

# MARKETING

## Investing in online optimization



### BACKGROUND

Studies show that it takes just milliseconds for someone to form an opinion of another person. In addition, longer exposure to an individual has an insignificant impact on changing that first opinion either positively or negatively. Thus first impressions not only count but often eliminate the value of second chances. This translates into problems with reaching new patients in a dental practice. Traditionally, dentists welcomed new patients with a smile and a firm handshake. Today, most people search for a dental practice using online reviews and ratings—and seldom do they look beyond the first couple of names. Optimizing your ratings and rankings is vital and may require some help from specialists.

### DEFINING RATINGS AND RANKINGS

*Ratings* are what prospective patients search for when they read reviews online. If the practice's average rating is less than the prospective patient feels is acceptable or if the number of reviews is low, the likelihood of being selected as a possible choice is nil.

Between 7 and 9 patients in any city are looking for a dentist every day on Google—and that doesn't include any other search engine. Google *rankings* are based on an algorithm that has just been tweaked to focus on a local search by homing in on the user's exact location. Only geographically relevant results are then listed in the search results. The practice is called hyper local search results.

### OPTIMIZING RESULTS

Companies exist that serve to provide online reputation management and to optimize search engine results so that the dental practice doesn't get lost through poor ratings or rankings. Among the online reputation management platforms are Birdeye, Podium, and RatingLaunch. Each helps gain authentic reviews on key review sites such as Yelp, Google, and Facebook. They allow the dentist to invite all his or her patients to review their experiences after their appointments and post their reviews on major review sites.

Local Search for Dentists understands the significance of appearing first in search results and helps dental practices enhance their web presence. As a result, their average customers receive 96 calls monthly—and some of these callers could be converted into patients for the dental practice.

### CHOOSING THE RIGHT ONLINE PARTNER

Many of the companies that offer search engine optimization and online reputation management provide great results. The dentist

must understand his or her return on investment (ROI) so the choice of marketing partner will exceed expectations and grow the dental practice. Advice in choosing a company should include the following:

1. Enter the search with a desired outcome in mind. It's important to understand the results that are most important to the practice. These could be more web traffic, increased numbers of referrals, or increased interest in a certain procedure.
2. Calculate the expected ROI. The American Dental Association (ADA) offers that the average long-term patient spends about \$653 per year. If the goal is to increase new patient numbers, it's important to determine how much the practice should spend to acquire the new patient, including the overhead expenses. This will help the dentist determine if the ROI is meeting expectations.
3. Create a definitive timeline for seeing results. Earning money requires an investment and the time needed to see a return on that money. Any marketing campaign should have a reasonable schedule set so that it has time to achieve good results but doesn't continue with insufficient ROI.
4. Understand the features that are included. It's vital to recognize what core features are desired to achieve the outcome that is sought and not be overwhelmed by unnecessary feature lists. However, it's equally important to be willing to spend to get the core features desired so that the goal can be reached with a good ROI.

#### Clinical Significance

Marketing costs are one of the investments each dental practice must make to ensure it continues to reach prospective patients. Because the online presence of a dental practice is vital to reaching patients today, it makes sense to invest in the strategies that have been proven to have a good outcome and to be a good choice fiscally. Outstanding reviews and high rankings are part of the equation that eventually should lead to growth in the dental practice.

Vet RC: The patient search—why you're losing patients before they even call your office. *Dent Econ* 108:28-29, 2018

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