

# Rating, and righting, your online reputation

By Gale Pryor | June 1, 2016

## Data Snapshot

5-9%

increase in revenues seen by restaurants for every star on Yelp.

Online reviews matter: A one-star increase in a restaurant's Yelp rating boosts revenues by 5 to 9 percent. But the healthcare industry has been slow to keep up with modern consumer behavior – with many doctors' offices dismissing patients' online rants, or barely keeping track of them at all.

Things may finally be changing. In an ongoing study, athenahealth researchers are examining key financial and operational metrics from across a national network of 99,000 providers and identified the top 10 percent of performers. Among the key

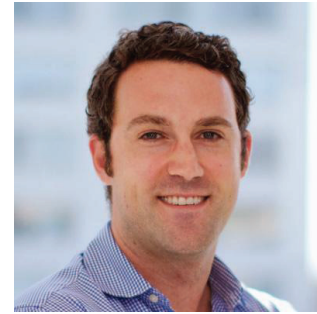
## Key Takeaways

- 1 Patients' ratings on Yelp match HCAHPS survey results.
- 2 Reach out and respond to all feedback: positive and negative.
- 3 Outsourcing online reputation management can pay off.

qualities shared by top performers is an effort to engage patients across multiple channels – including online rating sites like Yelp.

A valid source of patient feedback, ratings on these sites correlate with HCAHPS ratings, according to a recent study published in Health Affairs in 2016 – and can be more informative, often covering details missed by the federal government survey. Online rating sites can also serve as unofficial referral channels, as more patients begin their searches for care with the Google search bar.

“Like it or not, patients are having a conversation about your practice online,” says Luke Kervin, CEO of PatientPop, a company that helps medical offices manage their digital presence. “It’s important to control the conversation.”



Here are some tips from organizations that have taken control of their online reputations.

### **Ask for feedback, fast**

To stave off negative comments, high performers say, ask patients for feedback on the day of the visit—even before they leave the office. Given an immediate opportunity to rant, patients may feel less compelled to complain online later.

One high performer, a top orthopedic care center in California, asks patients to drop answers to two quick survey questions in a box in their waiting room. And one day each week, one large Ob-Gyn group emails every patient who was seen that day to ask how the visit went. Patients who leave positive comments are encouraged to share their testimonials on Yelp, HealthGrades, and other ratings sites.

### **Heed the complainers**

When patients do post negative comments online, high performers pay attention: Patient feedback opens a window into what’s going well and what needs work. One large orthopedic group found that in a sea of positive reviews, patients had a common—and basic—complaint: The front desk workers were so busy they didn’t look up and smile.

So the office adopted Phreesia, a tablet-based check-in system, to streamline the staff’s work so receptionists could focus more on patient needs. They also wrote scripts and role-played friendlier greetings. Patients loved the new, warm welcome, and said so online. Now, both the billing staff and clinical team are enrolled in a customer training program.

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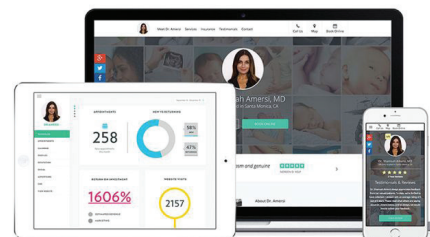
### **Contact unhappy patients**

When patients are unhappy – no matter how small or off-base the complaint – high performers reach out. “Often those patients just want to be heard,” says Quinten Davis, chief operating officer of Mid-Maryland Musculoskeletal Institute, an orthopedic practice that makes a point of calling every patient who posts a negative review. Many patients will repost a more positive comment “just because we contacted them,” Davis says.

### **Outsource the job**

PatientPop is one of several new businesses – others include Demandforce and Binary Fountain – that manage the online presence of health care organizations. Among their tasks: monitor ratings sites and social media for comments from a practice’s patients, and flag comments that require action.

“In the past, our marketing person had to spend her evenings running through these sites checking for patient comments,” says Davis, who uses Binary Fountain. “Now we get a report: ‘Hey, guys, here’s one you need to be aware of.’”



## Say thanks – publicly

Whether a patient posts a rant or a rave, he's taken time to comment. So high performers take the time – on that same site – to write back with a “thank you” for the feedback. PatientPop advises clients: “The patient has let you know how they feel, rather than bashing you to friends and family and never visiting your practice again. That deserves your thanks – and other patients will take note of your graciousness.”

Read more about the drivers and habits of high-performing physician networks.

*Gale Pryor is associate editor for athenaInsight.*

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