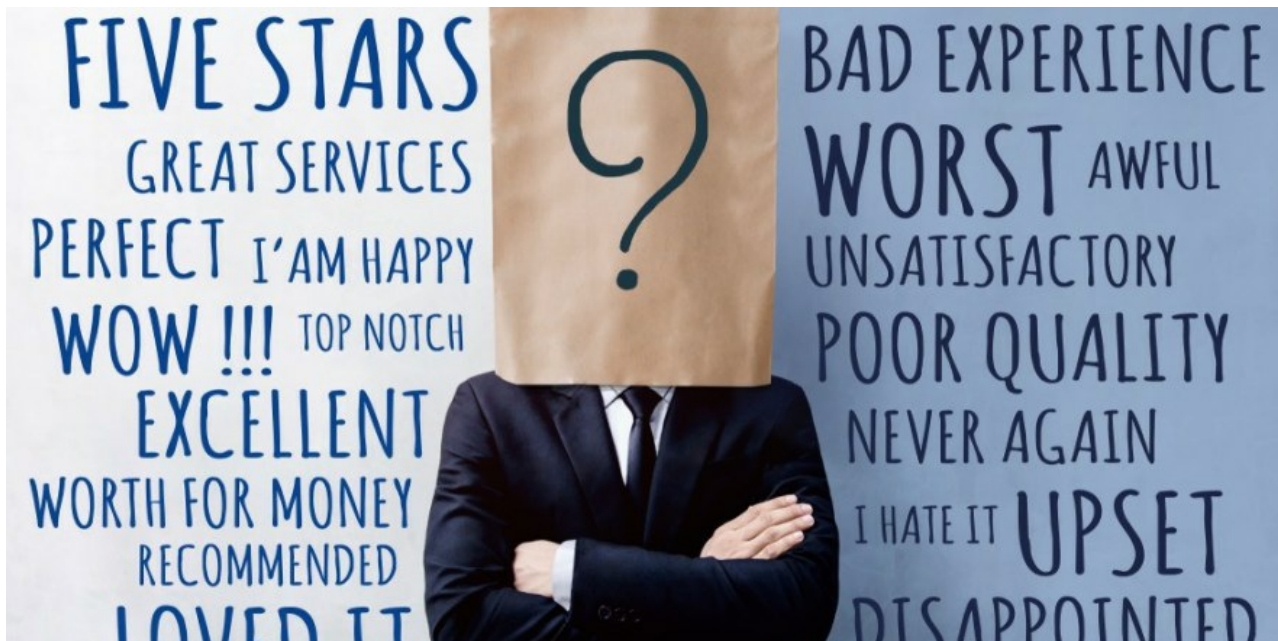


Your Online Reputation

aestheticmedicalpractitioner.com.au/features/marketing/your-online-reputation

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New York marketing guru Wendy Lewis explains the importance of being vigilant in maintaining your online brand.

Consumers can rate almost everything online today: books, salons, florists, hotels, restaurants—and even doctors.

Whereas reviews for hotels tend to focus on location, amenities, comfort, and price, doctor ratings often focus on a long list of issues that are more subjective. These may include waiting times, scheduling snafus, décor, fees, and bedside manner, often more than the results and outcomes of treatments and services.

The landscape of aesthetic medicine has changed radically. Patients are more plugged in and command a high level of electronic connectivity from their healthcare providers. Aesthetic patients are also more demanding, have high expectations, and all too frequently change their doctors and go clinic shopping, for a lot of reasons, like better service, lower costs, location, likeability, or even improved connectivity.

Without a doubt, the decks are stacked against practitioners because they are greatly limited in how they can respond to public posts. Online interactions with patients about their medical treatment and care in your clinic, such as e-mail exchanges, are widely accepted. However, these conversations should never occur on a social networking platform or open forum.

The idea of online reputation and reviews is relatively new to medicine, but it is rapidly taking on increasing importance. Social media and online reviews are now considered critical success factors for aesthetic practitioners as well as all medical practices in light of the new consumer behavior and the value reviews have taken on. They are crucial tools for keeping your practice on the cutting edge.

