

The New Patient's Journey

HOW TO EARN 5 TYPES OF NEW PATIENTS



Officite



Every practice needs patients.

Without a steady stream of new people coming through the door, sooner or later, any practice will fail. In the past, professionals like yourself received new patients through word of mouth and advertising in traditional venues like radio and newspaper. In today's world, the act of bringing new faces into your office has become much more complex, but that's not a bad thing. There have never been more ways to get your message across to prospective patients. That's what we do at Officite, and this guide will show you the hows and whys of online marketing.

As a website company, you may expect us to say that a cutting-edge website is the solution to every practice marketing problem. That all you need to do is get a good website, and new patients will come flooding into your practice. You may expect us to reach into the Field of Dreams playbook and say, "If you build it, they will come."

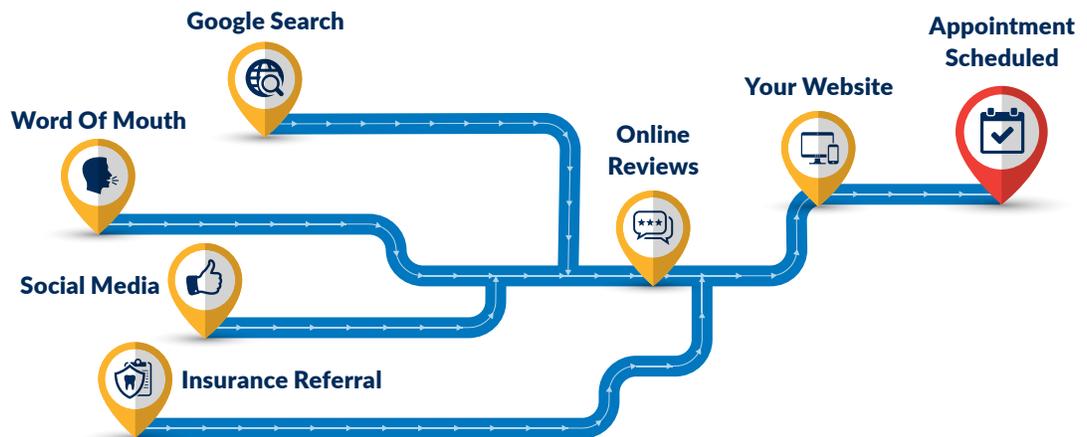
But they won't.

New patients don't come from websites. Instead, new patients come from many places, all of which may eventually lead them to your website. They take a long journey before setting foot in your practice, and your website is one of the very last steps along the way.

A new patient's journey doesn't look like this:



It looks rather more like this:



The exact steps of a new patient's journey will vary according to your area of practice, and to the individual needs of that patient. What works for a Pediatrician, for example, may not be the best strategy for a Podiatrist. Nevertheless, a healthy understanding of these online marketing techniques will only help you choose the best strategy for your own practice.

So what do we know about the steps in a new patient's journey, and how can we use that information to position ourselves for success? We'll break it down, step by step. But first, let's meet the patients we're trying to attract.

Meet the Patients: Consumer Profiles

Consumer profiling is one of the oldest tricks in the marketing book for one reason – it's incredibly useful. Profiles help us understand why customers (or in this case, patients) make decisions, how to reach those customers, and how to persuade them to act. With some quick profiling, we can stop asking vague questions like “how do I get new patients?” and start asking more useful ones, like “what sort of new patients will my marketing efforts earn for me, and why, and how?”

Profiles can be built to describe everything from demographics to psychographics to socioeconomic positions. This guide is focusing on need-states, i.e., the primary reasons these fictional people find themselves searching for care.



Newcomer Nathan

Nathan is a 32 year old software engineer who just picked up his entire family and moved cross-country for an exciting new job. With no friends or other family in the area, he needs to find a new primary care provider by himself.

Most likely starting point:	Must-Haves:	Mid-Point:	Dealbreakers:
<i>Search Engine</i>	<i>First-page Google ranking</i>	<i>Website comparison</i>	<i>Unprofessional/dated website</i>



Dissatisfied Debby

Debby is a 41 year old school teacher with two children, and recently, she's become dissatisfied with her old care provider. She needs to find someone new – someone who won't do whatever made her leave her last care provider.

