



Online Reviews and Testimonials: Everything You Need to Know

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We live in a digital era where people can find any information they want on their smartphones at the touch of a button. People spend more time on their smartphones than ever before and they rely on online reviews and recommendations to decide just about everything – from what to eat, wear, and watch to which dental practice to visit.

This is why it is imperative for dentists to have a strong online presence. Prior to the advent of the internet, dentists used to rely primarily on referrals and also had the chance to meet prospective clients in social settings from time to time. Times have changed now and many patients these days rely on the internet to find health care providers. So, building and maintaining a strong presence on the internet is the only way to make sure prospective clients find you whenever they are in need of a dentist.

BUILDING TRUST ONLINE

One of the problems with modern digital culture, however, is that anyone can set up a website and claim to be an expert on any subject. With this being the case, how do you establish yourself as an authority on oral health and build trust with prospective clients? Also, how do you make sure prospective patients are able to find you amidst a sea of pseudo experts online?

The answer lies in building trust online through a multi-pronged approach – garnering positive reviews and testimonials from your clients, having a dedicated blog for your practice, and being active on social media.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROVIDING SOCIAL PROOF ONLINE

In 2012, a leading industry publication named Search Engine Land conducted a survey, which revealed that nearly 75% of consumers trust online reviews just as much as they trust personal recommendations from someone they know. Whenever they are in need of a healthcare provider,

they turn to websites like Google+ Local, RealSelf.com, DrOogle.com, Yelp.com, and Healthgrades.com, which contain consumer reviews on local businesses and service providers, including healthcare professionals.

What this means to you as a dentist is that you have an opportunity to reinforce word-of-mouth referrals as well as reach prospective patients before they even decide to call you and schedule an appointment.

CREATING AN ONLINE PROFILE

The first thing you need to do is to set up a comprehensive online profile which contains all the information a prospective dental patient would like to know about your practice.

Websites like Yelp.com and Google+ create accounts for local businesses and service providers automatically using the data gathered from online directories. Such randomly gathered information might not be accurate all the time. So, you should update your profile on these websites with the latest information.

These websites usually have a link that says 'is this your business?' or 'claim this profile', by clicking which you can log into the website and claim ownership of the profile by uploading the required information. Typically, your profile should contain photos and videos of your practice and your team, a link to your official website, your consulting hours, and your contact information.

Once you do, prospective clients will be able to find accurate and updated information about your practice, photos and videos to get an idea of what it is like to visit your clinic and get treated by you, as well as a number of reviews by your current patients. It is a great way to market yourself and your services to prospective dental patients.

THE NEED FOR REVIEWS ON THIRD-PARTY WEBSITES

One of the most effective ways to enhance the reputation of your dental practice is to have your patients post their reviews and testimonials on third-party websites. You can also ask them to leave their reviews on your own website, but many people tend to be skeptical of these testimonials and believe that they have been 'sanitized' to a great extent. Neutral, third-party websites, on the other hand, welcome all kinds of reviews, which is why many people trust them more than practitioners' official websites.

You should, however, remember that authenticity is the most important aspect of online reviews. While it is true that many people use these reviews as a determining factor for choosing a dentist, they are also savvy and smart enough to spot genuine testimonials from disingenuous and fake

ones.

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR PATIENT TESTIMONIALS

If the reviews are over the top in their praise for your services, people are likely to be skeptical. So, ask your patients to express what they genuinely feel about you and your services in these reviews.

Similarly, if a number of highly positive reviews show up on different websites all of a sudden, people might mistake them for paid reviews. So, you should try to accumulate a large number of positive, appreciative reviews from your patients over a period of time, rather than rushing through the process.

More importantly, the websites mentioned above have strict guidelines in terms of accepting reviews. They track the IP addresses of users who post reviews. If you create multiple accounts to post your patients' testimonials, you might get flagged. So, the best option is to ask your patients to post their testimonials on these websites by themselves.

Online reviews also tend to reinforce word-of-mouth referrals. If someone recommends you to a prospective client, he or she might still go online and check out your profile and patient testimonials before confirming their decision. So, the importance of genuine reviews and testimonials simply cannot be overstated.

MANAGING NEGATIVE REVIEWS

One of the reasons why many dentists hesitate to ask their patients for testimonials is that they are afraid that a disgruntled patient might leave a negative review, which could affect their reputation. If you feel the same way, you need to know a couple of things.

Firstly, when you ask your patients for their feedback, one or two of them might leave a negative review. There is not much you can do about it and it is not worth fretting over.

Secondly, the best way to neutralize existing negative reviews and discourage people from leaving more such reviews is to get a large number of positive reviews from satisfied patients. After all, nobody wants to stand out from the crowd and be the lone negative voice and even if they do, their opinion will likely be delegitimized by the positive comments that many others leave.

If you are not sure how to ask your patients for testimonials, here is a simple tactic. Whenever a patient says he or she is satisfied with your services, simply ask them to post their thoughts on the aforementioned websites.

Alternatively, you could send them an email with a write-up of the compliments they paid you, along with a link to your website and online review profiles. It makes their job a lot easier, as they can simply cut and paste your email into the review section, rather than searching for the right words all over again.

Now, some of your patients might not have an account on Google+, Yelp, or any of the aforementioned websites. In such cases, you should not force them to create an account and post a review. Instead, you should provide them with a local review form to post their testimonials.

PATIENT TESTIMONIALS AS A PART OF OVERALL ONLINE MARKETING STRATEGY

One thing you need to know is that patient testimonials alone cannot help you build a solid online presence. Your social media visibility also plays an important role in it. You not only need to have your own website and blog, but also need to create and maintain accounts on social networking websites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

If you are not tech-savvy enough to update your social media accounts or if you simply do not have the time, you can outsource it to a vendor, who can update your blog and social networking profiles regularly and make sure you have a strong presence on social media.

Search engines like Google take a number of factors into account while ranking your website and online profile – the overall tone and volume of the reviews you get, the quality of your blog and website content, the regularity with which your sites and social media accounts are updated, and so on. All these factors play a key role in terms of search engine optimization and can help you stay visible to prospective clients who are in need of dentists.

BUILDING TRUST ON THE WEB – A SLOW AND STEADY PROCESS

A public testimonial or recommendation from a satisfied patient is the highest seal of approval you can ask for as a dentist. As online reviews become more pervasive, the number of people who trust them also keeps increasing steadily. So, building your online reputation through this medium could pay you rich dividends in the future.

Remember – building trust online is neither easy nor does it happen overnight. It is a long process and the best time to get started with it is right now. If you take the first step today and start accumulating testimonials from satisfied patients, you will be able to develop a strong online presence a year or two down the line. Once you do, the momentum created will fuel your ongoing marketing efforts and help you maintain your reputation for years to come.

About the Author

Naren Arulrajah is President and CEO of Ekwa Marketing, a complete internet marketing company that focuses on SEO, social media, marketing education, and the online reputations of dentists. With a team of 180+ full time marketers, www.ekwa.com helps dentists who know where they want to go, get there by dominating their market and growing their business significantly year after year. If you have questions about marketing your practice online, call 855-598-3320 to speak one-on-one with Naren.