Monitoring Your Brand Online

Relying solely on word-of-mouth marketing just will not cut it anymore. You need to reach new patients where they are. Review and rating sites rely on public information to populate their profiles, and your profile will exist whether you initiate it or not. In fact, you need to be vigilant because in many cases, public information is wrong or outdated, and the range of possible errors is vast. Your clinic may be mislabeled or categorized incorrectly, the name may be spelled wrong, qualifications may be incorrect, and even the location may be wrong.

All of these errors can result in lost patients and a slump in revenue through no fault of your own.

Updating Online Listings

Most rating and review sites allow you to claim your information and make updates. Hunt down every listing that you can. You want all the information about your practice to be as accurate and up to date as possible. Whenever possible, add hyperlinks to your website and social pages. Some sites require the physician to approve any changes and may even ask for your license number to verify your identity. Having accurate listings does several important things for your clinic. It helps improve your website's ranking on search engines and increases the prominence of your placement in online searches. It also allows you to monitor what is being said about your practice so that you can respond or mitigate any negative comments.

The process of owning your listings will take some work in the beginning, but it will be worth it when your online reputation improves and new patients contact you for an appointment.

Another tactic is to look into patient communities that include listings of clinics and practitioners who see patients for these specific conditions. For example, if you are a dermatologist or specialize in skin treatments, you may look at listing your practice on local, regional, or national resources for patients with common skin-related conditions like acne, rosacea, hair loss, and psoriasis.

Ratings and Reviews

A decade or so ago, one unhappy patient might tell a few of her friends about her doctor or complain about a less than perfect experience. Today, one unhappy patient can literally broadcast her displeasure to all of her fans and followers in a matter of seconds,

and that can spread like flesh-eating bacteria all over the planet. Those fans and followers can, in turn, share this displeasure with their own fans and followers, and the end result can be gut wrenching for the practitioner. Once that unhappy patient presses the send button, her message is out there, and it is virtually indelible. All it takes is one person to share it, and it can take on a life of its own.

Your current and future patients are online reading what others have to say about you. The challenge is that a small number of people may be influencing what others think of you. To stay vigilant, you must listen to what people are saying about you and be a part of this conversation. You also need to encourage your happy patients to post reviews in an ethical way.

Practitioners are understandably nervous about the impact of negative reviews. As long as your reviews are not overwhelmingly negative, you may be in fine standing. It is not until a physician's overall rating falls to two and three stars out of five stars that patient preference for that provider may begin to decline significantly.

Reputation Management Strategies

If patient growth is a primary objective for your practice, and it should be, managing online reviews and ratings requires attention. Having accurate listings, engaging in the online conversation about your practice,

building your online presence, and increasing reviews may be some of the most important things your practice can do to protect your reputation.

Physician management of negative online content can take many forms. Some approaches help distill an unflattering post, while others can backfire and escalate a situation. The last thing you want to do is to stimulate one comment and have it spread into a chain of like-minded comments.

Assign a staff member to watch what is being posted on all relevant sites and social networking platforms.

Using an external monitoring service can also help alert you to any new developments, such as reposts of negative content and any derivative attacks that appear in response, so you can be proactive. As you check regularly on the review sites for new postings, be careful not to respond in a way that acknowledges a doctor-patient relationship.

Consumers are skeptical of reviews and look for red flags. You can make it worse by engaging with them in a public forum. If you feel compelled to reply, proceed with caution as a professional. Anyone who is reading these reviews is judging whether you are the kind of doctor they want to go to. Do not take risks online for all the world to see.

If you think a response is needed, it should be very straightforward, like "Thank you for expressing your concerns. Please be so kind as to contact our office so we can discuss this with you further. Patient satisfaction is our number one goal." Rather than the

practitioner responding, it is wise to have a staff member be the point person. For less than four- or five-star reviews, try to take the conversation offline. Showing your willingness to be responsive can be almost as powerful as a positive review. In this way, you have demonstrated that you stand behind your reputation and pay attention to situations flagged in public forums. You can then privately try to resolve the conflict, assuming that the post is actually a real patient with a valid issue.

