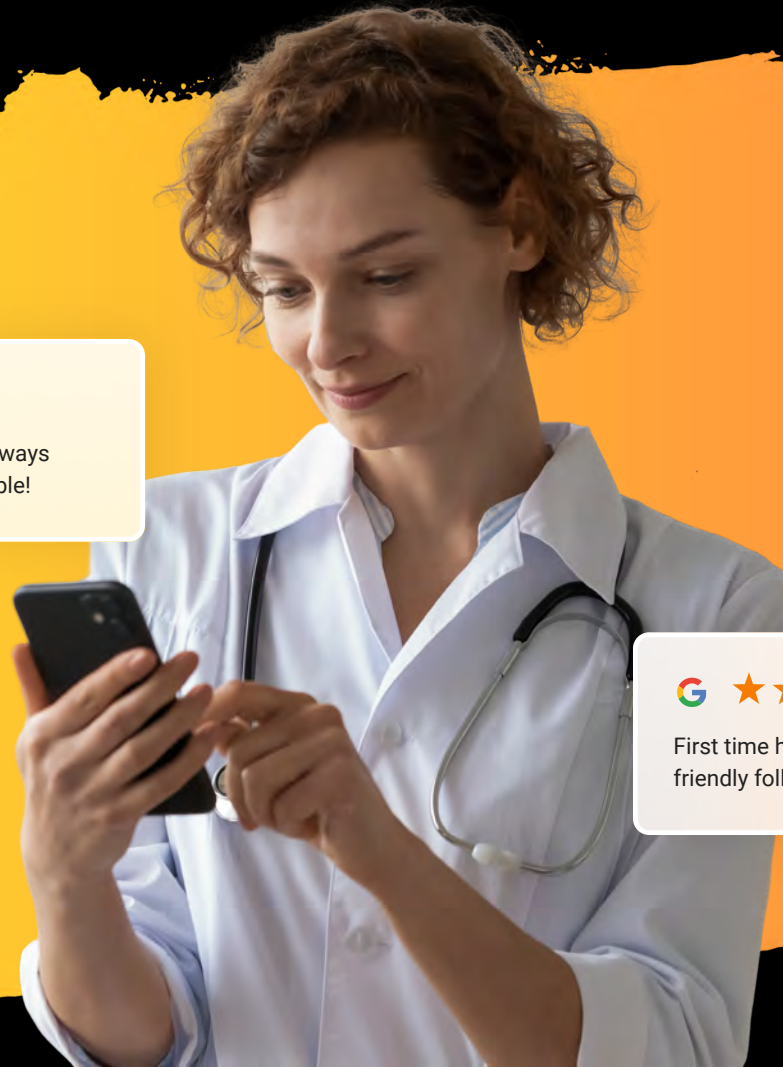


# The 2021 state of online reviews: Healthcare edition



Great experience! The staff is always helpful, friendly, and knowledgeable!



First time here. Exceptional service and really friendly folk. I highly recommend them!



# Introduction

Most consumers turn to patient reviews to determine which healthcare provider to visit and why. Industry data found that [77%](#) of consumers use reviews as the first step to finding a new doctor.

More people are turning to online reviews to select a practice than ever before, which can either grow your practice or hurt your patient acquisition efforts. Reviews help patients find a local practice that meets their expectations, making it an indispensable component of your growth strategy.

Understanding the latest best practices in patient reviews management will help you to generate more positive reviews and seamlessly manage them at scale.

With this in mind, we've analyzed our pool of customer data made up of **24,000 healthcare practices of all sizes** to identify how review management has changed in the last year, and what that means going forward. There's a lot to cover, so let's dive right in.



## Key findings

- **92%** of online patient reviews were positive in 2020
- Healthcare practices sent **the second most amount of review requests in 2020**, second to retail businesses
- **23%** of patient reviews were written on niche sites such as RateMDs, Vitals, Realself & CareDash
- In 2020, the average open rate for review request emails was **69%**
- The conversion rate of emailed review requests is **21%**, and the SMS conversion rate is **30%**
- Only **21%** of reviews are responded to by healthcare practices



