

Do you know what your patients are saying about your dental practice online? How about ex-employees or your competitors? Who is singing your praises or who is dragging your name through the mud? Either way, you want to be aware of it.

Why Online Reputation Management Matters

Good reputations are not built overnight. It takes time and money to establish a dental practice's good name and community goodwill. The frightening reality is it's comparatively simple for someone to destroy your reputation online. Just one comment or bad review on a blog, Yelp, or other ratings website by a disgruntled former employee, ex-patient, or competitor can make people suspicious. We recommend nominating someone on your team to manage your online reputation.

What is Online Reputation Management (ORM)

Monitoring the status of your brand (or name), evaluating the online conversation about your brand, taking deliberate steps to lessen damage to your brand, and promoting patient satisfaction make up ORM. You can think of ORM as a three-step process:

- 1. Monitor**—Maintain an ongoing system for researching and keeping track of public perception.
- 2. Analyze**—Consider individual feedback, as well as the source, outlet, reach, and timing, to come to a decision about the risk of the comments.
- 3. Influence**—Comment, rebut, or simply ignore what has been said, based on your online reputation manager's evaluation.

Tips for Effective Online Reputation Management

- 1. Assume Everything Will Find its Way Online.** Don't assume anything you say or do will be kept private. Simply assume it will be published somewhere online and potentially available to billions of people.
- 2. Set up Automatic Alerts.** Set up automatic alerts to notify you when your practice is mentioned on a review site, social network, blog, etc. Google Alerts is my favorite FREE tool for this purpose. Google Alerts will e-mail you (at a frequency determined by you) anytime your practice is mentioned online.
- 3. Maximize Positive References to Your Practice Online.** The more positive references to your practice online, the more insignificant the negative reviews will become. It is the average ratings concept. A few examples of how you might increase your positive references online include: encouraging online testimonials or reviews of the patient experience (for those who have Demand Force, Lighthouse PLZ or the like, this is easily done for you); engaging with patients and potential patients on social networks; submitting press releases; running contests; working with charities; being involved in your community; and posting on your Facebook page, your

blog, or tweeting. Doing any of these things will naturally create new positive references to you online.

- 4. Respond to Positive and Negative Feedback.** When it makes sense, respond to both negative and positive feedback online. The goal is to show your commitment to patient satisfaction. However, be particularly careful when responding to negative feedback. Do evaluate the situation before responding, but be prompt when the situation warrants. Remain calm, be honest, and always take the high ground in all interactions with someone who has a poor opinion of the service they received. This should help diffuse the situation before it gets out of hand. Check out Yelp for Business Owners. (You can list yourself as a business on Yelp, unlock your business account so you can respond to online feedback on Yelp, and find excellent information and advice on responding to positive and negative feedback online.)

Marketing is changing. Recently, a marketing guru said, "Marketing is moving from distraction-based to engagement-based." A social networking or community engagement plan is an important component to your marketing plan, and managing your online reputation goes hand in hand with having an online presence. Facebook is the largest of the social networks at this time. We recommend practices have a Facebook fan page. (See page 4.) There are many important reasons to have a fan page for your practice. Significantly, Facebook fan pages are listed so search engines can find your Facebook page, anyone can be a fan of your practice, and all of their friends can see your News Feed. This increases your reach tremendously and humanizes your brand (practice) for the larger community. If you have a personal Facebook profile, it is private, will not be indexed, and you have to accept people as your "friends" for them to review information about you. If you have a personal profile on a social networking site, do not mix your business relationships with your personal relationships.

All of us use the Internet to find out about people, products, services, specials, and pricing. This method of finding information is not going away. It is a new way of marketing, it is free, and it increases your practice's visibility!! We encourage you to participate and be prudent and knowledgeable. Assign someone on your team to be your online reputation manager and accountable for checking what is being said about you and your practice. Most importantly, get out there, engage with the larger community, and let people know about you and your practice!

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Social Networking & Online Reputation Management

Creating a Facebook Fan Page

To create a Facebook fan page, go to: www.facebook.com/pages/create.php.

From there, click on "brand, product, or organization." Then select "professional service" from the drop down menu. We highly recommend the owner of the practice set up the Facebook fan page. Whoever creates the fan page is FOREVER attached to it and FOREVER has access to the page. When a fan page is created by an employee, there could be a problem when the employee leaves your practice.

To create a business listing on Yelp, review their online guide at www.yelp.com/business. Follow the steps to set up your practice, and following a short wait on approval for your listing, unlock your listing so you can participate and comment on reviews regarding your practice.



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