

Reputation Management for the Modern Dermatology Practice



Word-of-mouth marketing has gone online. Here's what to know.

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>> In the pre-technology era, word-of-mouth was generally considered the best patient acquisition channel for dermatology practices. When a person required treatment, he or she would ask friends or family for a recommendation. Satisfied patients would happily recommend their favorite doctors. Essentially, marketing was as simple as providing good service and keeping your patients happy. However, that is no longer the case. In today's high-tech world, marketing is not simple—and it is not optional if you want a thriving practice.

WHAT HAS AND HAS NOT CHANGED

The problem with old-fashioned word-of-mouth marketing is that most people no longer “ask around” for recommendations. The internet puts a world of information at our fingertips, and people are accustomed to going online when they want to know something. As COVID-19 put a stop to social gatherings, the habit of connecting online strengthened.

What has not changed is the value that people place on the opinions of actual patients. Statistics from Nielsen reported by Buyapowa.com show that more than 90 percent of people trust personal recommendations more than advertisements.

BUILDING YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

There are a few key components in online reputation building. These include:

Increase patient satisfaction. This tops the list of things that never have, and never will, change. Good service is the foundation of a good reputation. It is important to remember that you need more than excellent clinical skills to keep your patients happy. Instead of just focusing on

the quality of your dermatology treatments, you need to optimize the entire patient experience.

Tips to increase patient satisfaction:

- Schedule carefully to avoid long wait times in your office
- Provide customer service training for your office staff
- Offer multiple contact options (i.e. phone number, email, contact forms, chatbot, SMS messaging)

Acquire reviews. Happy patients are a good start. Unfortunately, happy people tend to be less vocal than unhappy ones. Therefore, if you take a passive approach to review acquisition, you will likely end up with a disproportionately high number of complaints.

Too many negative reviews also lower your overall “star rating,” which is an important deciding factor for most of your potential patients. According to a survey conducted in 2020 and reported by BrightLocal.com, 87 percent of people check for reviews of local businesses, and 52 percent will not consider a business with a rating lower than 4 stars. Positive testimonials are also a great addition to your website.

Tips to increase your positive reviews:

- Include a review request with follow-up emails or messages sent to patients
- Provide links and instructions, making it easy for them to leave reviews
- Consider using software or a third-party service to automate review requests

Expand your digital presence. An important part of reputation management is branding, making sure your name is familiar and associated with quality. To accomplish that,

you need to make sure that your practice is easily discoverable online. Nearly half of all Google searches have local intent, and more than 90 percent of people have used the internet to find a local business. If someone searches for a local dermatologist, you want your name to be the one to appear in results. And, if someone decides to research your practice, you want to make sure that information is plentiful and positive.

Tips to increase your online presence:

- Optimize your website for local search rather than general SEO (search engine optimization).
- Actively participate in social media. If possible, secure your practice name as the profile name on popular websites. Make sure you post informative, engaging, and sharable content.
- Add your practice to Google My Business, as well as reputable business directories.
- Consider other platforms to expand your reach. This might include podcasting, blogging, creating a YouTube channel, or even contributing to local news outlets.

MONITOR AND OPTIMIZE YOUR REPUTATION

You want people to talk about your practice. You also want to make sure that they are saying the right things. If your dermatology practice is receiving bad publicity, you need to react quickly, because information on the internet can spread at lightning speed.

Tips for managing your online reputation:

- Monitor patient review websites and respond to every review. If it is positive, thank the person for their feedback. If it is negative, encourage the person to contact your office. Even if you know that it is not possible to make this particular patient happy, you want other people who read the review to see that you care and that you are proactive.
- Monitor all popular social media platforms (even ones you do not actively use) for mentions of your practice. If you find someone looking for information about your practice, answer the questions.
- Periodically search Google for your practice name and the names of doctors at your practice.
- When responding to social media posts or patient reviews, always be mindful of HIPAA rules.
- Ensure that your business name, address, phone number, and other basic contact details are accurate anywhere that your business is listed or mentioned.
- If reputation monitoring becomes too tedious and time-consuming, consider using a service or software to assist you.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

The ongoing pandemic has touched every area of our lives. It affects your business, and it can affect patients' perceptions of your practice. People want to be informed, and they want to feel safe.

Tips to protect your reputation during this challenging time:

- Word your articles, social posts, and marketing materials carefully to avoid appearing tone-deaf.
- Inform people in advance about new policies, such as wearing masks and social distancing. Make sure they know what to expect before they arrive so that there are no unwelcome surprises.
- Use your website and social media to highlight the special precautions that you are taking, so people know they will be safe in your office.

CONCLUSION

Word-of-mouth marketing has not faded away; it has just gone online. Prospective patients still want to know that you have a good reputation. However, instead of asking a few select people, they check resources such as social media and review platforms. Building a good reputation is the best marketing for today's dermatology practice. ■

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 dermatologists, 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 text 313-777-8494 to schedule a session at your convenience.

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