Most likely starting point:	Must-Haves:	Mid-Point:	Dealbreakers:
<i>Reviews Site</i>	<i>Positive Reviews</i>	<i>Social Media</i>	<i>Negative reviews, especially with whatever issue caused her desire to switch</i>



Specialist Steve

Steve is a 66 year old retiree with a very specific problem that requires a specialist's knowledge. He needs to find an expert in whatever ails him to get the best care available.

Most likely starting point:	Must-Haves:	Mid-Point:	Dealbreakers:
<i>Referral</i>	<i>Outstanding Patient Education</i>	<i>Search Engine</i>	<i>No mention of his required specialty; perceived lack of expertise</i>



Millennial Molly

Molly is a 23 year old health and fitness blogger who thinks "The Yellow Pages" is an odd name for Post-It Notes. A digital native and social (media) butterfly, she wants to find a new dermatologist without leaving her online comfort zone.

Most likely starting point:	Must-Haves:	Mid-Point:	Dealbreakers:
<i>Social Media</i>	<i>Good website, online scheduling</i>	<i>Search Engines, Review Sites</i>	<i>Lack of social proof (social media/reviews)</i>



Insurance Inez

Inez is a 34 year old HR consultant who has been visiting the same allergist since she was 9. Unfortunately, her employer has changed insurance plans, and she can no longer see him affordably. She needs to find someone – hopefully someone just as good – that her new insurance will cover.

Most likely starting point:	Must-Haves:	Mid-Point:	Dealbreakers:
<i>Insurance List</i>	<i>A striking first impression</i>	<i>Reviews, Search Engines, Social Media</i>	<i>Insurance Incompatibility</i>

Again, these are all fictional representations, even caricatures (our apologies to Molly). Nevertheless, each of these imagined journeys to your practice will be mirrored by many others in the real world. In order to bring them all the way from their starting points to your waiting room, we'll examine how to improve your online presence at each of their starting points.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) for Newcomer Nathan



As a software engineer, it's not surprising for Nathan's first step to be a search engine. But since **93% of all online experiences begin with a search engine**, Nathan is clearly in good company. Google is the first place to find answers in today's world. In fact, **91% of people won't look farther than the first page of results**. But the hits don't stop there:

- ✓ **Google's market share is 80.5%**
- ✓ **76% of local searches result in a phone call**
- ✓ **60% of American adults use smartphones and tablets to search for local products and services**

The stats don't lie. Search engines, especially Google, are today's most important source of information. For your practice to thrive, you'll need to reach for the top. There are 2 ways to get there, organic SEO, and pay-per-click (PPC) advertising.

Organic Search Engine Optimization

Organic SEO refers to a collection of strategies that, when done right, cause Google to notice your practice, and to mark your website as more relevant than the others in your area. The more relevant you are according to Google, the higher you rank in their search results. Hitting the top 3 results is the most difficult prize to earn in all of online marketing, but it also provides the best returns over a long period of time.

Many marketers do nothing but SEO, and for the best results, that kind of specialization is almost necessary. However, SEO isn't alchemy. There are many best practices, including:

High-Quality Content

“Content is king” is a successful SEO marketer’s mantra. High quality content includes things like online patient education, pictures and videos, and even relevant blogging. The more value it provides to your patients, the more value Google gives to you, and the higher you can rank.

Strategic Keywords

“Keywording” is the process of making your site speak the language of its visitors. In its simplest form, it takes words and phrases that you expect patients to search with, and integrates them into the content of your site. For example, you might use any of the following:

- ✓ Location Keywords
 - “Doctors in Bucktown/Near me”
- ✓ Name keywords (Branded search)
 - “Jeffrey Tambor, MD”
- ✓ Service keywords
 - “Urgent Care in Bucktown/Near me”

Volumes have been written on the finer points of keywording, and this is a very simplified explanation. Our Web Presence Advisors will be more than happy to give you a more detailed breakdown during your call.