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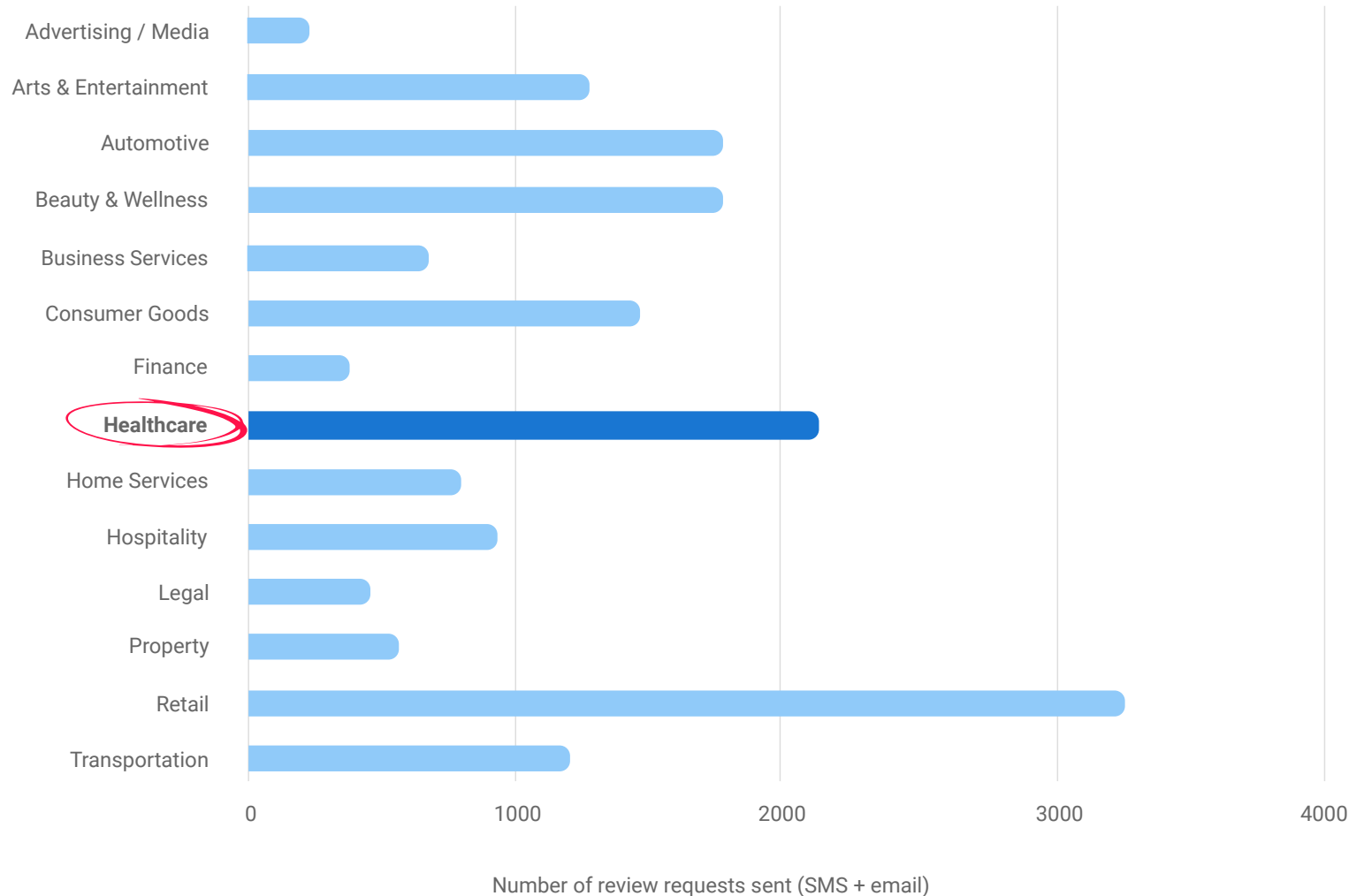
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# Do healthcare practices regularly request reviews?

The short answer is yes.

**Average review request by business location by industry (2020)**





Healthcare practices sent the second most amount of review requests in 2020, second to retail businesses. For decades, the healthcare industry has been full of confusion, red tape and bureaucracy. This is why consumers had consistently rated it as one of their [most hated industries](#). In response, healthcare has taken a patient-centric approach to fuel growth in recent times.

As healthcare becomes more patient-centric, it is hardly surprising that the industry has made review collection a part of their Experience Marketing strategy, particularly when considering that [94%](#) of healthcare patients use online reviews to evaluate providers.

What's more, 95%+ healthcare practices opt to automate and send out review requests automatically, resulting in healthy review request numbers (more on this later). Healthcare practices will likely continue to increase their review requests as they aim to improve the patient experience.



