

How To Generate More Positive Online Reviews

The dental marketplace is rapidly changing, dramatically affecting the marketing strategies necessary to attract new patients, particularly for specialists. Dental specialists are experiencing declining referrals from general and pediatric dentists, as they keep more patients in-house. Meanwhile, managed care (PPO) plans have exploded, with close to 80% of doctors now participating. As a result, it's relatively common for patients to ask for referrals to orthodontists and other specialists who are "on my plan" (in-network). As discussed earlier, corporate dental management companies are growing rapidly, with virtually all of these practices performing dental specialty services in-house.

In the wake of declining referrals, specialists must generate more new patients through internal marketing and direct-to-the-patient marketing efforts. Fortunately, the internet has become a more powerful source in dental marketing efforts. Patients and parents usually perform their own research before making any major purchasing decisions, including which orthodontist or other dental specialist to choose.

The Growing Impact of Online Reviews

Collecting online reviews is an excellent way to begin building your reputation and differentiating your practice from your competitors. Online reviews tell an authentic story about what it's like to be a patient in your practice. Patients saying great things about your practice in online reviews is much more credible than what you say about yourself. In fact, positive feedback on third party review sites is one of the most compelling factors patients use to select a doctor. A recent study found that 88% of consumers said they trust online reviews as much as they trust personal recommendations, up from 79% in 2013 and 72% in 2012.

Getting more positive online reviews isn't easy – there's no question about it. There's lots of apprehension in asking patients for reviews, and for good reason. It can be awkward in some cases and nerve-racking in others, especially since you have little control over what your patients decide to write.

And negative reviews can be damaging. You may have spent years building your reputation, and it's a shame when a negative comment or two tarnishes it. But the truth is you can't please everyone, and a bad review will eventually come. The key is to be prepared. It's extremely difficult to have negative reviews removed, so the best way to defend against them is by proactively buffering your online review pages with positive feedback. That makes a single negative comment look like an outlier, minimizing its impact.

An Effective System

Dr. Leon Klempner is a successful orthodontist and CEO of [People & Practice, LLC](#), a marketing consulting firm he formed to help orthodontists grow their practices.* After years of trying different methods, he developed a program to increase the number of positive online reviews and catch negative feedback before it

goes public.

He says it's important to target patients/parents who love you and ask them to share their experience online. He says many patients feel honored and are happy to share their positive experience. Receiving a compliment provides an excellent opportunity to approach a patient about an online review, turning them into brand ambassadors that promote your practice to friends, family, and neighbors.

It's also important to understand what's happening online regarding your practice. This means monitoring all public reviews across the web for any negative comments, and taking any such conversation offline quickly to limit the damage.

How it Works

In his office, Dr. Klempner offers an online feedback form on two dedicated office iPads, with one in the reception area and the other in the treatment area. He and his staff ask patients and parents throughout the day if they wouldn't mind providing feedback (not "reviews") so they can make their patient experience even better. The form also asks their name, email, and some information about their review site usage. This feedback is collected on a private site, so they get as much information as possible. Whether positive or constructive (negative), all comments are welcome. He also provides the digital intake form on his practice's website.

The positive comments automatically appear prominently on his website, adding credibility, personalization, and authenticity. He follows up with patients and parents who leave positive feedback, with a personal email asking them if they wouldn't mind posting their comments on one of the online review sites (such as Google+, HealthGrades, or RateMDs) from their own computer. He recommends emphasizing Google reviews so that your practice will be awarded gold stars in the Google search. These not only attract the attention of potential new patients, but also improve your local Google search engine ranking.

While it's important to thank patients for providing online reviews, never pay a patient or give them a gift in exchange for their positive review. It's against Google guidelines and not worth the risk of being penalized.

Feedback that is negative, or even not overwhelmingly positive, does not appear on his website. Instead, it instantaneously generates an email alert to the doctor so he can call the patient or parent and address the issue directly. This allows him to successfully deal with the concern privately, minimizing or eliminating negative online reviews.

In this rapidly changing dental environment, it's no longer enough to provide excellent clinical care. Your patients expect that. Rather, you must use the internet to educate prospective patients about your practice and its competitive advantages. Developing a system for getting strong, authentic, favorable online reviews is a critical part of that process, so get started today!

** For more information on Dr. Leon Klempner's [online review services](#), contact him at leon@pplpractice.com.*

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