



# Social media and negativity

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The pastime formerly known as **BRAND BASHING** has hit the web and **exploded**, and the ability of anonymous individuals to trash a practice makes many dentists wary of dipping their toes in the social media pool.

Unfortunately, ignoring the Internet does not make it go away. Chances are that your practice is already listed in many online directories that scrape data from various sources. People are probably already weighing in with their opinions.

There are four main truths you need to accept so you can turn social media into a tool instead of allowing it to be used as a weapon against you. They are:

- ① You cannot control what people post about you on the Internet.
- ② Negativity happens since you cannot please 100% of the people 100% of the time.
- ③ Negativity can be a positive if you handle it in a positive manner.
- ④ Social media can be one of the most powerful tools for brand promotion and reputation management at your disposal.

Not having an online presence is like having a blank credit report. If a potential lender does not know how you deal with debt, how does the lender know you are trustworthy?

If a potential patient does not know how you handle issues with patients, how does the patient know he or she will be treated well? A patient complaint on your Facebook or Twitter pages gives you the opportunity to show just how concerned you are with patient care and satisfaction.

There are four things you have to do when dealing with negativity online to turn such situations to your advantage. They include:

- ① Do not spout off in the heat of the moment, react in anger or with hurt feelings, or go on the attack.
- ② React as soon as possible after you have had a chance to review the comment and come to a calm, logical course of action.
- ③ Apologize. Whether or not the complaint is legitimate, often all the other person wants is for his or her frustration to be acknowledged.
- ④ Offer to help in any way you can, and present the person with an option to contact you privately.

A public apology and offer to make everything right is the quickest way to defuse a negative situation. If all a patient wants is attention, you can easily give that to the person via personal message, email, or a phone call without a huge public display.

If the last post to the Facebook comment or reply to a Tweet is your calm, concerned offer of help, the public will view you as compassionate and willing to bend over backwards to make things right.

You should choose your battles carefully. If someone makes an offensive comment about your race, ethnicity, or gender, 99% of people reading the post will think the person is a bigot. In many cases, people will do the work for you by crying shame on the aggressor. You do not need to respond to posts such as this.

If your ethics or the professionalism of your practice is called into question, a basic apology for whatever made the commenter upset, followed by a request for more information so you can rectify the issue, is a professional way to deal with and defuse the situation.

No one is perfect, and there may be times when you are at fault. If a patient has a specific complaint, respond quickly and decisively, and fix the problem. If you can satisfy the patient, he or she may be willing to update comments made and praise you for your quick action and attention to detail.

Social media is a conversation. If you do not participate, you cannot direct the conversation. This is what brand reputation is about. Your practice needs you to take a proactive stand, and allow members of the community to interact with you on a one-on-one basis.

Your base of patients, along with their friends and families, are your best source of feedback and data about the practice. When you put yourself out there honestly and are not afraid to deal with occasional negativity, you will be afforded the opportunity to make a difference in the way the public perceives you. Don't miss out on the chance! **DE**

*Kristie Nation is the founder and CEO of myDentalCMO, a marketing consulting firm that provides strategic marketing "treatment plans" exclusively for dental practices. The firm was founded with a mission to prevent dentists from wasting countless dollars marketing their practices ineffectively. She can be reached at [kristie@mydentalcmo.com](mailto:kristie@mydentalcmo.com) or (888) 557-6443.*