Meta Tags

This puts data in the “head” of the HTML code of your website, where search engines will be more likely to see it. They quickly explain your page’s content to the search engine, but are invisible to humans reading the site. Good meta tagging can make you stand out, bad or inaccurate meta tagging can make you drop out.

```
<meta name="keywords" content="Dentist, Cosmetic Dentist, Teeth Whitening, Dental Care, Dental Implants, Veneers, Dental Practice, Teeth Cleaning, Family Dentist, Downers Grove">
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Backlinks

Here’s an easy way of thinking about this: nobody wants to hear you talk about yourself. It’s far more impressive when someone else says good things about you. Backlinks do just that, and Google notices. Backlinks are links to your website from 3rd party websites – links that lead back to your practice. When it comes to

backlinks, quality is more important than quantity... but you will want both.

- ✓ Good backlinks
 - The Chamber of Commerce in your city
 - Any associations to which you belong
 - Medical blogs
- ✓ Bad backlinks
 - Off-topic sites
 - Sites built only to provide backlinks
 - In the comments section of Youtube (“He’ll need a doctor! DrSmithIsTheBest.com”)

Schema (Rich Snippets)

A search engine’s algorithms don’t speak English, they only speak in code. Schema markup is a rather technical way of “highlighting” bits of that code to make it stand out to the eyes of an algorithm. They are highly encouraged by Google’s Webmaster blog, and can include things like addresses, doctors’ names, and specialized services.

Geotagging

This puts a series of metatags in your HTML head which include your exact latitude and longitude. It allows Google to literally put your practice on the map.

Social Media

An important part of a balanced SEO breakfast, good social media can provide more content, provide more backlinks, and earn you referrals even without any other SEO efforts.

Some of this you can do on your own. In fact, with a little learning and a lot of dedication, you could theoretically do it all on your own. But it requires hours upon hours of work – not just in implementing these strategies, but in keeping up with the latest developments. For that reason, it’s best to trust a dedicated expert. If you have one on your staff, let them have at it. If not, give one of our Web Presence Advisors a call.

PPC Advertising

PPC stands for Pay-Per-Click, and it's the only instant solution in online marketing. Within minutes of crafting an ad, PPC instantly puts your practice on the front page Google in the paid ad section. This type of marketing earns fewer clicks than organic SEO over the long run, but its speediness makes it a favorite among online marketers, especially when used in conjunction with an organic SEO campaign.

With PPC, you pay Google a certain amount for each click on your ad. The more you pay, the more visible and long-lasting your ads become. This strategy is especially important in heavily urban areas, where populations are high and competition is fierce. Conversely, if you're the only primary care provider in your town, then PPC is likely not something you need to worry about.

Mobile-Friendly Websites for Nathan and... Well, Everyone, Really.

If you want to attract the most new patients, your website must perform seamlessly on phones and tablets. That seems like a no-brainer, but why cover it under SEO? Because:

- ✓ Nearly 60% of all search traffic comes from mobile devices
- ✓ 87% of smartphone owners use a search engine at least once a day

In short, without a mobile-friendly website, much of our SEO advice is useless. There are two main ways to go mobile-friendly – traditional mobile sites, and responsive website design.

