

Five Tips for Effective Reputation Management

PUMC received a robust response to our offer of the complimentary list of Top Doctor Rating sites. We were sent additional sites that we are adding as updates to our list that we will make available upon request. Many requested more specific suggestions from us.

We are now providing the following *Effective Reputation Management Tips* for cosmetic specialists that may help your online reputation management chore and minimize bad ratings before they start.

1. Maintain a complete profile for yourself on sites that rank physicians.

Cosmetic specialists should be proactive about encouraging their patients to rate them online. Steps as simple as sending your patients a follow-up email after a visit, giving them a card to take with them, and even drawing attention to existing positive ratings, can be very good, yet subtle ways to get the public talking about you in a positive way online. Care should be exercised not to pressure your patients, but encourage them to share their positive experiences with others. One of the best antidotes is to direct them to some of the positive patient success stories on your Web site.

This is the first step, and arguably the most important. The key to successful management of online reputation is about establishing authority, so get out there early on and dominate the space. Sites like WebMD give cosmetic specialists the chance to add information about practices online, and the cost to physicians is only a few minutes to register. The benefit in having current and accurate information about a practice online cannot be understated, and Web-savvy patients will recognize the efforts to engage them online and listen to feedback.

2. Implement an easy-to-use system for your patients to give their feedback.

One very effective and simple way to discourage negative comments on a third party review site is to have an open and active email address. Seriously, it's that easy. You won't completely eliminate unhappy patients or those looking to grind an ax, but by sending a simple email to a patient after an appointment, making a brief follow-up call or sending out a mailer, goes a long way towards stealing someone's righteous thunder. In the office, a well-placed sign that invites your patients to express themselves, coupled with the necessary forms, can have a tremendous affect towards making the public feel comfortable talking to you or your staff about their experiences, rather than the entire Internet.

3. Educate your patients on the use of physician-rating sites.

It is impossible, and ethically questionable, to prevent patients from using Web sites that rate doctors. However, doctors can help themselves and their patients at the same time by determining which sites provide the most reputable and relevant information and then directing patients to them. As the number of these types of sites continues to grow, expect to see items like cost, comments and outcome information in addition to numerical ratings. Forewarned is forearmed, and being aware of which sites have the best, most accurate information will help cosmetic specialists and their patients benefit the most from this technology. Something as simple as a handout with some basic information about the Web sites you have chosen will go a long way toward



keeping your patients informed and helping them not only make good decisions about which sites to use, but also to think of their doctor in a positive light.

4. Be vigilant of your reputation online.

By keeping abreast of issues that are commonly brought up when your office is mentioned, you have an opportunity to make relatively simple and effective changes that will nip the problem in the bud. Cosmetic specialists may be surprised to learn that the “biggest” problems many of their patients have is their time in the reception area or the tone of voice that the receptionist used with them. Since review sites tend to value the most recent ratings as most relevant, cosmetic specialists who address things in a timely fashion give themselves maximum benefit. Sometimes acknowledging the problem early on goes a long way to assuaging fears that the office is somehow hopelessly mismanaged. Again, patients appreciate the attentiveness and engagement.

5. Suggest that your patients use doctor-rating sites.

It might seem counter-intuitive, but it is a good idea since the vast majority of comments on review sites are positive. The dissatisfied frequently make a bigger show of their feelings, but they are substantially outnumbered in most cases. The more of your patients who have writing ratings, the more positive recognition you are bringing to your name, while at the same time improving the site’s accuracy. Everyone wins! A lack of positive ratings is, more often than not, not a sign of a displeased patient base. On the contrary, it is probably because patients with something good to say are unaware of doctor review sites, or the idea hasn’t even occurred to them.

Without a doubt, the one thing cosmetic specialist don’t want is negative user-generated comments on the Internet. We estimate that less than 10% of comments on the average user-generated feedback site are negative. Unfortunately, in terms of human cognition these traces of negativity have a disproportionate affect on the publics’ opinions, and conversely a cosmetic specialist reputation online. Often a patient vents negatively online because it is the most convenient way to express their frustrations and they are unaware of any alternative. The curious analog to this situation is that most cosmetic specialists find fault with online rating services, because there is no way to respond to negative comments.

Even with these five tips, some cosmetic specialists may not have the time or inclination to mount an online reputation management campaign. We have found that having a list of sites with positive reviews, backed with testimonials, on your Web site to be one of the most effective antidotes. This strategy will turn around a potential patient that brings a negative review to your attention. This week’s PUMC Webinar will show you how to create these success stories quickly at a minimal cost.