



## PRACTICE

### SOCIAL MEDIA

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## Managing online and social media reviews of your practice

**WE CONSTANTLY TALK ABOUT HOW IMPORTANT** it is for your dental practice to “dominate” the first page of Google search results—with your website itself, your social profiles, and the online reviews your patients post. Of these, the first can be controlled by your practice, and the second can be managed if you claim your profiles and work to create high quality content . . . but what do you do when online reviews turn negative?

Research shows that 67% of consumers base their choices at least partly on online reviews,<sup>1</sup> and four out of five might switch their choices based on negative reviews.<sup>2</sup> Ignoring the existence of reviews can be disastrous; as one blogger put it, “Not responding to customers on review sites and social media is worse than having a phone line you never answer because there are thousands of people witnessing your neglect.”<sup>3</sup>

### REACTING VERSUS RESPONDING

So how do you cope when someone goes on an online “rant” about your practice? The most important rule when confronted with a negative review is to take 10 minutes (or more) to review and reflect. Jumping in with a fast reply leaves you open to making statements driven by emotion, which can cause even more damage.

There’s a clear line between reacting and responding. A reaction is based on how the review makes you feel. It’s a gut instinct to defend yourself, your practice, and your staff. A response, on the other hand, is a measured reply created after reflection on how best to handle the situation.

### SEPARATING HATE FROM HURT

Sometimes an online review is obviously a hater blowing off steam that it doesn’t even warrant a reply. One-star reviews that provide no context and zingers to the effect of “This place sucks!” give testament to the fact that the Internet is populated by trolls who can use their anonymity to facilitate virtual drive-bys and who don’t particularly care about who they hit.

Fortunately, most people are aware that this kind of behavior exists and will automatically question the credibility of such reviews. The haters in many cases don’t expect (or even want) a response,<sup>4</sup> so reaching out (while always a good idea) may be futile. Chalk it up to the cost

of doing business in the Internet age, assume others will see the review for what it is, and move on.

### SOCIAL SITES VERSUS REVIEW SITES

A person who has posted a specific complaint, however, is likely waiting for a response, particularly if he or she posts the complaint on your practice’s social media page, rather than on a third-party online review site, such as Yelp. Swiftiness is crucial in such cases; most people who reach out to a company, brand, or practice via social media expect a reply in an hour or less.

Your social media platforms are also more exposed to your core audience than online review sites. You will be extremely visible if you do your best to turn things around, and any potential brand ambassadors can aid in your defense and offer alternate perspectives to the negative reviews.

### MAKING IT COUNT

You only get one shot at turning a review around. If the review was mediocre, you can use the sandwich method: Focus on something positive, address the negative briefly with an offer to try to rectify the issue, then circle back around to the positive again. If the review was highly charged, reaching out privately and taking the conversation offline may be best (but don’t forget to update the post later with the resolution). Finally, don’t forget to respond to the five-star reviews as well. They devoted the time to give you a thumbs up—the least you can do is say thank you. **DE**

### REFERENCES

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