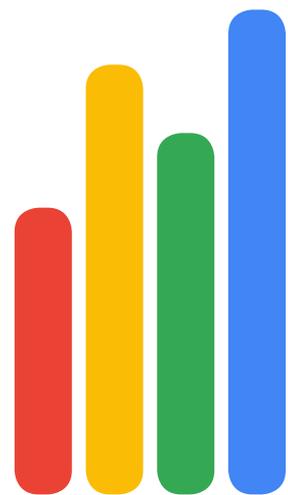


*The double-edged sword of*  
**Google Reviews**



# Think of the last time you tried to find a new place to go to dinner.

You shot ideas back and forth, eventually settling on pulling out your phone and opening up your mobile search engine. Your search terms are pretty basic: “Pho restaurant in Portland.” Six options pop up on Google, each accompanied by the number of customer reviews left for that particular restaurant and the corresponding average rating of that establishment. You may scroll through those first few options, but you likely don’t stray far down the list. While there are hundreds of factors that affect a business’s ranking on Google, the number and quality of reviews attached to a business is definitely a key factor. That’s why those top pho restaurants are in that top pool you choose from.

Any customer seeking a transaction undergoes a similar experience. Crowdsourcing opinions is now the commercial law of the land. We scarcely make a

**88 percent of consumers trust online recommendations as much as in-person referrals**

purchasing decision without first seeking the advice from hundreds of strangers online. For medical professionals, this indicates the systematic breakdown of practitioner credibility. A single referral doesn’t do it all anymore.

A 2014 study found that 88 percent of consumers trust online recommendations as much as in-person referrals.<sup>1</sup> Plus, this study also found businesses with more reviews are perceived as more trustworthy. This means patients aren’t taking their doctor’s word as law anymore: A formal medical suggestion is followed by thorough corroboration online, primarily through Google reviews. Nowadays, a doctor’s presence online, both the success of their website or their Google ranking, plays a tremendous role in how they stack up to their competitors.

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<sup>1</sup> Sorokina, Olsy. “Why Google Reviews Are Important to Small Businesses.” Get Noticed: Why Google Reviews Matter for Small Businesses, Hootsuite, 13 May 2015.

This increased reliance on online reviewing is likely a byproduct of the proliferating digital age, and many oral surgeons previously resistant to its progression may quickly fall behind others who harness its potential. The truth of the matter is a basic understanding of search engine optimization (SEO) and online ranking isn't just for young professionals anymore. Marketing isn't just about taking out full-page ads in Yellow Pages anymore.

Google is the first point of contact between a patient and your business. Because of how Google rankings physically list competitors in a region, a customer searching your keywords will literally see how you compare to other surgeons.

You can try this now: Go to Google and search "oral surgeons [NAME OF YOUR TOWN]." Are you listed in those top three results? If not, you're missing out on a seriously untapped market of patients who make the search for an oral surgeon independently, or attempt to corroborate their dentist's advice with a simple search online.



## There's no golden ticket for Google ranking.

If everyone knew the secret formula for Google's algorithm, every business would be performing well on Google, completely eliminating the objective of the Google hierarchy altogether. Altogether, we know very little about how Google determines its top performers. There are over 200 factors the search engine considers when ranking businesses, and they're highly secretive about how each one is weighted. What we know is largely conjecture.

If you're looking for a cheatsheet on how to beat the Google problem, we can't help you. Instead, we've come up with three methods you as a business owner can execute immediately to help out your ranking.

There are various methods you can implement to improve your Google ranking:

- 1. Post Relevant Content** – Quality content created specifically for your site is one way to drive clicks. Think of what keywords a patient in your region will search: "Wisdom teeth removal," "cosmetic dentistry," "dental implants." This

will take a bit of research on your part. If you want to rank for certain keywords, you need to be sure your website uses those words often, so long as it's relevant. That means

those keywords can be found on your landing page, your "About" page, and within the body of your blogs. For example, if you're an oral surgeon

in Houston, and you search "best oral surgeon Houston," and all of your competitors come up, you have some work to do. If you're completely adept at SEO, it may be worth it to seek an outside marketing specialist.

**A site that isn't up-to-date or is aesthetically lazy won't perform well**

- 2. Update Your Content Regularly** – A website that looks like it popped up out of 2005 won't keep patients come back. Credibility is a huge influencer in how we make business investments, and a site that isn't noticeably up-to-date or aesthetically lazy won't perform well online. You need to have (or hire someone that has) a comprehensive understanding of effective website design to ensure those who are clicking on your page aren't immediately clicking away.
- 3. Get More Reviews. Period.** – Just like everything else in the digital age, improving your Google ranking can be crowdsourced. The number of reviews – especially good reviews – a business boasts can help skyrocket it to the top of Google's list. Some data even suggests that your body of reviews is more influential in your Google ranking than SEO optimization.<sup>2</sup> 88 percent of consumers consult a business's reviews prior to making a purchase, so you need to be sure you're giving them something to look at. We can break down the other benefits of review into three primary pros: You can use positive reviews as testimonials for future patients, you'll have a better idea of what you're doing right and wrong in your business, and, as we've discussed, you're more likely to improve the visibility of your business on Google.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Allen, Paula. "Why Local Businesses Need Reviews and 12 SEO-Approved Ways to Get Them." Bruce Clay, Inc. Blog, 9 Dec. 2014

<sup>3</sup> Harsevoort, Bernie. "The Importance of Google Reviews." Rocket SEO, 30 May 2014.