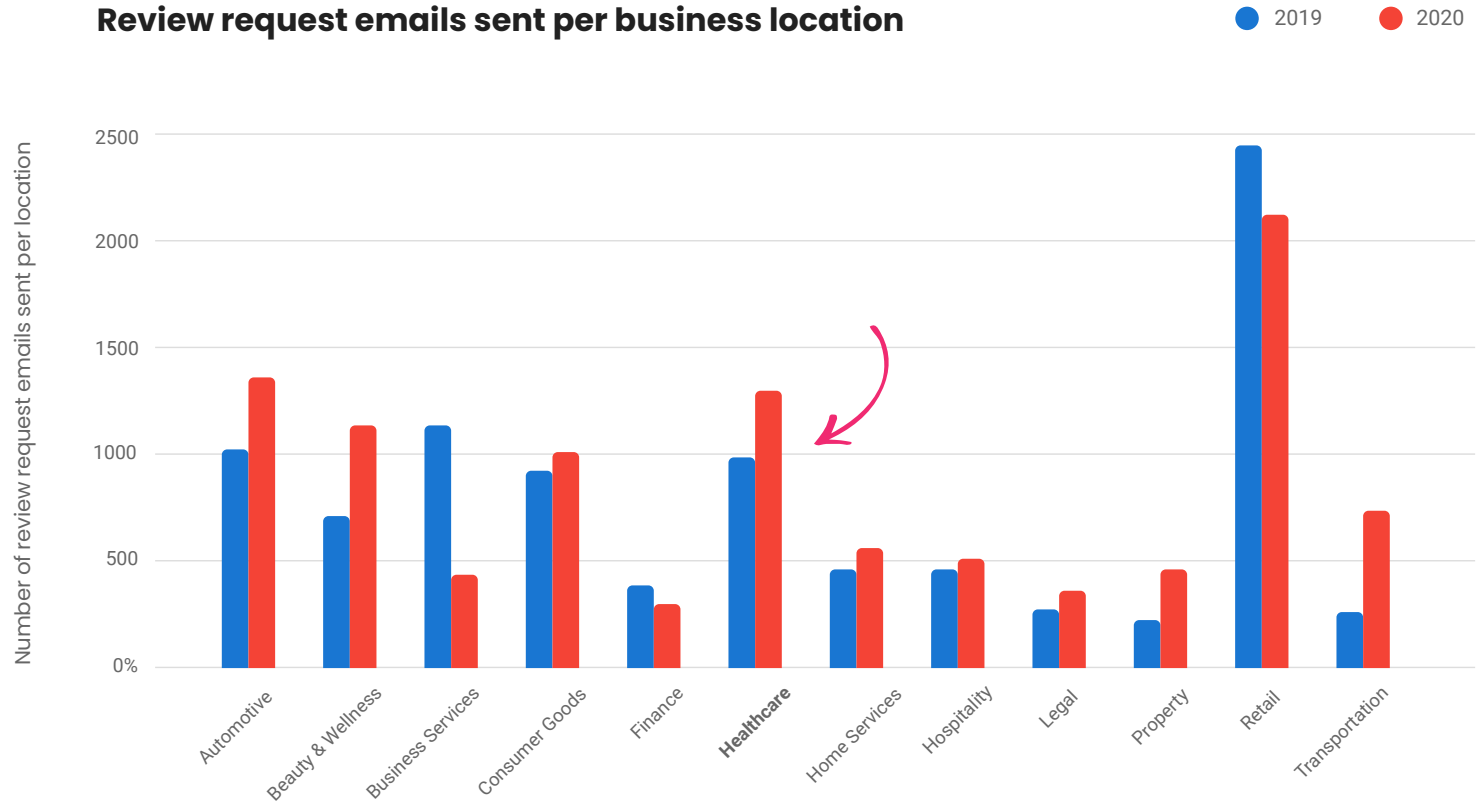




# How do healthcare practices request for reviews – Email or SMS?

Consistent with the overall review request trend, **healthcare practices** send high volumes of review requests via email. In 2020, healthcare practices increased review requests sent by email by **26%**.

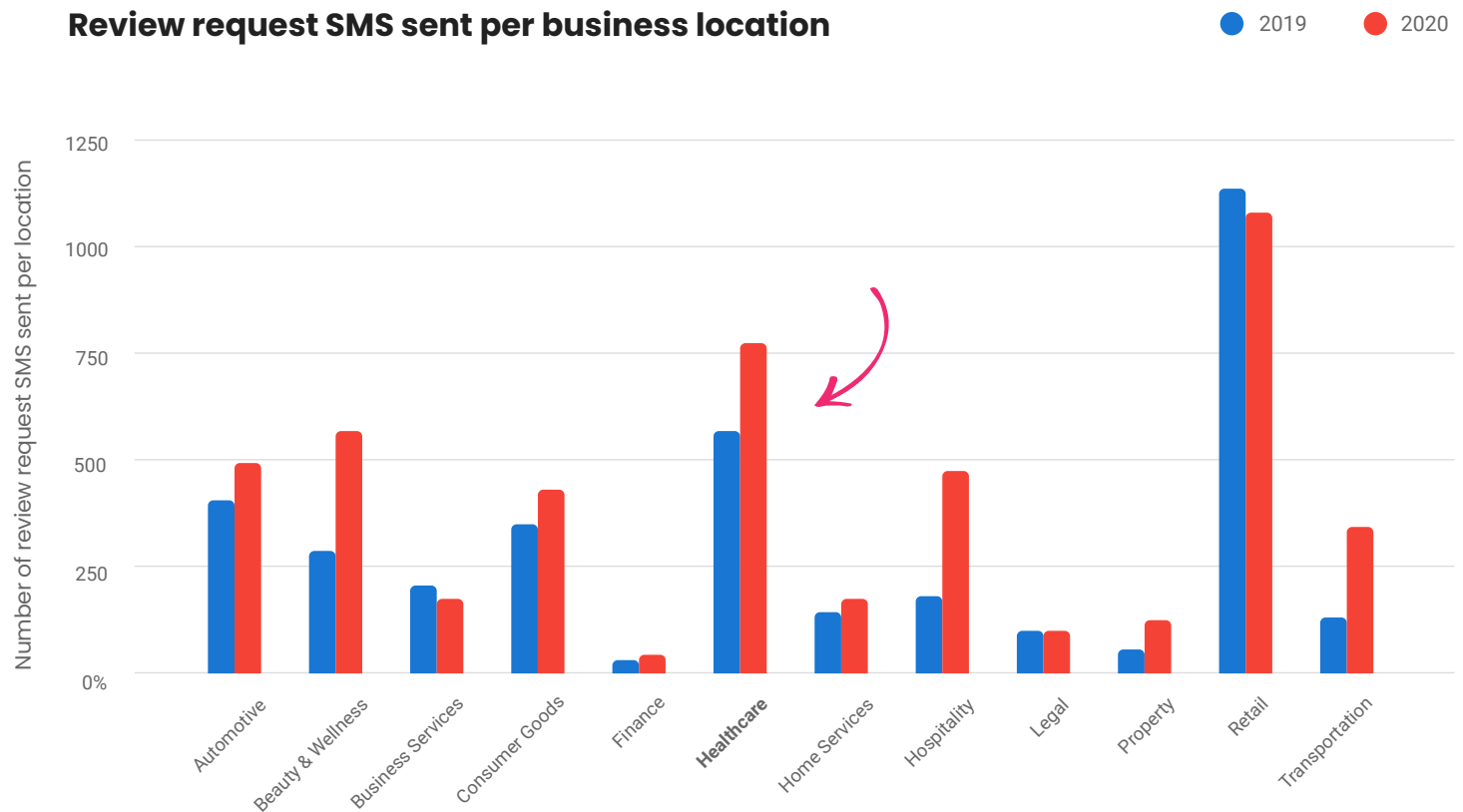
Review request emails sent per business location





