

Whitepaper

DEALING WITH PATIENT REVIEWS

THE DENTAL GUIDE TO
ONLINE REPUTATION

DEALING WITH PATIENT REVIEWS

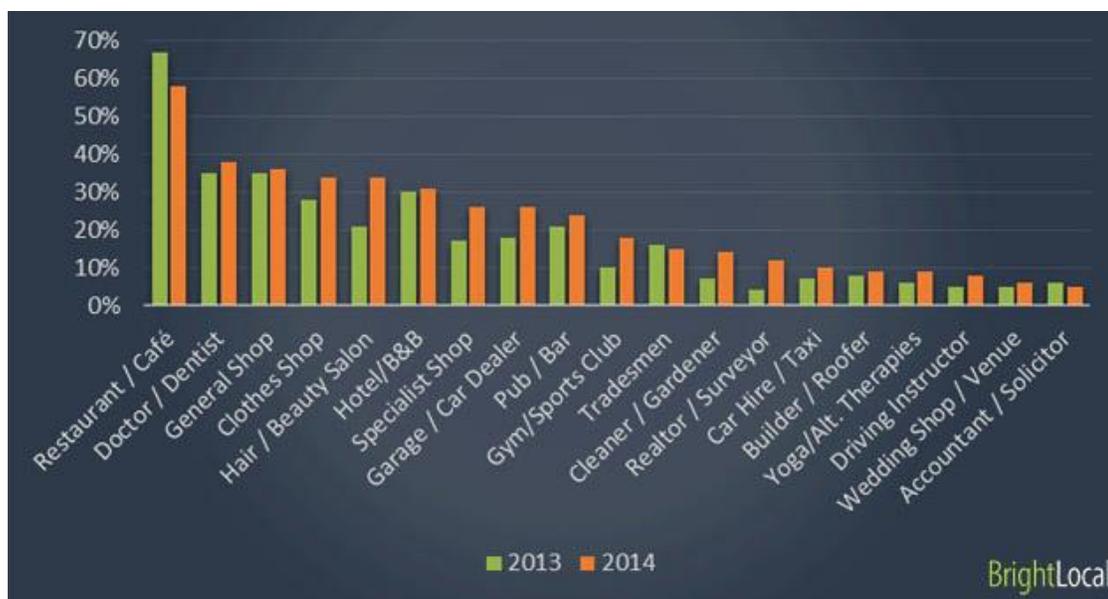
Reading online reviews has become one of the biggest trends in consumer online search behavior. For dentists, that means that word-of-mouth — long hailed as the most effective source of new patients — has now expanded into the digital world. A good online reputation is critical to the success of a dental practice. In fact, consumers say dentists along with doctors are the top professions in which reputation matters most to them.¹

This is not a passing fad. In one year alone traffic to the top 10 review sites increased by 158%.² More importantly, 88% of consumers say that online reviews on sites like Yelp influence their perception when choosing a business or service.³ This shift has huge implications for dentists – affecting your website, your social media strategy and even your practice policies. Online reviews have solidified themselves as a crucial part of any dental marketing plan – and understanding, monitoring and responding to them is more important than ever before.

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As traffic to these reviews sites grows, searches for reviews specifically about dentists are also on the rise. According to a recent survey, consumer searches and reviews for doctors and dentists grew from 27% in 2012⁴ to 38% in 2014.⁵

Consumer Searches & Reviews by Business Type⁶



This means that even if you've never heard of Yelp, or never visited one of these websites, it is very likely that you and your practice have been reviewed on at least one of them.

THE MOST COMMON REVIEW SITES

There are many websites that show or gather reviews, but perhaps the most well-known and most frequently visited by consumers is Yelp.com. Yelp is a website that allows people to review any business they want without the business owner's permission. They merely find the business listed on Yelp.com and post a comment about that business, giving it a rating from one to five stars. Yelp is a major force in shaping the online reputation of businesses today. To date, Yelpers have written over 71 million local reviews.⁷ The site had approximately 135 million unique visitors each month of the last quarter of 2014.⁸

As part of its own expanding search service, Google+ Local also gathers reviews for businesses. The premise is similar to Yelp – consumers are able to rate and review a business and Google will list them as part of search results as well as on Google Local. Google uses a 5-point scoring system and Zagat summaries for user reviews.

There are also dozens of similar sites that show reviews for dentists, notably among them Angie's List and Dr. Oogle. Angie's List is unique in that it requires paid membership in order to search or post reviews. Dr. Oogle is a site for all medical categories. Both are growing in usage, but Google and Yelp still get much more traffic.

Here's an important note about most reviews sites: You have no ability to remove a negative review about your business once someone posts it. A dentist recently spent two years suing both Yelp and the patient who posted a negative review to get the comment taken down.⁹ The court finally ruled against the dental practice, requiring that the dentist pay \$80,000 in legal costs to the patient and dismissed the case.

This is the rule: Reviews are considered free speech, protected by the First Amendment. So unless it's profane or libelous, you can't get it removed. But read on — there are ways to mitigate their effect.

