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Pulling Rank: Can Online Reviews Boost Your Rankings?

By David Evans, PhD, MBA

Online reviews are where it's at, and this trend won't change anytime soon, but how do they affect your rankings on Google and other search engines?

The answer depends on where the reviews are served.

Reviews that appear on sites other than your own, such as Yelp, Google+, or RealSelf, can increase your online footprint, but really don't contribute much to search engine optimization (SEO). These sites want to rank for the same terms you do, so that they can generate more traffic and sell more ads. This means that any ranking juice will be theirs—not yours.

That is not to say these sites can't help you. Many prospective patients add "reviews" to search phrases (eg, "breast augmentation reviews san diego"), and that will capture more eyeballs because large review sites rank well and will continue to capture these types of searches.

What to do? Develop a strategy to obtain reviews on external sites for increased visibility. This may include asking satisfied patients to write a review, handing patients postcards with review-site URLs at check-out, or sending out surveys to determine who is happy and then soliciting reviews from them. Getting more reviews r



requires a proactive effort.

CLOSER TO HOME

Amazon has been placing reviews on the same pages as product information for years, and with good reason: when reviews are mixed with product information, conversion increases. This is why placing reviews on your own site will boost conversion and SEO for name-related searches such as "John Smith plastic surgeon reviews."

On-site reviews can also help with "procedure + reviews" searches. Procedure-related reviews should be placed on the procedure pages, not just on a reviews page, the Home page or the About Us page. You may even be able to compete with the bigger sites such as Yelp and RealSelf for these "review"-related searches because your site will now have sections of procedure pages dedicated to reviews.

Whether reviews appear on your page or on external review sites, the following tips will help you get the most mileage:

KEEP IT REAL

Too many positive reviews look fake. Today's savvy patients are now wary of a pristine online image and often look for a few negative reviews to validate your positive reviews. A study by Stanford Business

School confirmed this, calling it the "Blemish Effect."

BE CONSISTENT

All the major review sites have profiles for aesthetic surgeons, most of which have been set up automatically with software that combs through government databases. The name, address and phone number (NAP) information on these review sites are called "citations." Google uses citations to rank websites. Make sure your citations are correct and consistent.

FILL IT UP

If a review site allows pictures and other information to be posted as part of your profile, do it. These FREE bells and whistles will increase conversion once a consumer reaches your profile.

DON'T DOUBLE DIP

Google does not like duplicate content. Copying a review from Yelp and pasting it on your site is duplicate content. Instead, use a feed from the review site so that Google knows that reviews are present on your site—without duplicating the content. This is called Schema code. Alternatively, create an image of the review, and place the image on your website.

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