The healthcare industry took center stage during the pandemic and society engaged more frequently with online channels, which is why it isn't surprising to see so many healthcare practices ramped up their review request emails. According to industry benchmarks, open rates in 2020 grew from 21% to a peak of 25% and click-through rates increased from 2.5% to a high of 3.3%. However, Birdeye customers enjoyed **an average 69% open rate** for review request emails in 2020 – *more on this later*.

While email experienced a spike in engagement during the pandemic, our data shows that healthcare practices leveraged SMS marketing as a strategic method to scale their review requests. 2020 saw an upward trend in SMS adoption. Healthcare practices increased their SMS review requests by **24%** in 2020 compared to 2019.





Smartphone usage has increased to exponential heights — 46% of people check their phones before they even get out of bed. People keep their phones readily available to find information and to communicate - making them an increasingly effective channel to request reviews. With the amount of smartphone users expected to increase even more to 298 million by the end of 2021, we'll likely see this channel continue to grow. Healthcare practices seeking to generate more reviews should consider increasing their SMS review requests to boost conversions.

Hi Ana, thanks for visiting Lumen Healthcare today. Will you take some time to leave us a review?  
<https://bit.ly/2RHvCzn>





# Average number of review sites in every request

There are a plethora of review sites you can request reviews for from your patients, but that doesn't mean you *should* ask them to leave reviews on all of them.

Sometimes having too many options can be a bad thing; it can cause decision paralysis and decrease your conversion rate in the process. On the flip side, having only one review site limits the reviewer. If they don't have an account for the site you're requesting a review on they're unlikely to create one just for the sake of leaving a review — which will also hurt your conversion rate.





So what's the sweet spot? On average, healthcare practices on the Birdeye platform have **2 review sites configured** within their review requests.

**Average number of review sites in the review request template**



Having **2-3 options** for your customers provides them with just enough flexibility to choose which review site they're most comfortable leaving a review on. We recommend offering two general sites (such as Google and Facebook) and one healthcare-specific such as **RateMDs** or **ZocDoc**.



