type of review on a given

platform. Try to personalize in some way. Perhaps reinforce your great work by mentioning how happy you are that [insert patient name here] is so delighted with the results from [insert procedure here]. Reference an upcoming birthday, reunion, trip, or something else that is specific to the reviewer. It shows that you listen, care, and do not perceive them as just another number and time slot.

## RESPONDING TO NEGATIVE REVIEWS

Naturally, responding well to negative reviews can be challenging. You or any practice leaders in charge of managing reviews may need to take a step back. Breathe. Try to empathize. Do not take the review too personally or respond defensively. As noted in the above, acknowledge the reviewer by name. Thank them for sharing their concerns with you. The review may be unfair, yet the “customer is always right” adage applies here. Apologize. Take responsibility. Move the issue from the highly visible online world to the offline “real world.” It can then be handled appropriately. There are numerous opportunities here to win back a valued patient. When the issue is rectified, they can then tell their friends and family how well you responded and “fixed” the situation.

Additionally, the patient may update their reviews to reflect everything that your team did to “make things right” since their initial response.

We all know how misunderstandings can snowball. In the digital space, these mishaps can become widely and embarrassingly known. You want to prevent that with prompt intervention in the form of review responses and the dialogue that accompanies them.

See the learning opportunities within challenging patient interactions. Here again, step back. Patients have the benefit of an outside perspective. Consider that they may have valid points.

In fact, the insights within an unsatisfactory review may reveal blind spots or weaknesses within operations that need to be addressed. There may be an opportunity for further training in how staff answer calls, or you may find that a new phone or scheduling system is better suited to the needs of your growing practice.

Additionally, there are opportunities for team building and practice improvement within positive reviews. Be sure to let the associate or staff member mentioned positively in a review know this! Complimentary reviews from the patients that we care for serve as validation. We are doing things right. These comments can help to make all our hard work worth it. They also go the extra mile to rejuvenate our professional outlook. What we do with these reviews can make a real difference in workplace morale. ■

## AT A GLANCE

- ▶ Consumers rely on the experiences of others when purchasing services or products.
- ▶ The nature and timeliness of responses can have as much of an impact on one’s professional reputation as the content within the reviews themselves.
- ▶ The insights within an unsatisfactory review may reveal blind spots or weaknesses within operations that need to be addressed.

1. Turner E, Rainie L. Most Americans rely on their own research to make big decisions, and that often means online searches. Pew Research Center. Published March 5, 2020. Accessed August 12, 2024. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/03/05/most-americans-rely-on-their-own-research-to-make-big-decisions-and-that-often-means-online-searches/>.

2. What Does It Take to Be a Top Healthcare Provider? Reputation. 2022;2-23. Accessed August 12, 2024. <https://go.reputation.com/hubfs/Downloadable%20Assets/Healthcare%20Assets/Healthcare%20Reports/2022%20Healthcare%20Reputation%20Report.pdf>.

3. ReviewTrackers. Online Reviews Statistics and Trends: A 2022 Report by ReviewTrackers. ReviewTrackers. Published December 1, 2021. Accessed August 12, 2024. <https://www.reviewtrackers.com/reports/online-reviews-survey/>.

### NAREN ARULRAJAH

■ President and CEO, Ekwa Marketing.