

Social Media & Technology

Reputation Marketing: Getting the Visibility and Credibility Needed to Be Found Online

by Len Tau, DMD



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Education in General Dentistry at UMDNJ in Somerdale, N.J. Dr. Tau has had extensive training in cosmetic and reconstructive dentistry, including Invisalign.

In recent years Dr. Tau has focused his attention on the process of practice marketing, using tools that have not historically been available. His development of iSocial Reviews (now a part of BirdEye) has grown out of that intensive study. Dr. Tau consults with hundreds of dentists around the country, particularly in the area of reputation marketing. He can be reached at **215-292-2100** or drlentau@pcde.com.

Using the power of the Internet has become one of the biggest avenues that dentists look to in attracting new patients, after direct word-of-mouth referrals from existing patients. In order to succeed in the race to the top of a Google search, your practice needs both visibility and credibility, two different things that people often confuse. The easiest way to achieve both is to focus on reputation marketing, the process of getting your happy patients to talk about you online.

I have been teaching this terminology to dentists for years in my various seminars across the country. Reputation management has always meant the process of getting negative reviews off the first page of Google; I like to refer to it as reverse Search Engine Optimization (SEO). If online marketing companies tell you they will handle this kind of reputation



management, they are not focused on the most valuable asset in marketing: your happy patients.

Your happy patients are the strongest voice your practice has, and they are more than willing to share their experience with others. You just need to give them the ability to use that voice, as many have no idea how to leave a review for your practice online. Let's focus our attention on promoting your most valuable asset, your online reputation, to get that visibility and credibility that both you and Google are looking for.

There are 3 steps to reputation marketing: getting found; getting found in a compelling way; and monitoring and protecting your online reputation. For the purpose of this article I am going to focus on the first 2 steps: getting found (or visibility), and getting found in a compelling way (or credibility).

First and foremost, you need to understand how important online reputation is. A 2017 Bright Local survey revealed that 85% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations; 93% of consumers read online reviews to

determine whether a local business is a good business; and 68% of consumers say that positive online reviews make them trust a business more. It's especially true in our space that if patients trust you, they are going to buy from you.

In the past, a patient who was referred to a dentist would just call the office and schedule an appointment. Now 87% of patients search online to find information about a practice, and 52% of the time they are looking at the practice's online reviews. Even if you are a "word of mouth" practice, if you ignore your online reputation, you are going to become less and less credible online.

Becoming visible means being found online. A local Google search—a search on "dentist Philadelphia," for example—will bring up a page with 1 or 2 paid ads, then a map with 3 sites marked, then detailed listings for those 3 sites (called the "map pack" or the "3-pack"), and then the rest of the results Google's algorithm found (called the organic results). Clearly, being highlighted in the map pack thrusts your practice into the patient's awareness and is the goal to shoot for.

Two of the most important criteria Google uses for ranking in the local map pack are consistent citations and online reviews. Before you spend lots of money on Google Adwords, social media, or even display advertising, you have to have a decent foundation of online reviews to get the best return on your investment.

Citations are the digital equivalent of the phone book; but it is not enough to be listed on only a couple of sites. Any mention of a business, by name, address, and phone number (NAP), on a website (other than the business's own), constitutes a citation. And the more places your business is cited—correctly and consistently—the more trust Google will have in your business, and the higher your business will generally rank in the race to get into the map pack.

If the citations also include a reference to your website (NAPW), that's even better—one more data point that helps the search engines connect to your business—but that isn't needed for the citation to count in the rankings. The value of a citation is the mention of your business; the more mentions, the more prominent your business appears to Google.

Note that your NAP needs to be consistent on all the sites in order for Google to trust your business. You want to make sure you have one and only one accurate listing on each of the sites. But don't worry about abbreviations (Suite vs. Ste, Road vs. Rd, New York vs. NY), as the major search engines are able to figure out what they mean. Once your citations are consistent, you become a more trustworthy business and become visible to those searching for a dentist in your area.

Now that you have achieved visibility, we need to focus on making you more credible. The easiest way to be found in a compelling way is to have more reviews than your competitors. There are many review sites, but the most important ones

that you should be focusing your attention on are Google, Facebook, Healthgrades and (depending on your location) Yelp.

Patients are more than happy to provide feedback about their experiences, and in most cases that feedback will be positive for your office, but you have to make it easy for them to do it. Simply asking for a review is not going to work in the long term, as your team has other things to do in the office, and patients have no idea how to do it, or even what to write. The best way to make it easy for your patients is to automate the process of sending review requests to them via text message.

Take a look at your mobile phone and see how many unread text messages you have, compared to how many unread emails you have in your inbox. I would bet that you have very few unread text messages—which is why that is the best avenue for the patient to receive the correspondence. By automating the process, you send the message to all patients within a certain period of time after they have been checked out of your practice management software.

Birdeye, an online reputation marketing company whose dental division I run, provides this service for your office, in addition to claiming your local citations. When the patients receive the text message on an Android phone, it directs them to your Google page to write a positive review (because every Android user automatically gets a Google or Gmail account). On an iPhone, we direct them to any 3 review sites of your choice. (I use Google, Facebook, and Healthgrades for my practice.) When patients click on Google, we open up the stars for them to provide a review on your Google My Business page. Once the review is left, you are able to cross-post the review to your social media sites and even your website. We currently automate the process to about 98% of the practice management software on the market.

A word of caution here for practices using iPads or tablets in their offices to try and collect online reviews while patients are on site: Google can see the IP address of where the review is coming from, and it's now against Yelp's policy to ask for reviews. So if Google notices a run of reviews coming from your practice IP, those reviews could get flagged as spam—and never published. And if Yelp catches wind of you soliciting reviews, you could watch not only your reviews but also your whole practice being moved to the Not Recommended section.

As you add more reviews to your Google My Business listing, you become a more credible office. That, combined now with the visibility you achieved through having consistent citations, gives you a much greater chance of being in the local 3-pack when a potential patient looks online for a dentist in your area. By giving your enthusiastic and satisfied patients an outlet to talk about your office online, you can use your most valuable asset, your happy patients, to acquire more new patients; and you will see the ROI of your other online marketing increase as well. It's very simple: your reputation matters. Focus on reputation marketing and you are destined to be successful. ■