Common complaints on rating sites often center on long waiting times, a rushed staff, the doctor did not spend enough time, the feeling that the practice was too busy, and the ubiquitous bedside manner. You could try to distill the commentary about long waits and short visits with a statement, such as, "We are among only a few aesthetic practices in the area, and we pride ourselves on providing quality care to all of our patients." Do not be defensive, which can be misconstrued as arrogance.

There is always a risk of negative reviews appearing, so devise a strategy for how to respond to these critiques. It is important to listen to your patients and help resolve any negative experiences they may have had with you. When a negative comment is received, respond quickly to meet it head on. It may feel like an attack against you personally and/or your clinic. Take a deep breath before you address it. First assess the nature of the comment and respond only in a constructive way, if at all. Responding quickly is important, but it is equally wise to never respond in the heat of the moment when you are angry. Look at the situation from your perspective and that of the customer to give a balanced response.

Assign a staff member to monitor all of your social media sites to note any negative posts that were not posted by an actual patient. If you are the victim of a fake review or bogus anonymous comment, and this happens often, try to take the conversation offline and address it head on. On Facebook at least, you can delete the comment, ban the user from posting again, and report it as spam or inappropriate content.

Dealing with negative Facebook Posts and tweets

Negative comments or bogus posts are always a possibility on social media. These can be from random strangers, spammers, and competitive web marketing companies. In some cases, unfortunately, off-color comments may be from actual patients. The fear of negative comments can be a tremendous deterrent for some practitioners to become active in online forums.

The good news, however, is that you have the ability to control who posts on your wall, anything can be removed, and the user can be blocked and reported to Facebook. However, I would urge you to think twice before you do that unless it is abusive or fake. If the post is a comment about pricing or something else benign, you may want to address it—without acknowledging a doctor-patient relationship. When you get rid of it, you just make someone mad. If you delete it on Facebook, which is the only platform you can really do that easily, the same person who may now be even more ticked off at you, can post it on Yelp, or create a new Facebook account and post it again on Facebook.

You may not actually be putting the fire out. Try to take the matter offline and urge the poster to contact the clinic by using Facebook Messenger, e-mail, or phone. This also shows your fans that the clinic is interested in patient care.

On Twitter you have no control at all, so if you see a negative tweet, it is generally best to leave it alone. The risk of responding may be worse than leaving it because Twitter is real time, and if you do not respond in 3 minutes, it is out there. You can try to send a direct message to the Twitter user, which is private, to take it offline.

In my experience, it is entirely possible to convert unhappy customers to brand advocates if complaints are handled swiftly and proficiently. Patients want to know that you care about them.

Stay Calm and Carry On

In reality, it is impossible to have 100% happy patients despite your best efforts. Regrettably, ratings sites and social media platforms have become the obvious places for patients and customers to vent and air their grievances. They are the first port of call for spite-based attacks on your professional reputation, and unfortunately, some patients use these platforms as a weapon.

No matter how good you are as a practitioner, you are bound to get some snide remarks about your fees and complaints about your approach or attitude at some point. It is almost impossible not to, especially if you have a busy practice. The more patients you treat, the higher are the odds of having some unhappy campers in the bunch.

It can be difficult to stay calm when you read what people are writing about you online. The worst thing you can do is to react in a defensive or aggressive manner. Try to stay rational, and reasonable, even when the patient is completely unreasonable. Whenever possible, keep emotions out of it. As a licensed healthcare professional, you do not share the privilege of overreacting with your patients. **AMP**

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SEVEN ESSENTIAL STEPS TO CHECK YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

1. Find and own your online listings on top rating and review sites.
2. Update and complete all your online listings.
3. Become an active participant in the rating and review process.
4. Set up Google and Yahoo alerts for your name and clinic names, including obvious misspelled versions to monitor the web for unflattering posts and mentions.
5. Be proactive about engaging with patients to encourage them to post reviews on the sites that matter to your practice.
6. Take good care of patients and resolve conflicts early.
7. If or when they arise, try to bury negative comments with positive content so that these posts are not the first thing that comes up.