A traditional mobile site is a second copy of your normal site built for phones. When a patient tries to access one of these sites from their phone or tablet, they are instead re-directed to the mobile version, where they will ultimately have a better experience. The technology is almost 10 years old, and it still works. Responsive designs, however, are a much stronger option.

Responsive websites are natively coded for use on smart devices. They identify what sort of device is trying to access them, and adjust themselves automatically. It doesn't matter whether the device is a tablet, a smartphone, a

desktop, or a laptop, a responsive website will conform to fit perfectly, like water in a glass.

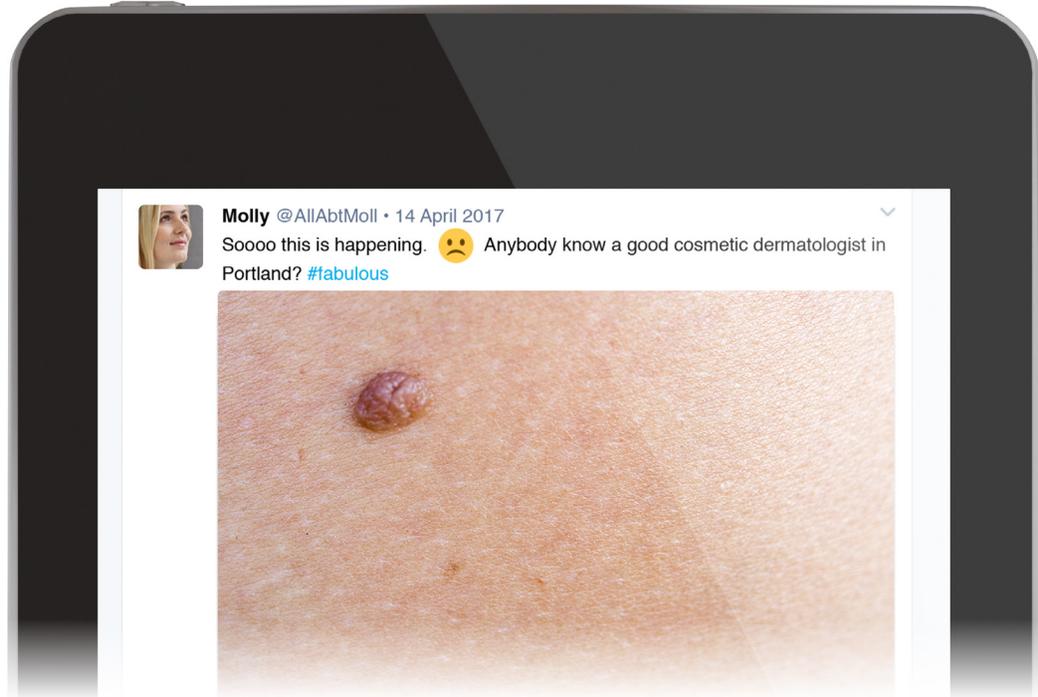
So why should you care? Because Google cares. They rank responsive sites higher than other sites by default, and they're very up-front as to why they do so.

1. Traditional mobile sites require 2 URLs, and responsive sites only require 1. Having a single URL makes it easier for patients to interact with, share, and link to your content.
2. Mobile sites require a redirection. This means longer loading times (almost twice as long), which ultimately makes for a worse experience. Responsive design does not require redirection, which makes them faster.
3. One URL is easier for Google to handle. With responsive design, each page only needs to be crawled once, which means Google can index your content more efficiently, and keep your information fresh.

For the full details, see here: <https://developers.google.com/webmasters/smartphone-sites/details>

At the end of the day, a traditional mobile site will work. However, it is no longer a future-proof option. If you're starting to build a web presence for your practice, start with responsive.

Social Media for Millennial Molly



Why would a dermatologist (or any doctor) need social media?

Because of what you see above. To put it simply, there's really no reason not to use it. Modern expectations require small businesses to have a social presence, and if you use it correctly, you earn patients like Molly, who start their search by tweeting, posting, or otherwise asking for others' opinions. These digitally-attuned patients are also more likely to leave online reviews after treatment, which brings us full circle:

[Social Media Marketing](#) > [New Patients](#) > [Online Reviews](#) > [Free Marketing](#)

Social media is the new word of mouth, and it's not just for college kids anymore. 74% of internet users engage on social media, and 80% of those internet users are specifically using social media to look for health information (Source *Pew Research*).

Which platforms should I use?

Do use:

✓ Facebook

- The biggest social network, used by 62% of the adult population
- 70% of users check Facebook every day
- Best choice overall, ideal for targeting millennials and care decision-makers alike

✓ Twitter

- Fastest social network, used by 23% of American adults
- 38% of users check Twitter every day
- Ideal platform for direct outreach, especially in more urban areas.

All stats provided by Pew Research

Don't worry about:

✗ Periscope/Facebook Live

- Allows you to broadcast live video and audio from a phone or tablet
- Few medical professionals have tried this, and to very limited success

✗ Snapchat

- Allows you to send pictures and videos that expire after a short time
- Meant more for pure social interaction than business; unproven ROI

✗ Instagram

- Very visually based. Requires a staff member with a truly artistic touch

What to Post

Every good social media post is 1 of 3 things, and the best are all 3 at once. At Officite, we like to call these things the 3 E's:

1. Engaging
 - a. Ask for responses directly
 - b. Post content you yourself find interesting
 - c. Post topical content reacting to fresh news

- d. Keep it accessible to lay-readers
- 2. Entertaining
 - a. Post things people will want to read
