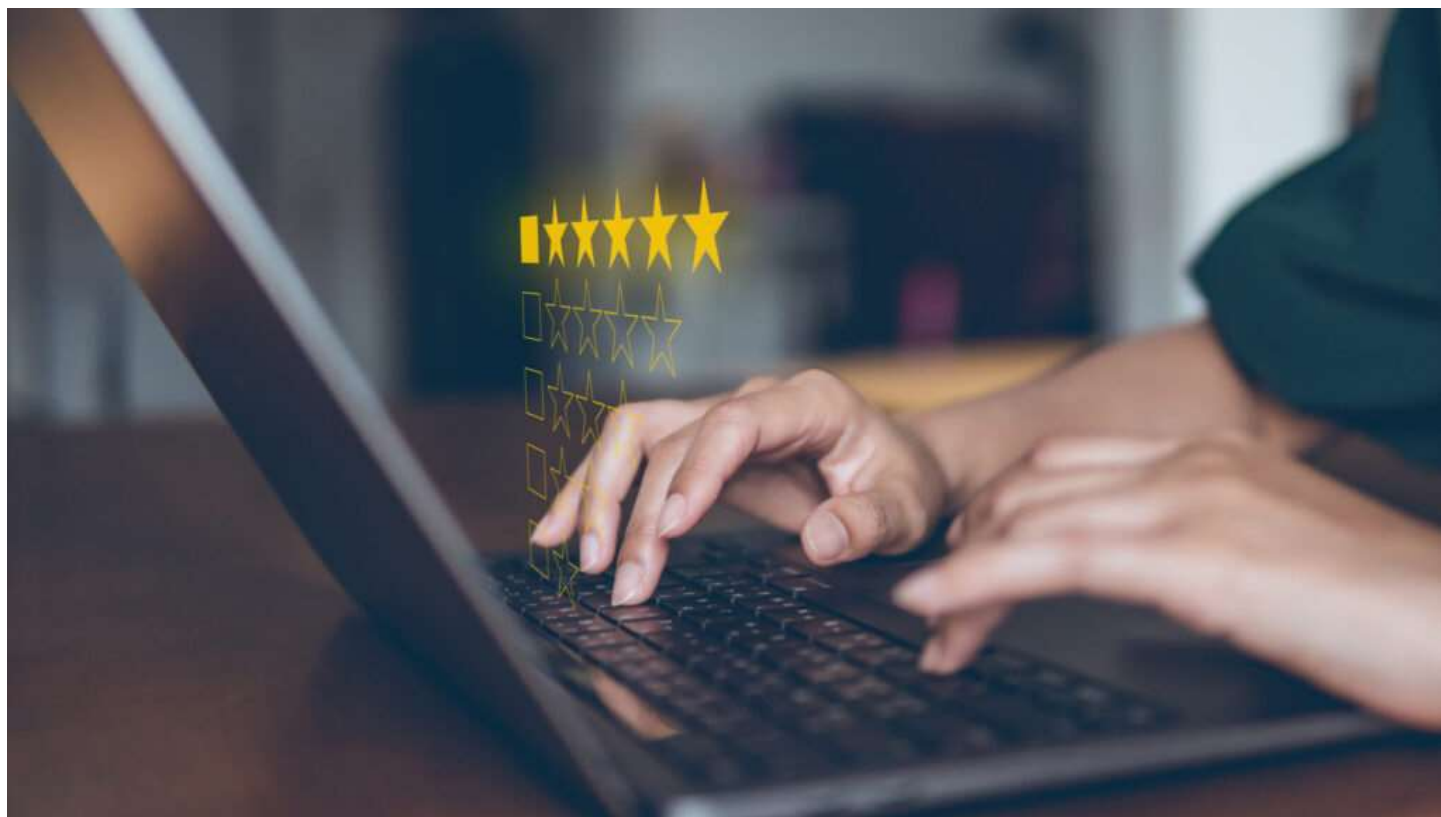


How You Respond to Negative and Positive Reviews Matters

08/30/2024 by Naren Arulrajah, Ekwa Marketing



iStock

Online reviews can instill trust or alienate potential patients. They are the reality of today's business. It does not matter if the company is built on the drive-thru model or on the delivery of exceptional dental care. What the healthcare consumer [says about your practice online matters](#).

Made in CA reports that:

- More than 90% of consumers read at least one review prior to buying a product or service.
- Nearly 70% of Canadians have avoided organizations after reading negative reviews.
- Trust is more important than price; 92% of Canadians will choose the trusted instead of the lowest-cost provider.
- Fewer than 9% of our fellow Canadians do *not* consult with reviews before buying, with nearly one-third claiming to read between four and six reviews¹.

The power of consumer-to-consumer experience and product quality sharing in the digital universe is undeniable. However, the process of harnessing reviews to drive trust, patient retention, and the acquisition of quality patients is not as cut and dried as accumulating a large volume of rave reviews from your biggest “fans.”

