

# Best Practices for Online Reviews

by Jason T. Lipscomb, DDS

Like it or not, we live in a world of reviews. The online review process has brought democratization to a new level. Anyone with a computer or smart phone can review just about anything. Reviews have even gone viral. This whole review process has not gone unnoticed by the dental community. Online reviews have driven some dental practices to great success, while others have succumbed to the wrath of negative reviews. Success or not, online reviews will affect your practice.

In my practice, I have stopped using most conventional marketing. Studies have increasingly shown that the yellow phone book and display ads are on their way out.<sup>1</sup> It is just too convenient for those with smartphones to find what they want quickly. Studies have also shown that people are seeking recommendations from the masses instead of what is fed to them.<sup>2</sup> An online listing with multiple reviews from real people will carry much more weight than a phonebook ad with no real-world recommendations.

1. <http://www.emarketer.com/Article.aspx?R=1008462&dsNav=Rpp:25, Ro:3, Ni:800>
2. <http://www.marketingcharts.com/interactive/most-consumers-read-and-rely-on-online-reviews-companies-must-adjust-2234/deloitte-consumer-review-purchase-influence.jpg/>

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## Tracking Your Reputation

by Fred Joyal

Tracking your reputation should be a daily part of your practice. The fact is, there are hundreds of Web sites that could potentially be displaying information or reviews about your practice, and these generally fall into three categories: directory sites, review sites and social media. All of these contribute to your SEO, and a few key sites are widely used by Internet-savvy consumers to assess your business.

I rank them in this order of gravity and impact: At the top, Google and Yelp have almost equal weight; Facebook is the next tier down (your business page, not your personal profile, which search engines can't see); then significantly below that are Twitter, CitySearch, Dr. Oogle, LinkedIn and Angie's List, as well as several others that operate more locally.

When it comes to negative reviews, I recommend you always respond online. As the business owner, you can do that. But don't be defensive; take the tack of being concerned, apologetic, and whenever possible, add positive information about your practice. And you should also respond to positive reviews. Don't just leave them without a comment from you. Thank the reviewer, express your appreciation for the nice comments about you, and be personal. Consumers will read these and see you as someone dialed in to the pulse of your practice, and they will find that appealing.

My company 1-800-Dentist recently launched a tool that simplifies the monitoring process for you. It's called ReputationMonitor, and for a low monthly cost it looks everywhere on the Internet for listings, comments and reviews about your practice, and puts them all into a simple dashboard, so that in five or 10 minutes a day you can stay current with what the online word is on you. For more info, call 855-225-5231 or visit [www.1800dentist.com/rm](http://www.1800dentist.com/rm).



ReputationMonitor®

The truth is, even a review from a person you hardly know will influence your decision-making. This is truly the online age and we are all susceptible to a groupthink attitude. It takes a village to influence your spending and decision-making habits.

For those of you who don't know, reviews can be found all over the Web. When we formed our company, Social Media for Dentists (<http://www.facebook.com/socialmediadentist>) back in 2009, we could see the writing was on the wall. Consumers were looking for recommendations from many places on the Web. They were talking to their friends on Facebook, closely studying reviews on Google, and logging their favorite places on Yelp. Their experiences were becoming a virtual cascade of recommendations. If you think that you don't have reviews or mentions of your business online, you are sadly mistaken. I encourage all dentists to take a look around online and do a Google search on yourself. You might be surprised what you find!

### Best Practices for Online Reviews

1. It is imperative that you institute an online review process in your office. This needs to be an everyday part of how you do business. Not having a body of reviews can mean that you are partly invisible online. You have to be found online in this day and age. A simple listing in the phonebook just won't cut it anymore. More and more consumers are looking to listings and reviews on sites like Google. These listings are now translating into consumers finding you on their smartphones. Did you know that the new Apple voice automation system, Siri, pulls listings from Yelp? You have probably seen the commercials many times, and if users ask Siri to find a dentist, they will probably see the dentist on Yelp with the most reviews.

Many workplaces block access to a lot of the Internet, so workers are pulling out their smartphones to find local businesses online. Will they be able to find your dental office? If they do, will you have the reviews to influence their decision?

2. The review process must be easy. It is much easier to get a bad review than it is to gain a good one. Sites like Google, Yelp and Citysearch try to make the review process an easy one, but the potential reviewer will still face some roadblocks. Google requires you to have a Google account to leave a review. The simple process of setting up an account may deter many people from leaving a review, unless they are angry or dissatisfied. The old adage goes that a person who is dissatisfied will tell dozens of people about bad service, while a happy customer might only tell a few. This is definitely true on the Internet. People who are angry with you will stop at nothing to leave a bad review. They will sign up for multiple accounts just to tell you off. So if you think implementing a system of reviews in your office will only lead to bad reviews, well, you already have that system in place.

Making the process easier for your patients will ultimately make it simpler to gather good reviews. I use a system called Demandforce in my office. It integrates with my practice software and automates the review process, making it easy for the patient to leave reviews. I have been able to gather more than 500 positive reviews since implementing this software because it removes the roadblocks. I have recently found some great iPad and iPhone apps that make the review process quite easy. (E-mail me to find out some of my secrets!) You work hard to create a following on Facebook, why not allow them to help you build up a healthy amount of great reviews?

