

There was a time that has long since passed when one could ignore online ratings and believe they did not matter. That's not the case these days. You want to strive for a five-star rating, but not because this is important to attract new patients to your practice. Rather, this is your patients' reflection of who you are, and it is being processed through a vehicle known as online reviews. Ratings can no longer be ignored: Embrace the technology, because it will be present for the foreseeable future.

How should one manage their online review profile? The first step is to take ownership. Always remember what a special privilege it is to practice dentistry. Be sure that this sentiment is conveyed throughout your office so patients know that you feel this way. Every day you transform lives through the art of dentistry, so engage with your patients. Your practice is built not only on the beautiful and functional smiles you create but also on the trust the patients have in you. You are "selling" your trust in addition to the treatment, and this is what attracts new patients. When patients place their trust in you by accepting a treatment plan, that is a perfect time to ask for a review. Ask for thorough and honest comments,

inviting the patient to tell their story and experiences with you. Remember, you can ask for reviews at any time—Do not wait until the end of treatment only, though that is also an appropriate moment. When sharing reviews, request that your patients post them on the sites most pertinent to your practice, taking geographic location into account when needed.

It is then very important to respond to the reviews: Be sure to receive notifications of new reviews so you can reply with a personal comment. I do believe there is an aspect of reality in reviews and that they are valuable to patients; having a lot of five-star reviews that do not share patients' actual experiences is not helpful. It can take about 5 years to build a strong library of reviews that allows patients to learn about you and your practice.

The scary aspect of the online world is that there is always the possibility of malicious and negative reviews. Be sure to respond online to these reviews as well and to report malicious reviews. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to remove a review unless it is vulgar.

What do we do about negative reviews? The first step is to digest the

review thoroughly and understand the patient's point of view. There are times when we are misperceived, and the patient's experience is not what we clinicians thought it was. There are also times when patients are overwhelmed and will react with a negative review rather than dealing with you directly. The second step is to pick up the phone and call the patient. If you strive for excellence, you will most likely take the negative review personally, and this step lets your patient know how you feel: If you believe the review is unfair, you can ask the patient to take it down or edit it for an accurate description of the experience. This conversation presents an opportunity to discuss the patient's actual concerns, move treatment goals forward, and resolve the negative review.

If this sounds like you should deal with reviews the same way you deal with other confrontations in life and in your practice, that is exactly the point. Embrace the process, continue to strive for excellence, and own your online profile the same way you manage every detail of your practice.

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