Word-of-mouth 2.0

Dr Lorne Lavine talks about how leveraging your online reputation can help you to attract new patients

I t is an undisputed fact that in the world of dentistry, no amount of expensive advertising or fancy marketing can beat the power of word-of-mouth referrals from your satisfied patients. What your patients say about you is the ultimate driver of business success.

Today, consumers increasingly turn to the internet to locate and select a dental practice. Understanding this phenomenon and using the right tools will help you create and maintain the most relevant, valuable practice builder you’ll ever have: the experience and feedback of your own patients, shared with millions of prospective patients actively seeking a new dental practice. It’s up to you to choose: will your online reputation consist of a single thread of random gossip, or will it become your most valued asset, carefully managed and nurtured to give you the ultimate return on your investment?

Your online reputation

You know in the growing world of online reviews, consumers want and expect to find the local user information they seek, whether it’s a great Italian restaurant or a top-notch cosmetic dental practice. As the internet has come of age, our universal search results are here to stay. Our patience says about your practice. Google has this one of two ways: passively or actively.

The passive approach – You can hope the patients who visit your practice have the wherewithal to create a Google account, find your Google profile, and submit a review. This requires time and effort on your patients’ part, and staff time to inform patients and promote the process. Even if your staff is dedicated to making your patients aware of the online review process, you can only hope they remember to follow through once they go back to their busy schedules at home and work. If history is any guide, a passive approach will result in one or two reviews posted over the course of several months.

The proactive approach – Today, the only integrated approach to proactively managing your online reputation in Google is through companies such as Demandforce. This proactive approach results in dozens of reviews being posted to your profile every month.

Whether you opt to take a passive approach or one of a proactive approach to build your online reputation, I highly recommend you take charge to ensure it accurately reflects and therefore benefits your practice. Your online reputation is your business and those practices that realise it early on will have a significant head start over their peers.

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Bread and butter

Solicted or not, online reviews are here to stay. Our patients’ satisfaction and their resulting word-of-mouth referrals will always be our bread and butter; only the serving plate has changed. What are you doing to shape your online reputation? Have you “Googled” your practice or your competitors lately?

Dr Lorne Lavine will be speaking at the British Academy’s sixth Annual Conference, titled ‘The Future of Dentistry’ On 19 to 21 November 2009 at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre (EICC). To reserve your place, visit www.ited.org or contact Sury Rowlands on 0207 612 4166 or by emailing info@ited.org.

About the author

Dr Lorne Lavine is founder and president of Dental Technology Consultants, focusing on the sophisticated needs of the dental community. A consultant and integrator with extensive hands-on experience with software technology in dentistry, he writes for many well-known industry publications, lectures widely, and is the UK’s first dental technology consultant.