

How to Cultivate

# ONLINE REVIEWS

by Leon Klempner, DDS, and CEO of People & Practice, LLC



Is cultivating online reviews worth the effort? The short answer is yes!

In fact, online reviews are becoming more and more essential to an effective practice-marketing program. They're hard to get—no question about it. Yet we know from research that positive feedback on third-party review sites is one of the most compelling factors for new patients seeking your services. A recent study found that 88 percent of consumers said they trust online reviews as much as they trust personal recommendations (up from 79 percent in 2013, and 72 percent in 2012).<sup>1</sup>

Progressive orthodontic practices realize that the marketplace is changing rapidly, and these changes are upending the way that we attract and keep new patients. For starters, general dentists are referring fewer patients to us. They're doing more minor (and sometimes not-so-minor) orthodontics themselves.

Likewise, pediatric dentists are no longer a referral source for independent orthodontic practices since they're hiring orthodontists and keeping their patients in house. Another challenge is that insurance companies are becoming increasingly influential in dictating referral options. Indemnity insurance plans, which allow patients to choose their own doctors, have dropped from 38 percent in 2001 to current levels falling below 10 percent.

PPO plans, which require patients to choose their doctors from a set of in-network options, have exploded from 39 percent to close to 80 percent. Consequently, it's relatively common for patients to ask for referrals to orthodontists who are "on my plan."<sup>2</sup>

Second, dental service organizations (DSOs) are becoming a formidable competitor to private solo practices. As corporate entities, they provide affordable payment arrangements, participation in all insurance plans with flexible weekend and evening schedules, and care delivered by well-trained, young orthodontists.

How are they able to compete? Well, right now there is a surplus of

well-trained, new orthodontic graduates with significant educational debt looking for employment. There just aren't enough traditional apprenticeships to accommodate the current influx of recent graduates, who have upward of \$200,000 in loans to pay off. So, instead of taking on additional debt to buy or open a practice, they're accepting job offers from DSOs that can guarantee a salary and benefits.

Last, and most importantly, the Internet has empowered patients and/or parents to do their own research before making any major decisions, including which orthodontist to choose. The online information about your practice can be very beneficial in driving new patients to call your practice.

Or it can be damaging to your future. However, unlike some of the other factors influencing the practice of orthodontics today, you can take control of your reputation and manage it to your advantage.

## The impact of reviews

Collecting online reviews is an excellent way to begin building your reputation and also differentiating your practice from the competition. Patients saying great things on review sites about you or your practice is much more credible than what you say about yourself in advertising or on your website. Online reviews tell an authentic story about what it's like to be a patient or parent in your practice. They serve as a window into the office that can be astoundingly influential.

However, there's a lot of apprehension and discomfort around asking patients for reviews, and for good reason. It can be awkward in the best case, and nerve wracking in the worst, since it feels like there's little control over what people decide to write. It's true that negative reviews can be damaging. You've spent years building up your reputation and it's a shame that a comment or two can tarnish it.

The truth is that you can't please everyone. A bad review will come ... the key is to be prepared. The way to defend against negative feedback is by proactively buffering your

online review pages with positive feedback. This makes a single negative comment look like an outlier.

### Playing hard to get

So why is it so difficult to get positive reviews? Actually, getting patients to talk isn't the hardest part. I'm sure you've recognized that many have written 5-star reviews about your practice, but somehow they never appear online. That's because some review sites have automated filtering systems that mistakenly categorize authentic reviews as fake and deem them as less than influential, making it very difficult to get published reviews. Others make you register in order to post a review. This multi-step process discourages many of your patients from continuing the review process, despite their good intentions. Collecting reviews within the walls of your office also poses a challenge. Many review sites flag reviews as suspicious if they're all posted from one location.

### The top five to thrive

The following tips enhance the chances of getting positive reviews:

1. Concentrate on the patients/parents who love you and ask them to share their experience online. It has been our experience that patients often feel honored and are happy to share their positive experiences. Getting a compliment is an excellent opportunity to approach a patient.
2. Although getting public reviews on a variety of review sites is best, start with Google Reviews so you can be awarded gold stars in a Google search. Gold stars are critical for the future success of your practice. They not only attract the attention of potential new orthodontic patients—they may also improve your local search ranking on Google.
3. As mentioned earlier, do not ask patients to leave reviews from your office computers or their laptops when they're in the office, unless you have a system for bypassing this issue. Multiple reviews coming from the same location (using the same IP address) are detected and filtered as inauthentic.
4. Never pay a patient or give them a gift for a review. It's against Google guidelines and not worth the risk of getting penalized.
5. All reviews should be authentic. They should be under the patient or parent's real name and account and posted personally—by them.

