



Bogeyman or best marketing tool ever?

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Many dentists are **TERRIFIED** of **social media** because they think that opening themselves up to social networking makes them vulnerable to a negative review at the hands of a disgruntled or unreasonable patient. But by refusing to participate, they do not actually prevent any possibility of that happening and they deprive themselves of one of the most powerful and relevant tools in existence.

The key to prospering in today's rapidly changing market is to harness the power of social media rather than being intimidated by it. If you participate, you can manage and control the information available. By doing so, you can increase your practice's positive visibility in the community.

Here are six good reasons why you should stop ignoring social media, and instead make it your workhorse:

- ① You exist in the same space as your patients.
- ② You become more than a Web address.
- ③ You can connect with your patients directly using their preferred mode of communication.
- ④ You can create a community that supports you and encourages others to trust you. This leads to prequalified new patients.
- ⑤ You can answer questions and address issues that arise. These issues, by the way, will exist and surface even if you are hiding your head in the sand.
- ⑥ You can manage your reputation.

That last point is perhaps the most important. Rare is

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the practice that has zero negative reviews. But if you position yourself correctly, you will be more than able to take control of the situation and minimize any potential damage. In fact, you just might be able to turn dross into gold!

There are three steps to take when it comes to managing your online reputation.

First, you have to expect that people will be talking about you (especially if you are marketing yourself properly), and that the talk simply cannot be positive all of the time. You cannot please every single person on any given day. People have been known to post bad reviews simply because they disliked the movie that was playing on the overhead television during their treatment.

Second, you need to learn from every bit of information that comes your way via social media — both the good and the bad. These are your patients, their families, and their friends. They are showing what they like and do not like about you. This is incredibly valuable data, and tells you when you hit the mark and in what areas you need to improve.

Third, you have to dilute any negative reviews by addressing them openly, and (if you were the one in error) bending over backward to make things right. Follow up by encouraging your most loyal patients to recount their positive experiences. It is easy for a negative review to stand out from a handful. But the negative review is much more difficult to find when it is buried in a pile of glowing testimonials.

When I research a hotel, I am much more likely to dismiss one bad review if it is surrounded by dozens of glowing ones. If most visitors claim their rooms were spacious and only one says it was cramped, I assume the disgruntled guest mistook the Holiday Inn for the Hilton, was refused a free upgrade to a suite, and decided to take revenge. Likewise, if 100 patients gush over your attention to detail and your staff's politeness — and only one whines about a perceived slight — most readers will view you favorably.

Handled properly, social media is your friend. Take advantage of it! **DE**

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