

# Patient Reviews: The Good, the Bad, and the Viral

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It is often said that the more things change, the more they stay the same. A couple of decades ago, there was no Google, no Facebook, and no such thing as digital marketing. Back then, the best advertisement a dentist could have was a happy patient. In this era of digital promotion, you've probably heard that old paradigms like word-of-mouth marketing are irrelevant.

That's not quite true. Happy patients are still your best advertisement, but they aren't talking to their friends over the back fence. They are talking over the Internet, and their words can spread farther than ever before. That is both good and bad for your practice.

## Increasing Good Reviews

It's not surprising that many dentists think of patient comments as a problem rather than an asset. If you've ever had an unsatisfied patient on Yelp or a similar site, you already know the power of a bad review. A good one can be just as powerful, but they aren't as common. According to [Dimensional Research](#), unhappy customers are 50% more likely to share their experience on review websites than happy ones are.

The key to benefiting from satisfied customers is getting them to talk about their experiences. While it may seem too simple, the best way to get reviews is to just ask. The following tips can increase your practice's positive feedback:

- Use printed handouts. Prepare a document with instructions for leaving online reviews at your preferred site. Keep copies on hand and distribute them to smiling patients as they leave your office. You can also include space for them to write a review and return the form by mail if you wish.
- Send an email. Include a short request for reviews, along with instructions and links. This can be automated through mailing list services or software. However, make sure to send it as a personalized

message with the patient's name. Emails that begin with "Dear patient" are likely to be treated as spam.

- Add some incentives. A popular option is to hold a raffle-style contest, often with a free or discounted service such as teeth whitening for the prize. Every patient who leaves a review on specified platforms during a pre-determined timeframe is entered automatically. Be sure the winner is chosen randomly, to avoid the appearance of buying better reviews. If you want to promote a contest on social media, always check your chosen network's terms of service first.
- Use photos and videos. Make sure you maintain your profile on review platforms that allow multimedia testimonials. You can also encourage patients to post their pictures and comments to your Facebook page.

## Handling a Bad Review

You can encourage more good reviews. Unfortunately, you can't stop an unhappy patient from reviewing your practice or posting about it on social media. However, there are steps you can (and should) take to mitigate the damage. Every platform is different, but you may be able to do the following:

- Have the review removed. This is the best solution, but it is not possible with most websites.
- Flag or report false accusations. Your report may be ignored, especially if you cannot prove they are false. However, most websites make an attempt to filter sabotaging fake reviews.
- Respond to the reviewer. If the person is an actual patient with a genuine complaint, reach out to him or her. Find out if the review platform gives you an option to publicly respond. If so, use it. This shows readers that you take customer service seriously.

## Going Viral

When you get complimentary reviews, it's okay to brag. In fact, spreading the word about your happiest patients is highly recommended. It has the dual benefit of increasing your positive exposure, while burying less than stellar comments. This is especially effective if you have bad reviews that are showing up in search engine results. So how can you promote positive testimonials? Try the following:

- Add them to your website. You can include a page dedicated to reviews and feature the best one on your homepage or procedure pages.
- Post on your own social media. This is a particularly good tactic when you want to show off a highly successful cosmetic case. With your patient's permission, you can post photos of the outcome, or even before and after pictures. Most people will be flattered by your request and readily agree.
- Drive patients to the most favorable platforms. Not all medical review sites are created equal. Think carefully about which ones bring the most business to your practice, give you the most control over your profile, and have other features important to you. Those are the sites you want to include in your feedback forms.

## Conclusion

People are more likely to choose a dentist whom they consider reputable, and they are willing to pay a higher price for something they perceive to be higher quality. Therefore, reputation management directly affects your profit potential.

Testimonials (or complaints) from existing patients are generally considered more credible than general marketing messages, so review management directly affects your reputation. If you aren't encouraging and sharing rave reviews, you are missing one of your best marketing opportunities.

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