# Automation leads the way for practices when sending review requests to patients

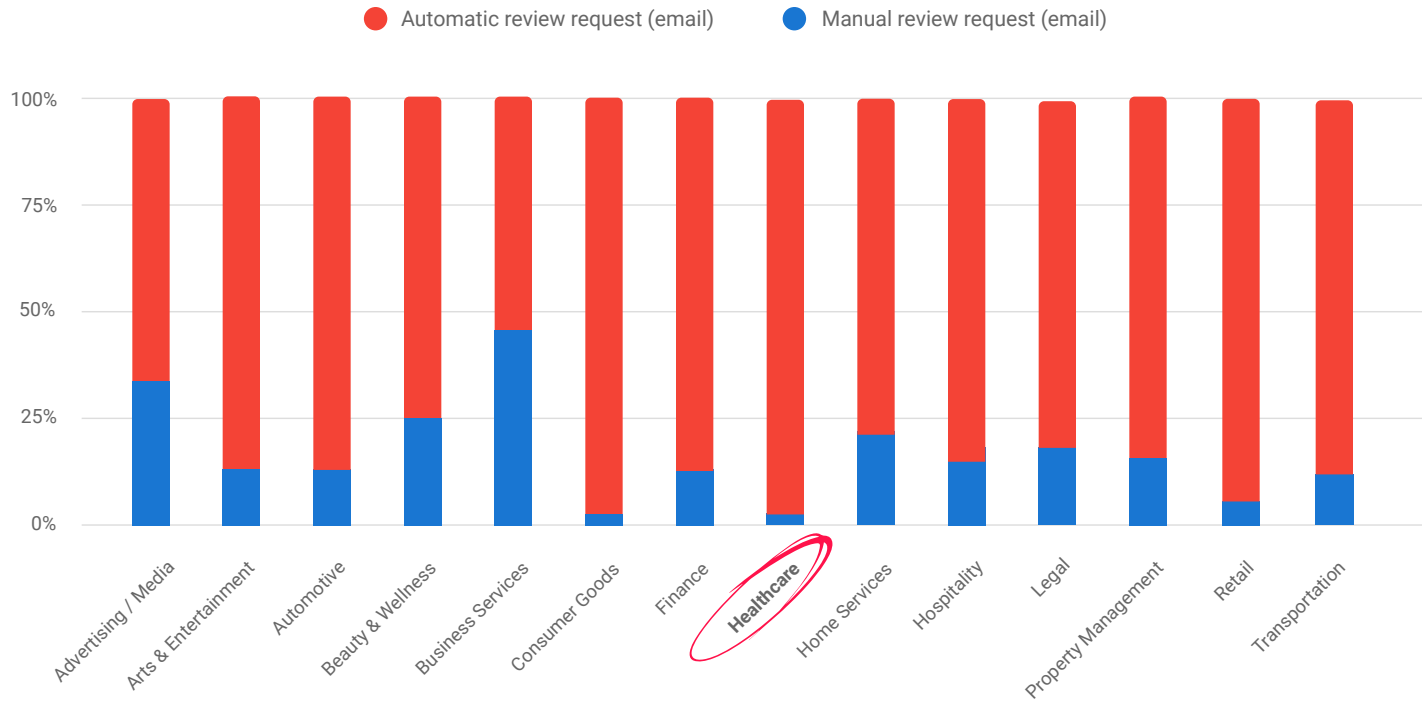
Digital transformation has been significantly fast-tracked in the wake of the pandemic. Healthcare practices had to rapidly adapt to significant increases in online patient engagement – from telehealth to patient reviews management.

With more consumers turning to online channels to discover and choose a practice, automation helps healthcare practices to sustainably improve their online reputation. Manual requests are time-consuming and can often fall through the cracks as priorities shift, especially during a pandemic, which can damage the long-term reputation of the practice.



## Send customer experience requests

Send **1** ▾ request to **customers from all locations** ▾  
when **customer is added from** ▾ **past 4-6 months** ▾



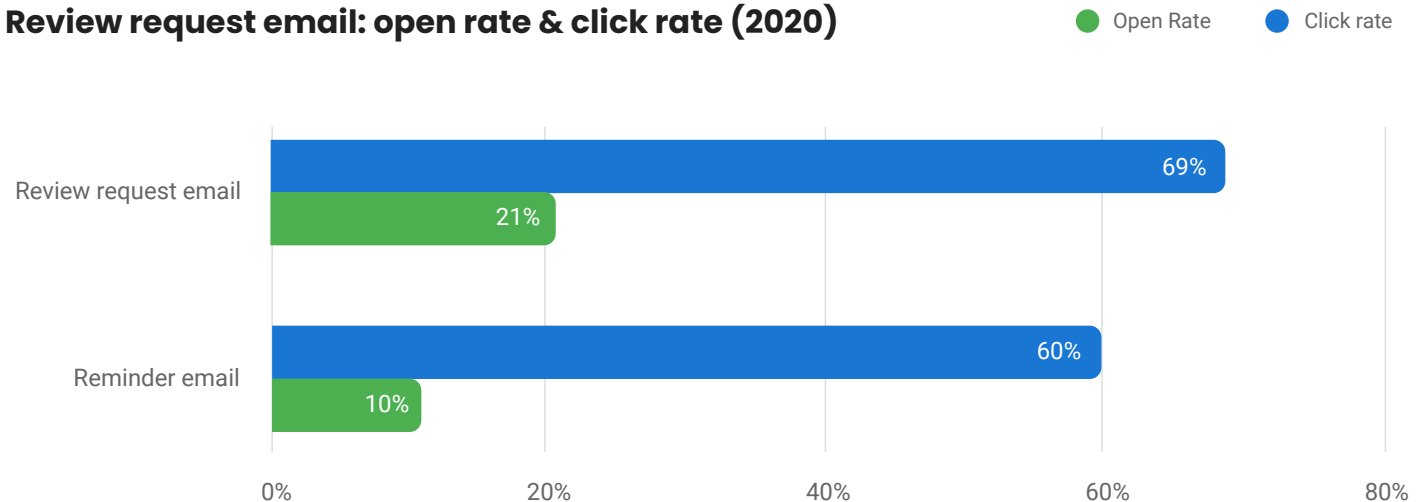
Automation not only eliminates the pain that comes with sending review requests manually, but also ensures that businesses receive a steady flow of reviews over time because the requests are automatically triggered after a transaction.