It is worth noting here that no one is positive what factors contribute to Google ranking (Google's algorithm is strictly confidential), but experts have a few guesses. It's estimated that reviews account for 9.8 percent of the total ranking factors, meaning patient feedback can't be ignored.<sup>4</sup>

## Reviews Are Always Generating New Content

For the purpose of this paper, we're going to break down how reviews can accomplish the first two goals in improving Google ranking while simultaneously maintaining a user-friendly brand.

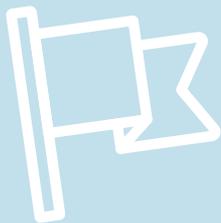
Any time someone leaves a review for your site or business, they're engaging with the content you've already created while creating new site content at the same time. Their language immediately becomes searchable for other users.

There's a sort of sociological pattern to reviewing: Customers are more likely to leave reviews for a business when there have already been reviews left. No one wants to be the only poster, so a business that already shows 300 hundred reviews, most of them positive, is already far ahead of the game. The exception being, of course, extraordinarily good or bad reviews. Customers completely blown away or utterly infuriated are the most likely groups to leave reviews, whereas everyone else falls somewhere in the middle.

As a business owner, this middle ground is the population you need to tap into. Although we'd like to believe that every patient who exits our office will want to go home and tell everyone how great our practice is independently, we need to operate with the assumption that most of this audience will remain largely quiet, even after a stellar experience. Your job, then, is to find a way to compel them to act without directly influencing them.

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<sup>4</sup> Kent, Kevin. "Why Google Reviews Just Might Be More Important Than Other Reviews." ReviewTrackers, 10 July 2017.



While encouraging patients to review can have a great influence over your business's ranking online, forcing or compelling reviewing can seriously dock your Google reputation. Within Google's web of guidelines, one segment discourages businesses from creating reward systems for reviewing ("Leave a 5-star review, get a free slice of pizza," "Give us a good review on Google and receive \$10 off on your next teeth whitening,"). If Google figures out you're practicing something like this, you'll actually be docked in your ranking.

That's right: Google is watching, and they certainly don't like cheaters.

The best way to ensure you're getting ranked highly is to just follow the rules. Organic reviews will always help your site more than hurt it, not to mention the content of genuine reviews will always be better written. If you decide to use an automated reviewing system, you need to be sure your receptionist is equipped with the right language or script, always ensuring the patient that reviews help your business, but they won't gain or lose anything by doing it – it's a favor, not an obligation.

Be sure to take some time to read up on Google's ranking guidelines. They're predominately confidential, but you can still get some good ideas on how to boost your online presence.

The reviews that will do the best for your site will be, of course, positive reviews that include a lot of text. For those impassioned patients who want to help out your practice, this won't be a problem. Reviews with just four or five stars but no description certainly don't do any harm, but the good stuff comes in the detail.

Here's something you should already know: Your primary demographic to engage with your website or social media channels is mothers. Moms are the most likely to call your office to make an appointment for their child, and they're going to care the most about how their kid feels leaving the office. This is evidenced in social media engagement: For most oral surgeons, their prime Facebook audience is women aged 25 to 40. With that in mind, your target for proliferating reviews should be parents. When a mom is making a follow-up appointment for her daughter after her wisdom teeth removal, ask if she would be interested in leaving a review online.

It's not just the sparkling reviews that you should seek either. Some specialists

hesitate to encourage reviewing out of fear of negative feedback which could harm their online reputation.

Forget that concern right now. Let's dispel the "bad reviews" myth.

# All News is Good News

First off: If you're really that concerned that your practice is going to receive overwhelmingly bad reviews, you may need to make some significant staffing changes or invest in some consulting. If your practice feels subpar, you have a responsibility to change that on behalf of your patients. You should be fully confident in your abilities as a medical professional, and rounding out your patient's experience should be an element of personability that will encourage them to review your practice positively.

Now that we have that out of the way:

You need to break down the fear that a few poor reviews will demolish your Google ranking. Sure, any business that's riddled with negative feedback online will discourage some from investing. But a couple 1 or 2 star reviews won't really hurt your practice. On the contrary, they make actually help.



One study suggests that bad reviews can actually improve customer conversion by 67 percent.<sup>5</sup>

How does this happen?

Much of it comes on part of the business owner. Leaving a bad review as is won't help much, but you can bolster your reputation as competent, level-headed, professional, and engaged if you actually respond to that

**Bad reviews can improve customer conversion by 67 percent**

<sup>5</sup> Harsevoort, Bernie. "The Importance of Google Reviews." Rocket SEO, 30 May 2014.

feedback; try to alleviate the situation and suggest you want to come to a mutually-agreed upon fix. This isn't necessarily intended to convince the unhappy patient, rather to indicate to future patients (who are likely to check out your poor reviews) that you're interested in their satisfaction and willing to work towards compromise.