MONITORING YOUR REPUTATION

The permanence of online reviews makes it all the more important to actively monitor your online presence so you know what is being said about your practice – and where. Not only will this ensure that you're not blindsided by negative feedback, in many cases it will also give you a chance to respond. Responding to negative reviews is essential as 35% of consumers are now reading online reviews for dentists¹⁰ and your response can determine whether or not a potential patient chooses your practice.

It should be the job of someone in the practice to regularly visit Google, Yelp and the other sites at least daily, and see if anything new has been posted about your practice. Another good idea is to set up a Google Alert, which will send you an email every time your name is mentioned in a public document. It's also important to regularly monitor social media sites like Facebook, Google+ and Twitter for mentions of your practice, as patients are likely to "review" your practice in these forums as well. Interestingly, research shows that your practice is more than twice as likely to get recommended on Facebook as either Twitter or Google+.¹¹

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Although this work can be done manually, it can be streamlined into just minutes a day using ReputationMonitor®, a leading-edge social monitoring tool that comes standard with PatientActivator® or is available as a standalone product. ReputationMonitor is the first social media product in the dental industry that monitors your entire online presence — reviews,

social media mentions and listings — and displays them on a single screen. ReputationMonitor notifies you of new online reviews in real-time and will also let you compare your online presence with local competitors.

As you discover reviews, don't be too alarmed by a negative comment. When most savvy internet users read reviews, they disregard the best and the worst reviews and give much more credence to the reviews in the middle.

In fact, if consumers don't see any negative reviews, they may assume that you wrote all the reviews yourself, and will disregard them. One or two negative comments can actually provide some balance and credibility to your more positive reviews. According to Business Week's top tip contributor and CEO of CityVoter, Inc., Josh Walker, "While small business owners often fear reviews on social networks may harm their business, [they] actually offer a tremendous opportunity for open communication with customers."¹² The goal is to have so many positive reviews from your good patients that it overwhelms any negativity.

RESPONDING TO NEGATIVE REVIEWS

Although negative reviews can't be removed by the business owner, that doesn't mean there's no action you can take. If you see a negative review, here is what you can do:

STEP ONE: CONTACT THE PATIENT

If you can identify the author, call the patient directly and ask them if you can remedy the situation. Experts advise, "Reach out to those who have had a bad experience and ask for a second chance to prove to them that their experience was not up to your high standards."¹³

Let your patient know that you're sorry that he or she is displeased and if there's anything you can do, you're glad to do it. It may be as simple as that. And if you're able to resolve the problem, by all means ask them to please take the negative review down. A major report published by Harris Interactive and RightNow Technologies revealed that 92% of consumers say they would consider returning to a business they negatively reviewed if they received an apology.¹⁴

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STEP TWO: RESPOND TO THE REVIEW

If you can't get the patient to take the review down and fix the situation yourself, now you need to reply to the negative review. And there are two things to remember here:

1. Always respond to negative reviews, but never be defensive or angry.
2. Use the response to essentially write an ad for your practice.

For example, one of the most common bad reviews is a patient saying that the dentist told them they needed a lot of dental work and wanted a huge amount of money. Then they went to another dentist who told them that they only needed \$400 of dentistry. They think the first dentist tried to cheat them (when in reality, the first dentist simply presented too soon and the second dentist was afraid to present any comprehensive dentistry).

So how do you respond? The impulse may be to go on the defensive and insist that the patient misunderstood, the other dentist is illogical, etc. This makes you look bad and at best, accomplishes nothing. At worst, it exacerbates the situation to a war of words. Instead, respond by essentially writing an ad for your practice. Write something like this:

"We're very sorry to hear that this was your experience in our practice. It's our policy to offer a very high standard of care and to do everything possible to

provide each patient with outstanding service. We'd welcome a chance to try to resolve this issue in person – and we invite you to please contact our office directly so we can address your concerns."

This takes a negative situation and gives you an opportunity to say that you offer high-quality dentistry, and it's too bad this person didn't want it. This makes you seem like the calm, sane professional, and attracts the right patients to your practice.

STEP THREE: LET IT DIE

Once you've responded, don't get into it any more. If they respond back, leave it alone. You never win the war of words online.

STEP FOUR: INVITE YOUR OTHER PATIENTS TO REVIEW YOU

Whenever there is a negative review, the best defense is positive feedback from your satisfied patients. Ask your best patients if they'd be willing to review you, and you'll be amazed at how they will rally to your cause. The Customer Experience Impact Report shows that 55% of consumers are "willing to recommend a service due to outstanding service, more so than product or price."¹⁵

Patients who love your practice will often come to your defense, and they can say whatever they want without putting you in the middle of it. Here's another factor to consider. According to a recent survey, 85% of consumers say they read up to 10 reviews and a fast-growing segment is reading up to 20.¹⁶ That means an outpouring of support from your loyal patient base not only weakens a negative comment, it also forces it down the page, where consumers are less likely to see it. And remember that consumers tend to forgive negative reviews if your rating is overwhelmingly positive. A good ratio to strive for is at least 7 positive reviews for any negative one.

