

Finding Your Voice on the Web: Why Online Profiles & Patient Reviews Can't Be Ignored

by Naomi Cooper, Chief Marketing Consultant, Pride Institute

A website is a certainly a key component of any dental practice marketing plan. And search engine optimization, which enables your website to rank higher in search engine results also an important strategy. But the unsung hero in today's world of online marketing is most certainly the burgeoning field of online reputation management.

While many dentists sense that something should be done about their web presence above and beyond building their own website, most aren't sure exactly what kind of action to take. In fact, many dentists don't know what results come up if they Google their own name – or that of their practice, city and state. Is there anything positive that shows up anywhere but your own website? Are there any positive reviews from patients? Negative ones?

Dental practices across the country are facing the challenge of figuring out how to take charge of telling their own story online. For some, glowing reviews from satisfied patients have increased the effectiveness of their word of mouth marketing. For others, such as those who have moved their practice location, bought into a practice after an extended associateship, or changed their name due to a change in marital status, incorrect or confusing information often abounds. The fact that that inaccurate, disparaging or simply



incomplete information comes up when a dentist's name is searched can be not only very frustrating but also can be a major hurdle to overcome in winning over prospective new patients who are searching for that practice online.

Imagine that when a dentist leaves an associateship to raise her young children and buys her own practice nearby years later, her former employer still dominates the search results for her name. Why? They had conveniently forgotten to remove her bio from their website for all those years, so the search engine algorithms still found that information current and relevant. In fact, because search engines tend to value information more the longer it's been in circulation, they found the outdated bio more relevant than the information on her own up-to-date website.

In another scenario, a patient writes a disparaging review about a dentist. The dentist sues the patient and the website where the review was posted. In this real-life case, which recently played out in the California courts, a dentist who filed a defamation case over unflattering reviews on Yelp.com was ordered to pay \$80,000 in attorney fees.

The difficult news is that you can't really fight what others choose to say about you online. The good news is that by creating original material about yourself online, you can take control of the online narrative and effectively choose the story that you want to tell about your practice. Even if you're unfortunate enough to have had an unflattering review written about you, if you enable the generation of new, interesting, compelling and relevant content about yourself all over the web, eventually the negative material will be pushed so far down in the search results that it will never be seen.

Strategies to help dentists manage their online reputations:

- **Update Your Practice Website**

There are a variety of companies that specifically serve the dental profession and create robust, interactive dental practice websites with features and functionality that will make your marketing and patient communication process that much easier. If your practice website is more than a couple of years old, you may want to look at some of the newer sites out there. Dental office websites have come a long way – even just since the late 00's.

- **Complete Your Google Places Page and Personal Google Profile**

Go to www.places.google.com and www.profiles.google.com to create your personal profile and to claim your dental practice's business/place page. Plus, check out

GetListed.org to find out more about all of the other online business profiles you can claim.

- **Get Reviewed**

Ask loyal, long-time patients to write positive reviews about you on Google, Yelp, Yahoo and Bing. These “prophylactic reviews” protect and insulate you from future potential negative reviews. It’s important to note that people should not create fake profiles and/or have staff or immediate family post reviews about you. These should be legitimate, credible reviews from real patients.

- **Jump on the Social Media Bandwagon Get Social**

Create a Facebook page, Twitter account, YouTube channel and blog. And doctors, take note: you don’t have to do it all yourself. Many of the same companies that offer website development or search engine optimization can also help establish and maintain your practice’s social media presence.

- **Take Control of Your Online Reputation**

To take it to the next level, hire an online reputation management company, like Reputation Defenders (www.reputation.com) or My Personal Public Relations (www.mypersonalpublicrelations.com) to help generate positive content online about you and your practice.

According to Quantcast.com, 150 million people visit Google.com each month, with another 150 million visiting Yahoo and Bing. The reality is that in today’s world, online search is king. Couple this reality with the fact that Google confirms that 20% of all searches have local intent, and it’s easy to see that now is the time to take control of your dental practice’s online reputation – before someone else does!

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