



Revealed: Your Winning Online Review Strategy

Are you doing all you can to protect your online reputation?

By David Evans, PhD, Ceatus Media, L.L.C.

When your office phone stops ringing and those promising consults start ducking your follow-up calls, it's time to check your online reviews.

“A now famous Harvard Business School study¹ found a direct correlation between reviews and revenue. Income can swing by up to 18 percent in either direction based on whether reviews trend positive or negative.

The days of ignoring online reviews and wishing them away are over. Every practice needs a strategy to monitor, address, and accrue reviews.

Monitor

Set Google alerts for your name and your practice's name and/or periodically check key review sites to see what your patients are saying about your practice. Most physicians already do this. More than 80 percent of doctors monitor their reviews and ratings, according to a new survey from Vitals. Three-quarters of doctors check more than one online rating site. Nearly 12 percent of physicians said they check reviews at least once per week. If you're not one of them, you should be.

Address

If many patients are identifying the same negative aspects about their experiences at your practice, take steps to fix these issues STAT. This may include long wait times, feeling rushed during a consultation, a messy waiting room, or an ornery receptionist. Respond to this feedback in a non-defensive, positive, and supportive manner.

For example, write “I am very sorry to hear about your experience in our practice. Our goal is to provide every patient with exemplary care and the best outcomes. We welcome the opportunity to listen to your concerns to make things right for you. Please feel free to contact us at

Don't include any private health information in the response. This includes such seemingly innocuous details as appointment or treatment dates. In some cases, it can be best to take things off line and pick up the phone. The human touch goes a long way toward soothing an underwhelmed patient.

Don't freak out about a few negative reviews. People are naturally skeptical when they see too much of a pattern in the reviews. The good news is that a little bad news is good news. A purely pristine all five-star online image is not believable. A Stanford Business School study called this the “blemish effect.”



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If the reviews are false or defamatory, contact the review sites to see if they will take the reviews down. In some cases, a cease-and-desist letter to the disgruntled poster may help.

Accrue

Unhappy patients are more likely to post reviews or rants. Happy patients may need some prodding to write reviews. The best positive reviews appear on third-party sites such as Yelp, Google+, RateMDs, or Vitals. Make it easy for patients to post on these sites—but not too easy. Don't encourage patients to leave reviews on your office computer or tablet. Review sites screen the IP addresses of reviewers and block reviews when they are posted from the same IP address.

The ask should occur during the post-op visit when the patient is happiest. A staff member should ask politely if the patient would be so kind as to share comments about his/her positive experiences with others. The best, and the most efficient, way to go about this is to ask the patient to post a review using their smartphone right in the office—that way no follow-up is required. If this doesn't work, provide the patient with a postcard or send an email that includes a link to your profile on several review sites such as Yelp, Google+, or RateMDs.

Your final step is to collect positive reviews from the third-party review sites and feed them to your own website. I call this the “Amazon Effect.” The reason Amazon and the other major e-tailers publish reviews on their sites is that conversion explodes. Corraling all product information and reviews in one place online makes it easy for consumers to shop.

Use a feed that allows the practice to screen out negative comments and publish only four- and five-star reviews. It is very important from an ethical standpoint that the reviews feed states that the reviews are “Featured” or “Highlighted” so as not to give the impression that this is all of your reviews online.

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1. Luca M. “Reviews, Reputation, and Revenue: The Case of Yelp.com.” Harvard Business School Working Paper, No. 12-016, September 2011. (Revised March 2016. Revise and resubmit at the American Economic Journal - Applied Economics.)
<http://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=41233>