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HOW TO MANAGE YOUR PRACTICE'S ONLINE REPUTATION

Michaela Mishoe, Account Executive at The Hodges Partnership

It's not surprising that reviews are taken into consideration before purchasing a household product or going out to a new restaurant, but did you know that nearly 75% of patients turn to online reviews as a first step before finding a new medical provider?

If you're not maintaining your practice's online reputation, you could miss valuable opportunities for new patients. Positive reviews can help build credibility and attract new patients, while negative reviews can have the opposite effect. If you haven't been prioritizing online reviews as a part of the patient experience, it's never too late to start.

Here's how you and your team can effectively handle your practice's online reputation and manage reviews to ensure continued growth and patient satisfaction.

Optimize your online listings.

If you haven't already, claim your dental practice on all major online directories and review platforms such as Google, Yelp and Meta (Facebook). Ensure that your practice's name, address, phone number and website are correct and consistent across all platforms. This is a crucial step for local SEO (Search Engine Optimization), which helps your practice appear in local searches.

Encourage patients to leave positive reviews and encourage your staff to participate.

Satisfied patients are often willing to leave positive reviews, but they may need a little encouragement. Determine which interactions between the patient and your staff are ideal for mentioning reviews. A hygienist could provide a gentle reminder at the end of an appointment by including instructions on how to leave a review in the patient's complementary dental



Dr. Miller and Dr. Love in Falls Church make it easy for patients to leave and read reviews.

supplies bag. Another touchpoint could occur as a patient is checking out at the front desk. As your receptionist is interacting with a patient, have them ask a patient how their visit was, followed up by a request to leave a review when they have a few minutes. You can also follow up through emails or text messages with a direct link to your review page.

Another key touchpoint for patients is your website. In just a few steps you can embed Google Reviews on your homepage:

1. Go to the Google Maps website and search for your business name.
2. Click on the "Reviews" tab to see your Google reviews.
3. Click on the three dots on the right-hand side of the review you want to embed.
4. Select "Embed" from the dropdown menu.

Another effective strategy is to create in-office signage or business cards with QR codes that lead to your online review profiles. Remember to always make the process as easy as possible for your patients.

Monitor reviews regularly.

Make sure someone is monitoring online reviews daily. This shouldn't be a long or tedious process. A staff member can allot 10-15 minutes to quickly check any online activity. You'll want to check sites like Facebook, Google and Yelp on your search. Set up Google Alerts for your dental practice's name to receive notifications whenever a new review is posted.

Before you respond, consider patient privacy laws.

Dental practices can be fined thousands of dollars for responding to online reviews with identifiable patient information. These fines might also apply if your response

simply confirms that a patient was at your practice.

To ensure you're not violating any privacy laws, use generalities when replying to any online reviews to avoid confirming that a patient was in your practice.

Responding to positive reviews with a simple "Thank you!" demonstrates that you value your patients' feedback and are committed to providing excellent care.

If you get a bad review and choose to respond, do so in very broad "all patient" terms that don't identify a specific patient. See the box below for advice the ADA provides for responding to negative reviews.

Highlight your positive reviews.

Amplify your practice's positive reviews by sharing them directly on your website and social media platforms. Make a dedicated "Testimonials" page on your website to showcase the positive

experiences of your patients. Stay up to date with this content and ensure that any reviews you're highlighting aren't from years ago or about staff that have left your practice.

Identifying fake reviews

Because social media sites do not require posters to confirm their identities, fake reviews may appear on your platforms. To spot fake profiles and reviews, read the review carefully and look at the reviewer's history. If the review is short, lacks details, and has strange punctuation and word choice, it could be a fake review. Similarly, if the reviewer hasn't left any other reviews, has a generic profile photo, and isn't in your patient records, it could be a fake profile.

If you believe you're receiving fake reviews, visit the platform's policy page for reporting fake reviews or profiles. While fake reviews are still an issue for many small businesses, many

groups, including the ADA, are currently advocating with the FTC to reduce and eventually eliminate them.

With so many patients looking to online reviews to find a provider, managing your dental practice's online reputation is more important than ever. Taking a proactive approach to reputation management will help you attract new patients, retain existing ones, and ensure the long-term success of your dental practice.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET A BAD REVIEW:

- Close the computer, take a deep breath, and think about it overnight.
- Strive to use a caring and empathetic tone.
- Respond professionally, promptly, and privately.
- Show willingness to help and resolve the issue.

A broad statement response could be:

"Our office strives to provide the best service to all patients, and we do our best to meet this goal. We encourage any patient who would like to discuss their experience to contact us directly."



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