There's also an element of authenticity with bad reviews, as outlandish as that sounds. A business that boasts 100 five-star reviews but very little textual feedback, especially critical feedback, can start to feel untrustworthy. You never want to give the impression that you're compelling patients to leave high marks. If you're encouraging patients to leave reviews, leave the request open-ended. Avoid language like "If you enjoyed your experience, leave us a 5-star review!" Instead, aim for neutral language such as "We appreciate your feedback. Follow this link to leave a Google review."

Little steps like this can improve your online reputation in Google's eyes. The importance of authenticity in reviewing can't be underscored.

# Automation vs. "Organic" Reviewing

Some oral surgeon's practice the presumption that a hands-off mindset is best when it comes to gaining customer reviews, that all patients who have a positive enough experience will review on their own accord. As we've specified in this paper, however, we know this to be untrue: The most likely populations to review are those who experience overwhelmingly good or bad service, and the rest (approximately the middle 60 percent of your patients) won't be particularly compelled to act at all.

Here's where review automation software is your saving grace.

The term "automation" here doesn't mean automatically generated reviews – as we've learned, this is absolutely prohibited in Google's terms of reviewing. What we're referring to is a process that actually streamlines the reviewing process for your patients.

This digital era perpetuates simplifying and accelerating, cutting away the bells and whistles of online processes to the absolute necessities. The reason for this, unfortunately, comes down to the fact that consumers won't do any business a favor that takes them more than 60 seconds. Our attention spans are short, and our willingness to execute an action that has no direct benefit to ourselves must be very fast and very easy.

Automated reviewing does just this. Systems often involve a patient entering contact information (an email address or phone number) to which a link to a review is sent. This dramatically cuts down the time a patient would normally spend searching through Google for your business, or otherwise attempting to figure out how to leave a review (remember here: not all of your customers are as technically savvy as you'd like them to be. Particularly for your elderly patients, trying to find a review portal could take more time than it's worth).

**It's imperative you find a happy medium between patient interaction and digital streamlining**

Many review automation systems have excellent ROI, and the best overall will be those with who can guide patients through their review journey the fastest.

However, there's an important distinction to be made here. While automation is excellent for streamlining, the caveat is the loss of human touch. What we absolutely don't want to happen is the loss of human interaction for the sake of digitization. Just sending a link to a patient without any kind of communication with the surgeon or receptionist may cause the patient to feel like a vessel for reviews rather than a client. Your priority should always be cultivating the patient experience, meaning you can evidence your care for their wellbeing and comfort. Absolute automation risks harming your reputation as a caring practitioner.

Thus, it's imperative you find a happy medium between patient interaction and digital streamlining.

The more you can reduce the friction of the reviewing process, the more reviews you'll have in the long run. The more reviews you proliferate, the higher likelihood of website hits. The more traffic to your website, the better your conversion rate. The equation really is that rudimentary.

# Summary

Google is the gatekeeper of patient to practice interactions. Nowadays, no new patient walks through your doors without already having an idea of how you fall in the digital hierarchy. If you're apathetic about where you rank, you're at the bottom of the list. And garnering new patients is going to be an exhaustive uphill battle.

Increasing customer reviews takes little effort on your part as oral surgeon. Whenever you ask a patient to leave feedback, you're essentially asking for charity. If that makes you uncomfortable, keep in mind that the crowdsourcing paradigm has put the fate of your business in the hands of those whom you serve. Whether you trust them or not, they're in charge. As business owner, the most you can do is provide them with the tools to be active participants in the digital marketplace.

If you're interested in growing your body of reviews substantially and steadily, invest in review automation software. You'll save your patients considerable time and grief, and you'll witness immediate results in your Google rankings.

**A business without reviews doesn't exist.**





Boolean is the first automated review system designed specifically for oral surgeons.

In an age when digital reviews pack as much punch as a medical referral, Boolean streamlines the review process to increase your practice's Google, Facebook, and Yelp reviews.

We've cut away the fat of digital reviewing to the absolute necessities, reducing the total online process from the standard 7 clicks to less than 2. Re-viewing doesn't take more than 5 seconds of the patient's day. By saving the patient time and effort, Boolean guarantees increased reviews and improved conversions.

Because patient experience is even more important than automation, Boolean is also the first review software to include comprehensive training for the practice with purchase, including:

- Scripts and guidelines for receptionists on the most effective way to ask patients for reviews
- The importance of streamlining the reviewing process
- How to guide the patient through the decision process— All they need to do is click twice from the comfort of their home to leave a review

We believe good practices start with happy patients. That's why we prioritize your staff's interactions with your patients, ensuring every patient is asked if they'd like to review and enabled with the tools to do so easily and quickly.

Email [boolean@skeye.media](mailto:boolean@skeye.media) for more information on how Boolean can increase your body of reviews while still maintaining a positive patient experience.



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