 - b. Don't be afraid to have a (wholesome) sense of humor
 - c. Don't say anything you wouldn't say in front of grandma.
- 3. Educational
 - a. Bring value ("I didn't know that!")
 - b. Not necessarily academic
 - c. Establish yourself as an authority in your field.

What Not to Post

Just like there are 3 E's for doing social media the right way, we also have 3 P's for doing it the wrong way.

- 1. Private information.
 - a. Don't violate HIPAA. If a patient does this on their own, take the conversation offline immediately.
- 2. Preachy Posts
 - a. Don't use your platform to scold people for not exercising. They might need to hear it, but they certainly don't want to hear it. Tone is everything – be encouraging, not disparaging.
- 3. Political Posts
 - a. Just don't. Nothing good will come of this, especially in today's divided world. You will only offend those who disagree.

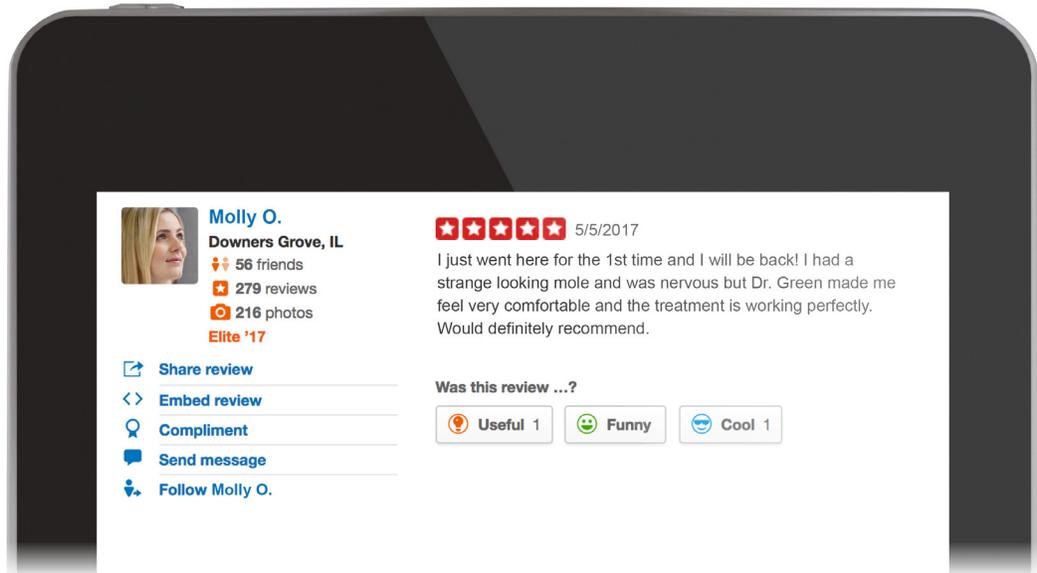
Online Reviews for Dissatisfied Debby



It can be tempting to dismiss online reviews. After all, you're not a restaurant. Your patients don't have the technical wherewithal to critique your medical performance. Unfair though it may seem, patients like Debby regard them as gospel.

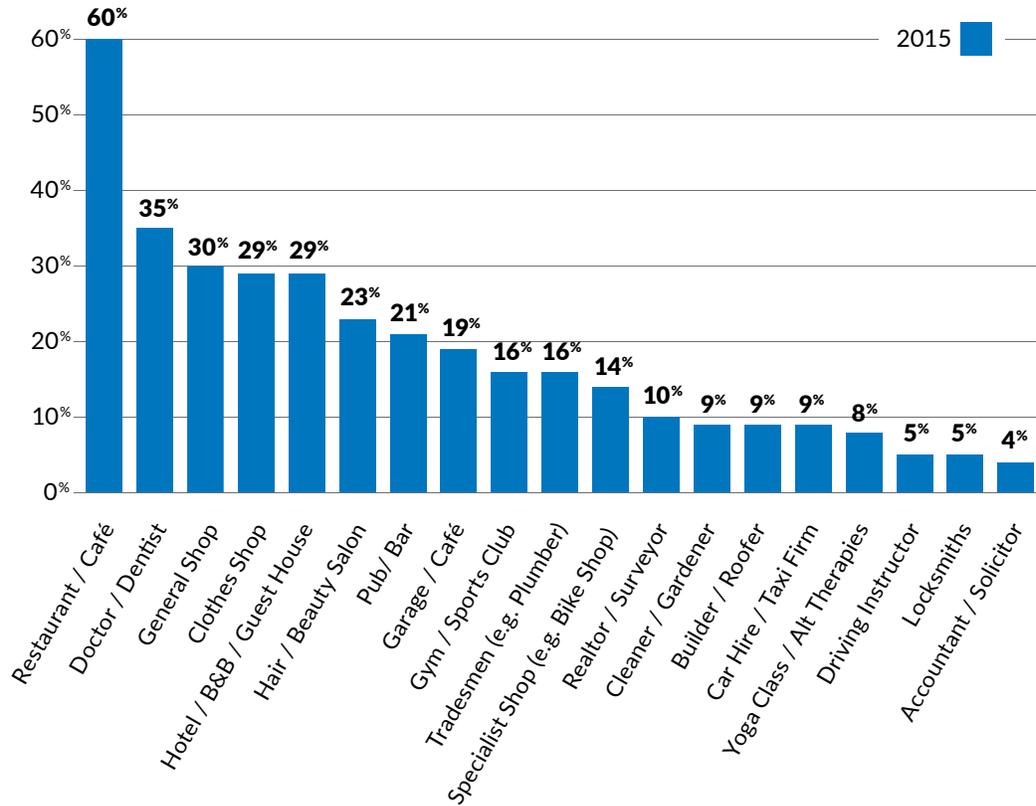
- ✓ 92% of consumers read online reviews
- ✓ 84% trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations
- ✓ 40% form an opinion by reading just 1-3 reviews.

The facts are powerful, but they lose something without proper context. Imagine you're Dissatisfied Debby looking for a new dermatologist. Then you go on Yelp and see this:



Convincing, isn't it? It needs to be. Online reviews are more important for doctors and dentists than nearly every other type of business.

Which of these business types have you read online customer reviews for?



How do I start?

First, take control of all the major healthcare directories. Yelp, Healthgrades, and Google are the most important, but you should also check in with Yahoo, Vitals, and Wellness.com. Once there, be sure to claim your listings, and check them for any incorrect or duplicate information. Then, start integrating them with your website and the rest of your online marketing.

Next, start earning more reviews, because the best way to recover from poor reviews is to bury them under a mountain of good ones. Aside from training your staff to ask patients to leave reviews for you, here are some good ways to earn more without being pushy:

1. Put a badge and link to your Yelp listing on your website using Yelp’s review badges - we provide the code, you just paste it into your website. The review averages and counts even update automatically as new reviews come in!

2. Put a “Find us on Yelp” sign in your place of business, on the front counter or window. These have even been spotted on business-branded vehicles. You can make your own using our brand assets, or request one from Yelp using this form.
3. Include a link to your Yelp business listing in your email signature with the words, “Check us out on Yelp!”

Should I Respond to Reviews?

Yes! But there's a right and a wrong way to do it. Since online reviews determine how new patients like Debby will think of your practice, sites like Yelp and HealthGrades can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, good reviews provide free marketing. On the other, negative reviews can hurt – both personally and financially. Even so, they don't have to be crippling. In fact, if you become proficient at utilizing some of these response strategies, you can even turn a negative review into a positive.

1. Don't ignore negative reviews.