# Review request email performance

As we touched on earlier, the average open rate for review request emails in 2020 for Birdeye customers was **69%**. This is **5% up** from numbers observed in 2019. The click-through rate (rate at which the email recipient clicks the link provided within the email) stands at **21%**.

## Review request email: open rate & click rate (2020)



The engagement rates seen from Birdeye review request emails is a whopping **48%** higher than the average open rate of 21% from industry data for the same time period. Additionally, the average click-through rate from Birdeye review request emails is **18.5%** higher than the *peak performance* seen from industry data of 3.5% in 2020.

This reflects that email is far from dead. What matters is sending the *right* email, at the right time, with the right technology.





Aside from review requests, Birdseye also allows healthcare practices to send reminder emails to their patients in case the patient missed seeing the original request. The open rate and click-through rate of reminder review request emails is **60% and 10%** respectively. Reminders are a great way to improve the overall conversion rate of review requests. Birdseye recommends sending **between 1 and 3** reminders for optimal conversion of review requests to reviews.

## Review request SMS performance

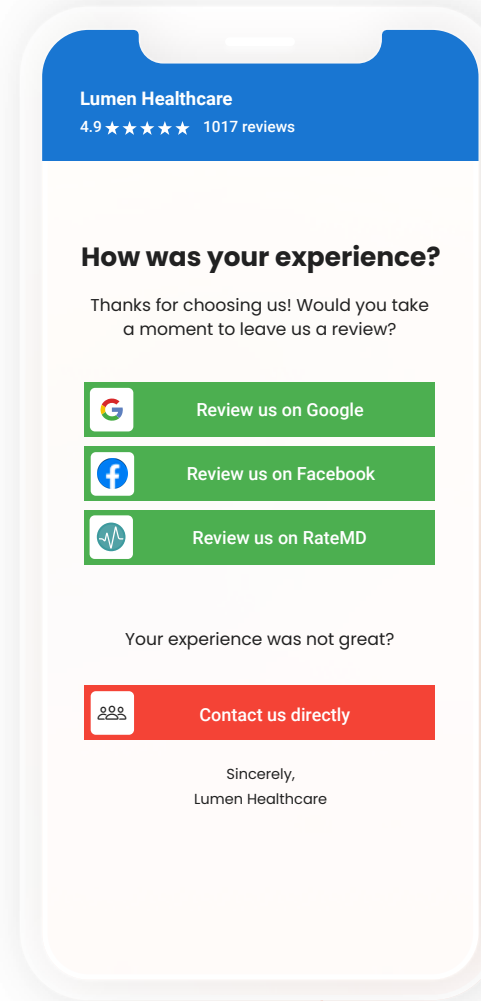
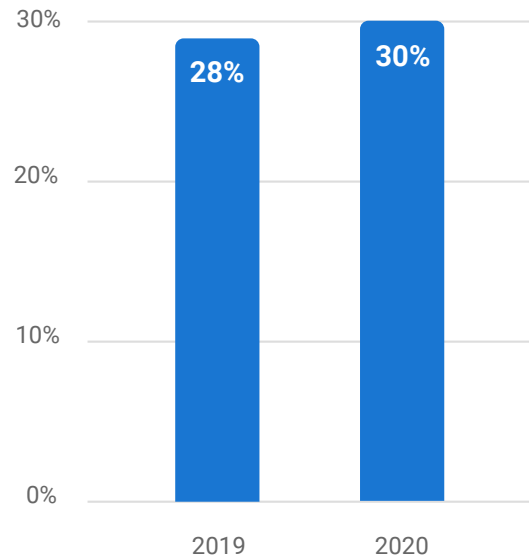
As mentioned earlier, text messaging is an increasingly popular channel among practices to drive conversions for review requests. They have an average **open rate of 98%**, which makes them a great tool to request reviews from patients.

The key to boosting conversions from patients is to make the process of writing a review quick, simple and convenient. We've already detailed that most healthcare practices provide their patients with 2-3 options for sites to leave reviews on, which helps to boost conversion rates. However, another important factor is making it easy to quickly get to the review sites that you want them to write reviews on, which means including hyperlinks to those sites in the review request.



Birdeye customers on average see a whopping **30% click-through rate** when including the hyperlink within the SMS review request.

