

Make Sure People Say the Right Thing About Your Practice

Keep a strong focus on customer service, and give your patients a reason to leave 5-star reviews.

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It has long been said that word of mouth is the best advertisement. That hasn't changed in the digital age. In fact, personal testimonials are more influential than ever, because today's dental patients have many more options to spread the word. Yelp, Facebook, and Google are just a few of the nearly endless options for patients to share their experiences.

Numbers you should know

Just how influential are online reviews? Consider these enlightening statistics:

- [Nine in 10](#) people consider online reviews just as trustworthy as a personal recommendation
- [More than half](#) of adults between the ages of 18 and 34 consider online reviews more reliable than recommendations from family and friends
- [More than half](#) will choose a local business if they see good reviews
- [Three-quarters](#) of consumers form an opinion about a business after reading fewer than 6 reviews
- Just [14%](#) of people are willing to consider a business with an average rating below 3 stars

Encouraging positive reviews

An unhappy patient is more likely to leave a review or post on social media than a happy one is. To increase your overall rating, you need more happy patients to take action. The easiest way to get reviews is simply to ask.

Decide which review site or sites you prefer, and create easy-to-follow instructions for your patients. This can be

included in pre-printed handouts that you distribute in your office, or send by email. You can also discuss reviews during a post-treatment follow up call, or in your regular newsletter. In addition to garnering more feedback, this will help direct patients to your review site of choice.

Responding to negative reviews

You've received a bad review. Now what? First off, don't panic. It won't necessarily harm your reputation. In fact, many people suspect falsified or censored reviews when they see a company that has only 5-star ratings. However, if the first thing someone sees is a complaint, or you have a high number of them, your reputation will suffer. What should you do?

- Before you respond – read it very carefully, a couple of times. Make note of all problems listed, and the person's overall attitude. If you are unsure of the validity of the complaint, investigate before proceeding. Beware of false complaints, posted by competitors, disgruntled employees, or others who have never visited your practice.
- If it is false – take appropriate steps to report it. Depending on the website, you may have various options to mark it as spam, or notify an administrator. Unfortunately, it can be very hard to prove that a review is false, so it might not be removed, but you should try.
- If it is (at least partially) true – respond promptly, but beware of HIPAA. Even when responding to a complain, you cannot divulge any information, including acknowledging that the person is a patient. However, you can let the reader know that your practice is responsive by replying with general information about your standard of care. You can also invite the complainant to contact your office. Follow up by contacting the patient directly by telephone so that you can discuss the issues.

Managing patient feedback

A negative review can adorn your profile for weeks or months before you even notice it. Similarly, you might not know if you are getting any reviews at all. It is important to develop a strategy, and make use of various software and tools available.

Begin by registering and completing your professional profile on all applicable review websites and social platforms. Look for options to receive alerts for new reviews, mentions, or messages. Social media management software can automate much of this, by aggregating tags, posts, mentions, and other engagement on sites like Facebook and Twitter.

You can also use reputation management software or services to help track review-specific platforms.

On a final note, don't forget the golden rule of reputation building. Keep a strong focus on customer service, and give your patients a reason to leave 5-star reviews.

About the Author:

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