SOLICITING POSITIVE REVIEWS:

A final tactic for overcoming negative reviews is to actively solicit positive online feedback from your most satisfied patients. Here is a great technique for getting people to post on your Facebook and Google+ pages, and also to get positive Yelp reviews.

Ask patients to do the recommendations above from their own devices. So many people use Facebook on their smart phones that they could do it on that device just as easily. The average U.S. Facebook mobile user spends more than 40 minutes a day perusing the site via cell phone which accounts for one in five minutes spent on mobile in the US.¹⁷

Even better, they can do a Google review because it is coming from their own device. You can make it easy for them to find the location by having a little card with the information on it that you can hand them, or by sending them an email right then.

It is also essential to get a release from all your patients to use photography and video of them. If they won't sign one, don't use their image in any way. (They, of course, can still post any image of themselves without a release.) This goes for staff members as well. You would want full rights to use the imagery on your websites, on YouTube and all social media and search engines in perpetuity. The release should include language to this effect:

"I [person's name] give my permission to [practice name] to use my image or be recorded in still or video photography or any other medium, for use in all media including social media, in perpetuity throughout the universe, for any purpose whatsoever."

Have them sign and date it. This is a must-do. You can get a release form from www.legalzoom.com, or use a local attorney to make sure it is appropriate for your state.

SUMMARY

Online reviews have forever changed the way dentists need to market their business. With such a large segment of the population consulting reviews sites before making purchasing decisions, you simply can't afford to be missing – or poorly represented – in the digital world. Take charge of your online presence by being proactive. Monitor your online reputation, respond to negative reviews calmly and quickly, and actively encourage your happy patients to contribute to your positive word of mouth online. It's a new world, but fortunately the tools exist to navigate the changes and leverage them into even greater success.

ABOUT FUTURE DONTICS®

Futuredontics®, parent company of **1-800-DENTIST®** and **Patient Activator®**, is the nation's leading provider of dental marketing services. Since 1986, the Los Angeles-based company has dedicated itself to developing powerful products that help dental practices thrive.

Recognized as dentistry's premier new patient leads program, the company's flagship 1-800-DENTIST service has helped over 9 million dental patients nationwide connect with member dentists. Every day, thousands of patients get personally matched to dentists through their 24/7 call center or via 1800dentist.com.

PatientActivator — Futuredontics' communications, social and online reputation solution — increases production and boosts the practice's online presence with automated appointment confirmations and tools for marketing, social media, reviews and much more.

Futuredontics also offer an extensive library of dental marketing resources – including whitepapers, webinars and videos. With unlimited live customer support, dentistry's best marketing products and North America's largest dental referral website, Futuredontics is the proven way for dental practices to grow their patient base and increase production year after year.

For more information about our dental marketing services visit us at www.futuredontics.com

Footnotes

¹ Myles Anderson, Local Consumer Review Survey 2014, July 1, 2014, <http://www.brightlocal.com/2014/07/01/local-consumer-review-survey-2014/#internettypes>

² Bob Nun, 12 Statistics on Consumer Reviews, Search Engine People.com, June 27, 2012.

³ Myles Anderson, Local Consumer Review Survey 2014, July 1, 2014, <http://www.brightlocal.com/2014/07/01/local-consumer-review-survey-2014/#internettypes>

⁴ Myles Anderson, Local Consumer Review Survey 2012 – Part 2, May 7, 2012, <http://searchengineland.com/local-consumer-review-survey-2012-part-2-120321>

⁵ Myles Anderson, Local Consumer Review Survey 2014, July 1, 2014, <http://www.brightlocal.com/2014/07/01/local-consumer-review-survey-2014/#internettypes>

⁶ Myles Anderson, Local Consumer Review Survey 2014, July 1, 2014, <http://www.brightlocal.com/2014/07/01/local-consumer-review-survey-2014/#internettypes>

⁷ 10 Things You Should Know About Yelp, March 10, 2015, <http://www.yelp.com/about>

⁸ 10 Things You Should Know About Yelp, March 10, 2015, <http://www.yelp.com/about>

⁹ Dentist Threatens to Sue Patient for Negative Yelp Review, December 1, 2011,

<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/health/2011/12/01/dentist-threatens-to-sue-patient-for-negative-yelp-review/>

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- ¹⁴ Harris Interactive and RightNow Technologies, 2012 Customer Experience Impact Report, Oct. 9, 2010, <http://www.slideshare.net/RightNow/2010-customer-experience-impact>
- ¹⁵ Harris Interactive and RightNow Technologies, 2012 Customer Experience Impact Report, Oct. 9, 2010, <http://www.slideshare.net/RightNow/2010-customer-experience-impact>
- ¹⁶ Myles Anderson, Study: 88% Of Consumers Trust Online Reviews As Much As Personal Recommendations, July 7, 2014, <http://searchengineland.com/88-consumers-trust-online-reviews-much-personal-recommendations-195803>
- ¹⁷ Josh Constine, American Users Spend An Average Of 40 Minutes Per Day On Facebook, July 23, 2014, <http://techcrunch.com/2014/07/23/facebook-usage-time/>

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