In its business profile update, Google noted visitors to one’s online practice view 110% positive and flawless reviews with suspicion². *Can we trust these reviews? Did this doctor pay to make the negative “go away” or not show up in search results? Just how were these reviews solicited?* Instead, a combination of positive and not-so-positive reviews imbue the trustworthiness essential in our field.

We spend a lot of time talking about the importance of *authenticity* to dental practices. An array of reviews, whereby one can actually “hear” the patients’ voice while reading, lends itself to credibility and is *endearing – not alienating*.

Beyond merely assessing for the “positive and negative,” it is critical to *engage*. **Respond to reviews.** As the Made in CA team underscored, organizations generally must improve how they connect with reviewers. As this resource for Canadian products and entrepreneurs puts it, the brand’s *reactions* to reviews are directly correlated with the perception and reputation of said brand. In fact:

It can weigh as much as the actual content the reviewer/patient provided.

As an example of the disconnect between organizations’ reactions to reviews and consumer expectations, the Made in CA team reports that around 33% of shoppers expect responses within three days or less. Fifty-five percent hope to see replies from the company to negative reviews within one week. **However, 63% reported that they never heard back from the brand about a negative experience with their product or service at least one occasion. Full stop.**

Similarly, ReviewTrackers’ analyses found that the top 10% of the 48,000-plus responding brands got back consistently sooner than the “average” for their respective industry³. An auto leader, for instance, responded in slightly longer than 24 hours (1.04 days, to be exact), while the industry average response time clocked in at a comparatively turtle pace of 8.8 days! The quality of reviews, too, followed suit, with the leader boasting a 4.31 rating versus the industry’s 3.92 average. It can be gleaned that “response time” certainly played a role in the comprehensive industry-leading rating.

The art of responding

Yes, responding to the legitimately disgruntled patients behind our unsatisfactory reviews is important, albeit one piece of the puzzle of supporting a favourable online presence. Additionally, it is pivotal to be mindful of even the most flattering reviews and ones that appear to be simply neutral – nothing to write home about. There are opportunities for *all* members of your online community to engage and inspire trust through review platforms.

We have isolated some of the most important elements to bear in mind when reviewing comments and writing your own responses to them:

- Even if the reviewer mentions you by name, try not to take it personally.
- Pause before typing away in anger, frustration, and outrage.
- Always maintain professionalism. Do not be a keyboard warrior or “stoop” to a level beneath you, *even if the review is unfair*.
- Passive aggressive, sarcastic, or defensive responses send the wrong message about your practice and team. They reflect poorly. *Would you select a healthcare partner who responds in such an unprofessional manner?*
- A so-called “negative” review can actually be a positive. **Quality reviews may have external perspectives and insights, which could be parlayed to improve operations;** for instance, problems with answering calls in a timely and professional manner may demand service-oriented training or a “brush up” on call etiquette.
- Ensure everyone tasked with managing one’s “online reputation” is on the same page.
- Piggybacking off of the above point, there must be controls or processes in place to ensure nothing is communicated to the broader world without the approval of you or another trusted leader or manager within your practice.
- Be kind. As available, address the reviewer by name. Hat-tip their concerns. Empathize, at least in writing and, here again, even if the review is seemingly unjustified. Take the high road as needed.
- Do not “over-promise” to “win” back a patient. It is better to “over-deliver” than to potentially fall short by making promises that were not realistic in the first place.
- **Do not fall into the trap of only responding to positive reviews.** Engaging with already satisfied patients only further elevates their glowing perception of you and your practice.
- Regarding the “four-star” reviews, do not damage this goodwill by jumping in with a disingenuous or cheesy sales pitch.

- Avoid the same “canned” response for each and every satisfied patient. They took the time out of their busy and likely stressful days to sing your praises. After all, visiting the dentist, eye doctor, family physician, and so on is not at the top of the public’s “fun list.”
- Make the time to provide a thoughtful and personalized response. It is the right thing to do, with the added benefit of potentially helping to build your credibility and online brand reputation to attract more people to your “offline” practice.
- **Share positive reviews with the rest of your team!** Staff often complain about how they only get their shoulder tapped when a patient is unhappy. Use these positives to build workplace morale and let your team know they are appreciated.

When in doubt about the content or approach to responding to reviews and other online breadcrumbs that lead back to your practice, we encourage you to seek us out. Soliciting and managing online feedback is a delicate and balanced art that must be treated with the seriousness it deserves.

References

1. <https://madeinca.ca/online-reviews-canada-statistics/>
2. <https://support.google.com/business/answer/3474122?hl=en>
3. www.reviewtrackers.com/guides/examples-responding-reviews/

About the Author



Naren Arulrajah, President and CEO of [Ekwa Marketing](https://www.ekwa.com), has been a leader in medical marketing for over a decade. Ekwa provides comprehensive marketing solutions for busy dentists, with a team of more than 180 full time professionals, providing web design, hosting, content creation, social media, reputation management, SEO, and more. If you’re looking for ways to boost your marketing results, call 855-598-3320 for a free strategy session with Naren. You may also schedule a session at your convenience with the Senior Director of Marketing – Lila, by clicking <https://www.ekwa.com/msm/> or simply send a text to 313-777-8494.