

Dentist's Guide to Online Reputation Repair

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It is often said that word of mouth is the best advertisement. That may be true, but only if people are saying good things about your dental practice. Otherwise, it can become a PR nightmare.

Furthermore, the modern version of "word of mouth" is actually the written word, which is widely shared across social media and online review websites. That is why reputation management is more important than ever.

Your reputation might not be as good as you think

While 100 percent patient satisfaction is a worthy goal, it is practically unachievable in the real world. Some people may be angry about issues that are beyond your control, such as power outages or traffic delays near your office. Some may come to your practice with unrealistic expectations and inevitably be disappointed. Then there are certain individuals who are impossible to please or simply not a good fit for your practice.

Whatever the reason, virtually every dental office will have the occasional unhappy patient. However, if the vast majority of patients love your practice, then you might not be too concerned about reviews. After all, most people are saying good things in your office, so they are probably saying good things online. Right?

Unfortunately, it is human nature to be more vocal when we are unhappy. People are more likely to share a negative experience than a positive one. Unless you are actively monitoring your reputation and encouraging good reviews, your online ratings are likely much lower than your actual patient satisfaction rate.

Online reviews matter more than you might realize

There is another common reason why dentists tend to take a passive approach to reputation management. They simply do not believe that people pay much attention to online reviews. Who actually reads Yelp? How many people give credibility to comments on social media? The answers may surprise you.

According to a recent local consumer survey:

- 86 percent of people read online reviews about dentists
- 96 percent of people who read reviews also read the business's response (if there is one)
- 91 percent of reviewers expect to receive a response, with more than three-quarters expecting that response within a week or sooner

- 79 percent of people trust reviews read online as much as they trust recommendations from family or friends
- On average, someone will read 10 reviews before deciding if a business is trustworthy
- 94 percent of people are more likely to choose a business if it has good reviews
- Dental care ranks in the top five industries for which reviews are important
- Less than half of all consumers will consider choosing a business with lower than a four-star rating
- 86 percent of consumers only read reviews that were written within the last three months

Reputation repair

Yes, reviews really are that important. If your dental practice has only three reviews or only a 3.5 star rating, you are in trouble. It is almost certain that prospective patients are bypassing your listing and scheduling appointments with your better-rated competitors. The next question is, what can you do about it?

Solutions for negative reviews

Start by determining where you stand. Check popular review platforms, including Yelp, Google, and local or industry-specific sites. When you find negative reviews, there are three options:

Respond: When you find a recent negative review, reply to it. A good response to a bad review can go a long way towards repairing the damage to your reputation. However, the response must be crafted carefully. Avoid discussing any details of the person's visit. Doing so would violate patient privacy, and depending on your local regulations, it may be illegal. Instead, provide general information about your practice policies and dedication to patient satisfaction. Encourage the reviewer to contact your office directly. This shows readers that you are making an effort to right the supposed wrong.

Report: Most platforms offer a way to report fraudulent reviews. If you are certain that an entry is false, ask for it to be removed. However, be aware that you have little recourse if they determine it is valid.

Ignore: Do not make the mistake of replying to every old negative comment your practice has ever received. First of all, your purported commitment to patient satisfaction will not seem convincing if the reply is delayed by months or even years. Secondly, and most importantly, reviews are generally sorted by date. A new reply effectively refreshes the timeline, bringing old reviews back to the top of the list. A better approach is to bury it with recent, positive reviews.

Increasing positive reviews

After some research, you may have realized that, frustratingly, your happy patients are not leaving feedback. The best way to counteract complaints and improve your overall star rating is an increase in good reviews. That might seem easier said than done, but it is not as difficult as you might expect.

The simplest – and most effective – way to get reviews is to simply ask. How and when you ask is crucial to your success. For example:

Capture the moment: As we discussed above, there will always be the occasional disgruntled patient. This is not the person you want to encourage to leave a review. Instead, seek out those who are complimentary. When a patient tells you how beautiful the new veneers are, ask that individual for a testimonial. Many are happy to comply.

Make reviewing easy: The simpler something is, the more likely a person will follow through. If you just ask someone to go to Yelp and leave a review, you are also asking that person to find the website and figure out how to post. If you provide a printout or email with instructions, it gets a little easier. If you include a link in your message, it gets a lot easier.

Express gratitude: When you ask a happy patient for an online review, start by thanking the person for the kind words. When you receive positive reviews, reply with a thank-you.

Final thoughts – do not get complacent

Reputation management is better than reputation repair. If your practice is in good standing online, keep it that way. Regularly monitor review platforms, respond to comments and amp up your efforts when recent reviews are lacking.

About the Author



Naren Arulrajah, President and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, has been a leader in medical marketing for over a decade. Ekwa provides comprehensive marketing solutions for busy dentists, with a team of more than 180 full time professionals, providing web design, hosting, content creation, social media, reputation management, SEO, and more. If you're looking for ways to boost your marketing results, call 855-598-3320 for a free strategy session with Naren.

You may also schedule a session at your convenience with the Senior Director of

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