

Dealing with negativity online



Laura Horton shares her top tips on coping with the darker side of social media

Whether you've written a blog or simply uploaded a new social media post, it can sometimes feel as though you're pouring your heart and soul online. Expressing an opinion is one thing, but posting work is something entirely different, and I know many dental professionals are often fearful of sharing in case they receive negativity from the public or their dental peers.

However, social media can be a great space for sharing the work you do, not only for marketing purposes to show patients (existing and potential) the standard they can expect from you, as well as new treatments, team members, etc, but also for knowledge sharing and learning from colleagues.

If the fear of negativity is holding you back, here are some pointers for dealing with it.

Don't panic

If you're a naturally anxious person, your first reaction is probably going to be panic. Take a deep breath and stay calm. Remember, that everyone is allowed an opinion, even if it wasn't the one you were hoping for. In many cases you can simply take it as constructive criticism, remember that, on the whole, most people aren't trying to get at you. Make a cup of tea and read the comment again with a calmer mind, you'll probably realise that it's not as bad as you first thought.

Face up to it

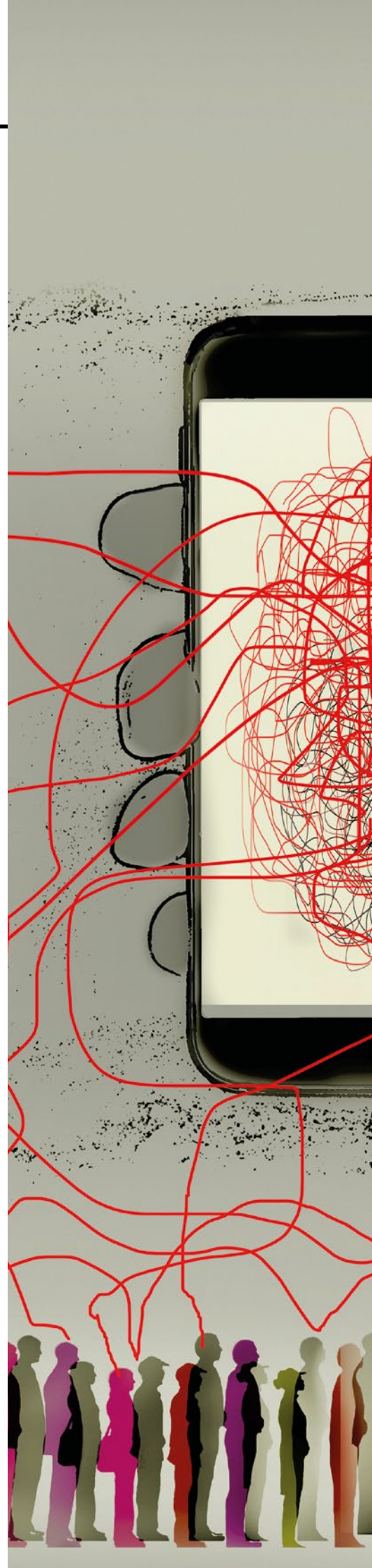
If the comment is a bad review of the service you've provided from a genuine patient who is dissatisfied, use this as an opportunity to openly rectify the situation. The fact that they've aired their opinion online shows that they want your service to improve, so take their comments on board and use it as helpful feedback. Respond to the comment thanking them for taking the time to leave a message and express your concerns regarding their experience. Then ask them to get in touch by email, DM or phone so that you can speak to them in private, do not create an open forum for discussion that could publicly escalate or breach patient confidentiality.

Don't leave them hanging

If you are dealing with a negative review, respond to it quickly, within 60 minutes – angry people don't like to feel ignored. This will show that you care about your patient's concerns and it will also demonstrate good customer service.

Make your response personal

A generic cut and paste response will not show you or your practice as a caring brand, so show your sincerity by answering personally to each unique comment or review. Of course, you need to respect patient confidentiality at all times – never publicly discuss any personal or treatment



information – but do make sure that your replies are not generic.

The same goes for the positive comments! If a patient has taken the time to sit down and write a heartfelt review of your service, the least you can do is thank them with the same level of respect. Whenever I see companies leaving the same response time after time to their satisfied customers I always feel a little disheartened by it – it almost undermines the good feedback they have just received.

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Don't delete!

While it might be tempting to hit the delete button on any negative comments, resist the urge to do so. I know you want to have a 'perfect' review score or comment history but life isn't perfect and it's absolutely OK for it to stay. If it is a genuine customer and you have replied promptly and dealt with the concern, this shows other people that your customer service is on point.

If the comment is a 'troll' – someone being nasty for the sake of it – again don't delete it, you'll only add fuel to the fire. See my point later on about dealing with trolls.

The only instance where it would be feasible to delete comments is if they are rude, explicit or spam. In these circumstances they should be reported to the social media platform, deleted and blocked.

Dental groups and forums

As with any profession, in dentistry everybody has their own opinions and preferences. In the same way that patients have differing smile goals, dentists will also vary in the style of work they offer. This may be their preference or it may be due to their demographic and the work that is requested of them.

If you decide to post your own work in a dental forum, whether for advice and opinions or because you are proud of the particular case, bear in mind that you might be opening yourself up to criticism. Just remember that everyone is different with varying ideals and aesthetics – after all, the world would be a boring place if we were all the same. In addition, some people are definitely more vocal than others.

However, if you like to learn by sharing and exchanging knowledge, be prepared to view perceived negativity as constructive criticism and take it as an opportunity to learn from your peers. Essentially, grow a thick skin!

Don't rise to trolls

There's nothing a miserable keyboard warrior likes more than an additional opportunity to argue, so don't give them the power to do so. If you see a nasty comment, ignore it. Rising to it will just give them the reaction they want and before you know it you'll end up in a Facebook war of words. These people are adept at twisting what you say, however eloquently you make your point, so it will just be a fruitless task. All it will do is waste your time and cause you added stress. The best response is to keep a still tongue, we're not here for the bad vibes!

Don't feel the need to be perfect

The rise of social media has made us feel like we have to lead these flawless lives and then reflect them in little squares on a grid. Remember that the people you follow are only showing their best bits, they're not perfect all the time either! If you want to post something online, then go for it, don't battle with yourself over whether or not it's 'perfect' enough. Conversely, if you're not comfortable posting online don't feel pressured to do so. It can be great for marketing but that doesn't mean you have to put yourself out there if you don't want to.

Here's an idea

If you have enjoyed a post – especially that of a friend or colleague – and see a negative comment on it, write something positive letting the post owner know how much you enjoyed it. While this won't be a direct response to the troll comment, it will help to diffuse the situation and it will make your friend feel a lot better. ♦

Laura Horton worked has worked in dentistry for 21 years and has an unrivalled passion and enthusiasm for treatment coordination, business and team development. In 2008 Laura left her full-time practice management role. Ever since, with her years of experience and vast amount of knowledge, Laura has been working with dental practices to help them successfully reach their true potential.

Horton Consulting work with dental practices through the UK and Europe to motivate and inspire the leaders and the team to deliver the vision of the owner(s) in a patient centred business.