### Accelerating the process

After years of trying different methods, I've landed on a solution that works for my practice and have developed a program that I'm now sharing with other orthodontists. The goal of this program is to get more positive online reviews; "catch" negative feedback before


it goes public; and pinpoint my happiest patients and turn them into brand ambassadors that promote my practice to friends, family and neighbors. It's also important to understand what's happening online regarding my practice, which means monitoring all public reviews across the web for any concerning comments, and taking the conversation offline quickly, which is the best approach.

### How it works

An online feedback form is made available on a dedicated office iPad—I have one in the waiting room and in the treatment area. This feedback is collected on a private site, so we get as much feedback as possible... positive or constructive, all comments are welcome. I also include the digital intake form on my practice's website.

My staff and I ask patients and parents throughout the day if they wouldn't mind providing feedback (not reviews!) so that you can make their experience even better. The form also asks their name, email, and some information about their review site usage. In fact, you can include any questions you like. For example, if you want to get a sense of patient interest in a new service, you can include a question on that topic.

The positive comments automatically appear prominently on my website, adding credibility, personalization and authenticity. Now here's the great part: feedback that isn't overwhelmingly



**PRECISION**  
PLIER SERVICE  
The world's 1st orthodontic plier repair company.

**Orthodontic  
Instrument  
Repair**

**REPAIR 5  
GET 1 MORE  
FREE**

**precisionplierservice.com**  
**Get Your Postage Paid Mailing Kit**



positive does not appear on my website. Instead, it instantaneously generates an email alert so that I can call the patient or parent and address the issue directly... before it goes public.

Last but certainly not least, I follow up with patients and parents who left positive feedback via a personal email, asking them if they wouldn't mind posting publicly on one of the online review sites (such as Google+, Healthgrades, or RateMDs).

### Worth its weight in gold ... stars

If your private practice is going to survive, it's no longer good

enough to provide excellent clinical care. Your patients expect it. Rather, you must differentiate your practice by getting strong, authentic online reviews. The program I've developed takes all the work out of the above process, so you can concentrate on what you do best: providing outstanding treatment to your patients while also building your online reputation.

Trust me, it's worth it. ■

#### References

1. <http://www.brightlocal.com/2014/07/01/local-consumer-review-survey-2014/>
2. [http://www.mcgillhillgroup.com/content\\_display.asp?id=991](http://www.mcgillhillgroup.com/content_display.asp?id=991)

Comment on this article at [Orthotown.com/magazine.aspx](http://Orthotown.com/magazine.aspx).

### Author Bio



**Dr. Leon Klempner** is the CEO of People & Practice, LLC, a marketing consultancy dedicated to helping other orthodontists grow their practices. He started Coolsmiles Orthodontics in 1978 after receiving his orthodontic training at Tufts University. He is on the teaching faculty of two dental schools, Tufts University School of Dental Medicine, and Stony Brook University School of Dentistry. Dr. Klempner was one of the first orthodontists in the country to implement digital records and imaging, and continues to integrate cutting-edge technology into his practice and his life. He maintains two busy practices on Long Island. He can be reached at [leon@pppractice.com](mailto:leon@pppractice.com).

## Ad Index

Our advertisers make it possible for us to bring Orthotown to you free of charge. Almost all of the advertisers provide telephone numbers in their advertisements for your convenience and fast response. Our advertisers want to hear from you.

PG #	ADVERTISER	PG #	ADVERTISER
033	Burleson Seminars	005	OrthoSynetics
027	Cottonwood Orthodontic Lab	017	People & Practice, LLC
IBC	Dolphin Imaging and Management Solutions	BC	Planmecca, Inc.
003	G&H Orthodontics	039	Precision Plier Service
009	OrthoClassic	023	Preferred Market Solutions, LLC
IFC	Ormco Corporation	013	Shock Doctor
011	OrthoMarketing.net	021	Ziegler Practice Transitions, Ltd.