The only time it's acceptable to ignore a review is if a patient says something so outlandish that they appear mentally unstable. 99% of the time, your best course of action is to respond quickly and courteously. Ignoring negative reviews is similar to a patient neglecting caries – they won't go away on their own, and the situation only becomes worse with continued neglect. Many reviews can linger for years, and the only way to make them “disappear” is by taking proactive measures to earn good ones, outweighing the bad with the good.

2. Stay calm.

Online reviews can get nasty. It's not uncommon for a patient to say something ignorant, inflammatory, or downright insulting. Sometimes a bad review will leave you itching to pound out a cutting retort – anything to show the world just how clueless they are.

That's a natural reaction, but you need to ignore it. Getting angry, no matter how righteously, will do nothing but make your practice look unprofessional. Even when personally attacked, listen, and respond amicably. You can still defend yourself in a productive way – just be sure to remember the next point...

3. Respond with new patients in mind.

Your responses serve two purposes. The first and most obvious is to address a dissatisfied patient's concerns. But the second is perhaps even more important – your reviews are marketing materials.

A calm, collected, and personal response tells every other person on the review site that you care about your patients. Your patients are sensible people, after all. If they see you taking action to make something right, they'll know that your practice is ready to go the extra mile toward patient satisfaction.

Examples of Review Response Techniques

1. Flip the Script.

First, acknowledge the grievance. Then, respond by drawing attention to the positive things about your practice. Just be sure that you still apologize as specifically and sincerely. Without that critical ingredient, this strategy will fail.

a. I am truly sorry you had a poor experience during your visit last Thursday. It is our goal to help all of our patients feel welcome, cared for, and satisfied. If we did not meet that goal during your visit, please reach out to me at [practice number], and we'll do everything we can to make it right. We've been providing [name of town] residents with quality care for 15 years, and we want to keep going for many more.

2. Own it.

Patients don't want to hear excuses. They want to hear that you're taking responsibility for what they perceive as an offense. Take responsibility, explain the situation calmly, and then outline how the same thing won't happen in the future.

b. I'm sorry to hear about your long wait with us last Thursday. That day was particularly hectic, and filled with especially delicate procedures. We do our best to treat our patients' time with the respect it deserves without compromising our standards of care. We will look at ways to improve our operations during the busiest of times. In the meantime, if we can help in any way, please reach out to us at [practice phone number].

3. If they say something nice, say thank you!

Every positive review means a patient took time out of their day to tell everyone

how much they love you. Thank them! It makes them happy and allows the entire site to see that you care about your patients on a personal level.

c. We're so happy to hear about your visit last Thursday! It was great to hear from you and the family again. If you need anything, give us a call!

In the end, the most important thing to take away from this is that online reviews deserve your attention. Keep calm, respond courteously, and if you're given a compliment, say thank you. If you handle them correctly, then even the negative reviews can shed a positive light on your practice – something that Debby desperately needs.

Patient Education for Specialist Steve



Honestly, the odds that Steve finds your practice without a referral are pretty low. However, if you're in an area where others share your specialty, Steve will likely do some comparison shopping. And since he needs a specialist, he's likely to go with the practice that makes its specialty known.

