

OPTIMIZING YOUR ONLINE REVIEW STRATEGY

How real patients really view review sites.

BY DAVID EVANS, PHD, MBA

We hear that reviews and review sites are an important part of an online marketing strategy all the time. But which review sites matter most? And how many of them should an aesthetic practice focus on to increase conversion? There's Yelp, Google, Facebook, and Yellow Pages, not to mention the numerous review sites specifically for healthcare, including Vitals, RateMDs, HealthGrades, UCompareHealth, RealSelf; the list goes on and on.

OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

To find out, we conducted an online survey on our plastic surgery patient education portal, The Consumer Guide to Plastic Surgery (yourplasticsurgeryguide.com). This site receives 4,000 visitors per day.

We asked visitors two very simple and straightforward questions about review sites:

- Which review site is most important to you when researching a plastic surgeon?
- Which review site is least important to you when researching a plastic surgeon?

RESULTS

More than 300 people responded to the survey during a 30-day period from May 1 to May 30, 2017. It turns out respondents view Google as a key player, but not the only one. Reviews on the search giant ranked as most important for the respondents, but at the same time, some potential patients rated Google in the middle of the pack on the least-important scale.

Facebook is rated the sixth most important review site and the second least important. That means that at any given time five other sites are seen as more important than Facebook. Yelp is considered an important site by many potential patients, fourth from the top, while some find it least important at third from the bottom.

Prospective patients researching plastic surgery place significant value on the healthcare-specific sites (HealthGrades, RateMDs, Vitals, and RealSelf), with all four showing a favorable score on the least important scale. RealSelf had the second highest number of votes for the most important review site behind Google, while Vitals had the fewest number of consumers indicate it is the least important site.

Review Site	Plastic Surgery	
	Most *	Least**
City Search	9	4
Facebook	6	2
Google	1	6
Health Grades	3	8
RateMDs	5	9
RealSelf	2	7
Vitals	7	10
Yelp	4	3
Yellow Pages	8	1
ZocDoc	10	5

* A ranking of 1 means consumers feel it is the most important review site
 ** A ranking of 1 means consumers feel it is the least important review site.

The data also show that prospective patients use multiple sites online to research procedures and choose surgeons. Visitors to Consumer Guide to Plastic Surgery were aware of and had obviously visited RealSelf; because they rated RealSelf as an important site for reviews.

CONCLUSION

The perception of value from the review sites varies among respondents. Don't sell your review strategy short by focusing on a limited number of sites. To capture the full range of potential patients and to create the best online reputation, a balanced strategy that includes eight to 10 sites is a must. And for plastic surgery practices, the strategy should include healthcare-related sites. ■



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