3. Your reviews can help your Google ranking. Now, your Google rank comes from hundreds of factors. The local portion often derives strength from citations. Citations are any mention of your name, address and phone number (NAP). The more mentions of your NAP across the Web, the more positive influence on your rank. Reviews are often considered a part of your citation count, therefore more reviews equal more citations. This is a very simplified version of what actually happens, but a good body of reviews can help!

4. The best way to overcome bad reviews is to overcome them with good reviews. Your reviews are your online reputation. If someone finds you online and you only have two negative reviews, then that is your reputation. You look bad. Now if someone finds you online and you have 50 positive reviews and 2 bad reviews, you look pretty good. Imagine that you are buying a TV on BestBuy.com. You are shopping around for the best deal and perusing the reviews. Do any of those TVs have all positive reviews? Probably not. Would a TV with 200 positive reviews and 20 bad reviews deter you from buying that TV? Probably not. As rational adults, we know that not everyone is perfect and we also know that we cannot please 100 percent of the population all the time. The same goes for a dental practice.

Having a large body of reviews is the best online insurance policy you can have. Even the best dentist in the world will probably get a bad review from time to time; just don't let it be your only entry for your online reputation.

There have been recent studies that show a peppering of negative reviews can give an air of authenticity.<sup>3</sup> Much of the population is becoming more Internet savvy and they are starting to learn how to spot a fake. Too many positive reviews can sometimes come off fake. So if I get a bad review every once in a while about "waiting too long," or "Dr. Lipscomb is losing his hair," I don't worry about it. It will make me look like the real person that I am.

5. Reviews have to be real! Many of you are probably thinking, "Hey, I can write my own reviews." Don't do it! There have been several cases where doctors have been caught writing their own fake reviews on Google and facing the consequences.<sup>4</sup> The consequences can range from fines, dental board discipline or even convictions of fraud. Just don't do it! Reviews are important, but they are not worth damaging your business over.

Be wary of SEO companies that leave fake reviews on your behalf. You will still be ultimately responsible for those reviews and might be removed from Google permanently! Simply find your reviews on Google and click on the reviewers screen name. If they have reviewed five dentists in one day, often in different states, they are likely fake. Don't ever think that you will sneak something past Google.

6. Learn the terms of service for encouraging reviews. Many sites that collect reviews, like Yelp, prohibit you from incentivizing reviews. In other words, they don't allow you to pay or gift your way into getting reviews. Paying for reviews can lead to the same consequences as writing fake reviews.

*"I encourage all dentists to take a look around online and do a Google search on yourself. You might be surprised what you find!"*

3. <http://www.clickz.com/clickz/column/1725342/reasons-not-fear-negative-reviews>

4. <http://paidcontent.org/2011/03/17/419-fic-fines-company-for-bogus-online-reviews/>

7. One of the newest trends in dental reviews is “owning” the online reviews from your patients. Some companies offer services that will have your patients sign disclosure agreements saying that you own any of their online reviews. Anything negative said about your business will result in some legal action. Some legal experts say that many of these cases are unenforceable and may violate free speech.

Like I said before, reviews should be authentic. They gain their power by utilizing free speech in order to shed a positive light on your business. Think about the image you are projecting when you have a patient sign away the right to review your business. I have spoken to several attorneys and successfully battling online malfeasance is an expensive and often unsuccessful task.<sup>5</sup>

8. Dealing with bad reviews can be a tricky task. My favorite method is to create a nice body of positive reviews and let them do the fighting for me. Legal action should always be a last resort. Always consider the placement of the bad review. Can anyone see it in the first place? There have been many cases where a single negative review that probably would have disappeared into the ether was given power by the person being reviewed. Overreacting to a bad review can sometimes give it more visibility than it actually had in the first place.

Try to turn around a bad review by reacting in person. Solve the problem over the phone and you might be surprised what happens. I have seen many reviews where the person reacted by calling the reviewer and making it right. Sometimes the reviewer removed the review or added an addendum praising the business for their prompt response. That looks very appealing to the potential patient! Some reviewers just want their voice to be heard.

Vigilance is the next best weapon against bad reviews. You have to know where to find your reviews in order to address them. Set up a free Google alert for your business and your name. This simple alert will send you an e-mail whenever your name is mentioned on the Web. Report a review if it is untrue or slanderous. Google will remove reviews that contain this content.

Think of reviews as a tool for your practice, not a hindrance. They can bring you great success! Help out other small businesses in the area by leaving reviews for them. The goodwill you spread might just return back to you! ■

5. <http://www.cybertriallawyer.com/>

## Author's Bio

**Dr. Jason T. Lipscomb** is a general dentist who operates two practices in Virginia. He specializes in helping dentists expand their practices through the use of social media. Jason started Social Media for Dentists to help dentists master social media and attract new patients by gaining exposure online. To learn more about creating successful social media and Internet marketing strategies for your practice, visit Lipscomb's Web sites, [www.socialmediadentist.com](http://www.socialmediadentist.com) or [www.lipscombdentist.com](http://www.lipscombdentist.com), and at @socialmediadent on Twitter.