Put patient education on your website, and you look like an expert to people like Steve. But that's not the only benefit; online patient education has a few more perks you may not expect:

1. It can raise your Google ranking.

Putting your patient education materials online generates more content for your website, which in turn creates new opportunities for search optimization. With a greater supply of properly curated content, search engines are more likely to direct patients searching for health information to your practice website.

2. It caters to more learning styles.

Graduating from the world of paper education materials opens the door to a wide variety of content delivery methods. The best examples include high definition videos, illustrations, and anatomically correct diagrams. Patients can watch, look, or read according to their preference.

3. Space is virtually unlimited.

Online materials don't take up physical space, which means you can provide as much information as you want. You probably can't fit a display of 1,000 different pamphlets in your practice, but you can do exactly that online.

4. It's easier to update than print.

New developments in gastroenterology require updates to your patient education materials. When they're online, it's often as easy as changing some text in your website editor. That means you can stay on the cutting edge of gastroenterology, giving your patients the up-to-date information they deserve. Printed materials need to be re-ordered, old ones recycled, etc.

5. It makes your website more engaging.

This is perhaps online education's greatest strength. When a new patient visits your website and finds answers to their questions, they're more likely to schedule an appointment with you than with another practice. It proves to them that you are knowledgeable on the subject. Once they decide they need to see a doctor, your contact information will be very close by.

All in all, online patient education is one of the best ways to cater to the modern patient. Use it alongside printed materials in order to get the best results – both for your patients and your practice.

Insurance Inez



Her simple motivations might make Inez seem like one of the easiest patients to earn, but she's actually one of the trickiest. When insurance compatibility is a patient's primary concern, how do you make yourself stand out from the rest of the names on an insurance list? The answer is all of the above.

After finding your name, Inez may start her journey at any of the points we discussed above. Sometimes, though, she may click a link that takes her from her insurance company's website directly to your website. To stand out in her mind, that website needs to leave a striking first impression. It needs to be

mobile-friendly. It needs to look great. It needs to give her all the information she needs, and it needs to make you look like the best option with only a cursory glance.

How do I get started?

First, take a look at your current online marketing efforts. Are you satisfied with the success they're bringing you? If not, then we hope the information in this guide will help you get to where you want to be.

Next, give one of our Web Presence Advisors a call. Online marketing is a full-time job. When you have a practice to run, you deserve an expert by your side – someone to handle all of this so you can focus on your patients. We'll go through this journey step by step to help you find your strengths, identify your weaknesses, and formulate a plan for success. It's easy, it's free, and it's one of the best ways to bring more patients to your door.

 (855) 926-6718

Thanks for reading, and good luck!

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