### SMS click-thru rate





# Review ratings for healthcare practices

People typically write reviews and share their experiences for one or more of the following reasons:

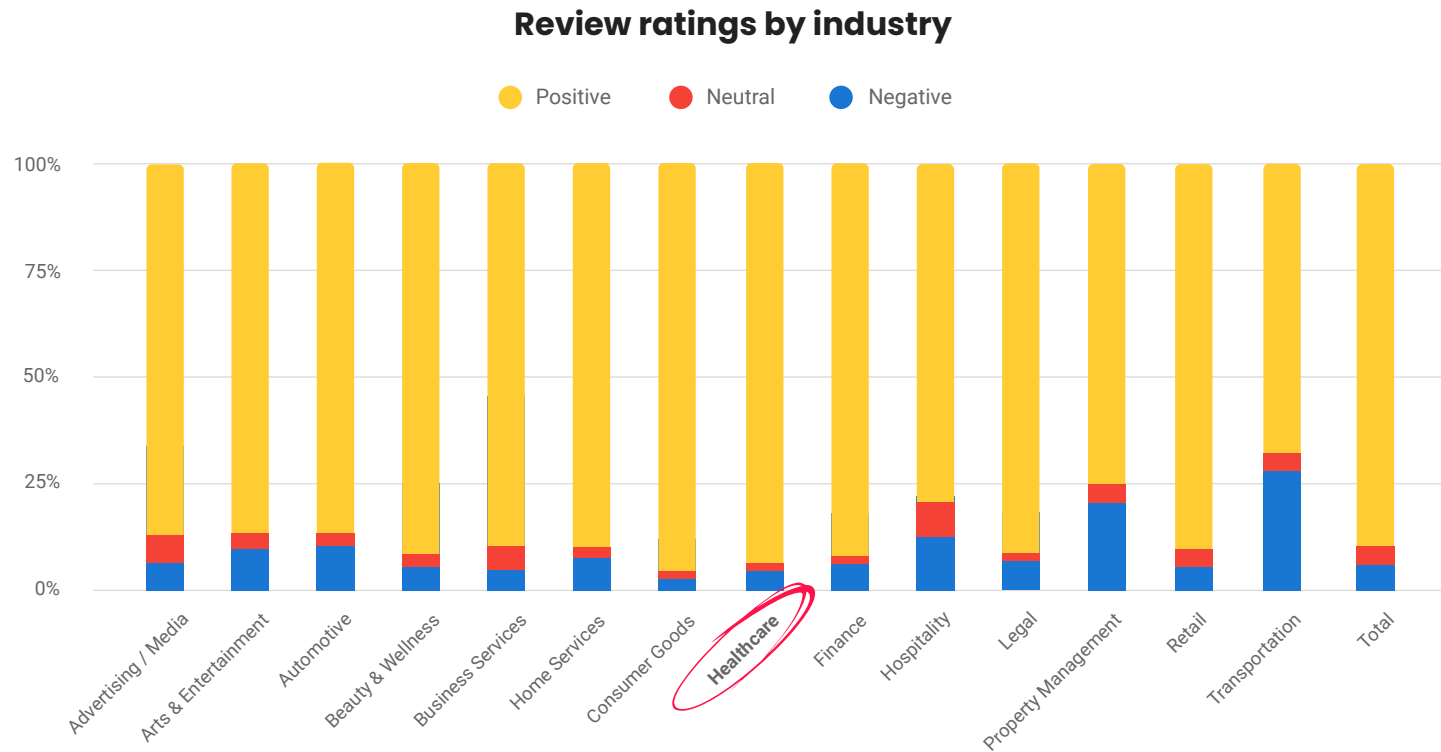
1. To help others make a better buying decision
2. To reward a company for good performance
3. To help companies improve their products or services
4. To be heard by the practice

The more impactful the service is to their well-being and overall patient experience, the more willing they will be to invest their time to leave a review — either proactively or when asked to.

Asking for reviews not only helps your practice to increase review volume but also ensures that reviews you receive truly reflect the experience your patients are having.



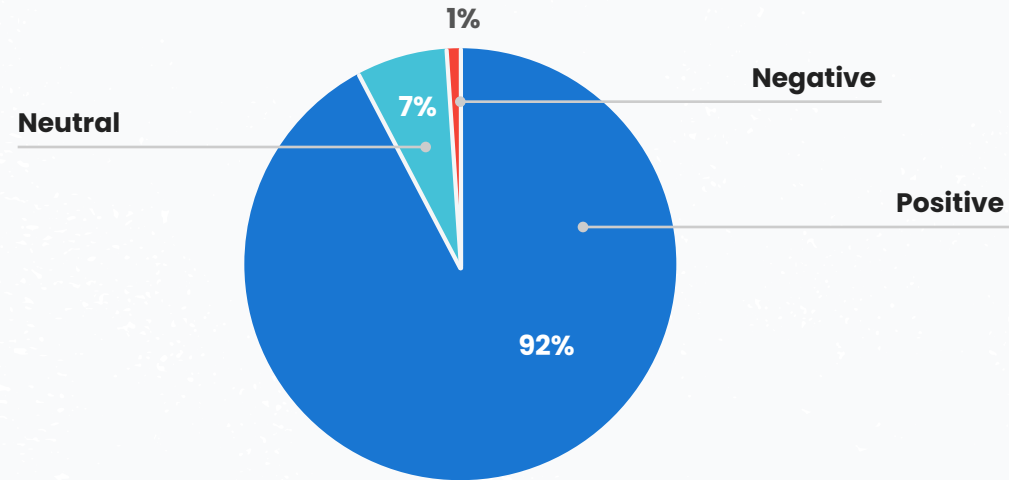
We examined the breakdown of positive, neutral and negative reviews for healthcare practices in 2020. Here is what we found:



Overall, customer reviews trended toward sharply defined experiences, either positive or negative – not neutral. Between those two extremes, most patient reviews were positive.



## Review ratings for healthcare practices

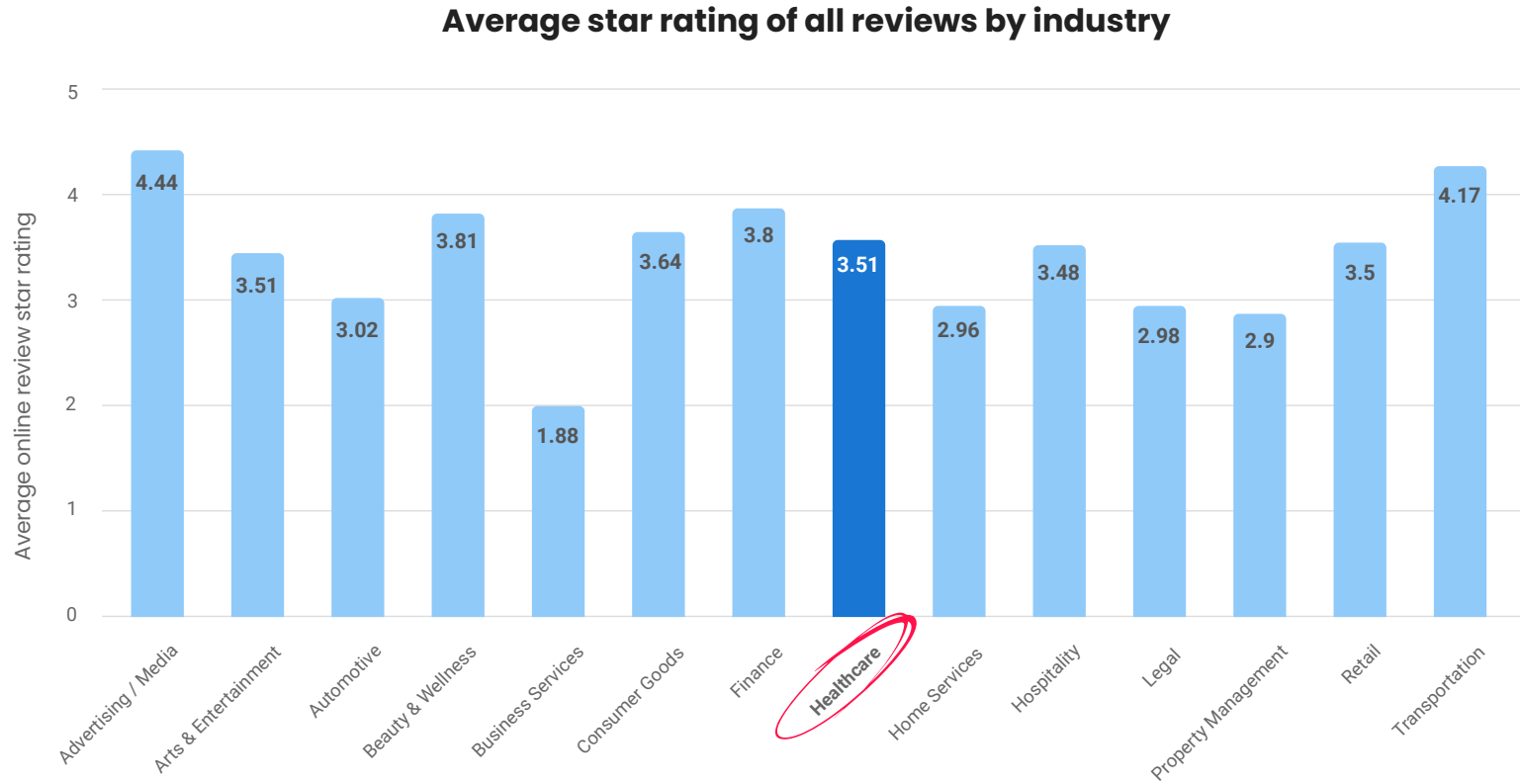


Healthcare practices had high volumes of positive reviews at 92%. There is an opportunity to further increase the number of positive reviews by improving the patient experience and making it easy for patients to give reviews.



## It's all about star ratings — or is it?

When we looked at industry data, we found that the average star ratings for healthcare practices is below 4 stars.



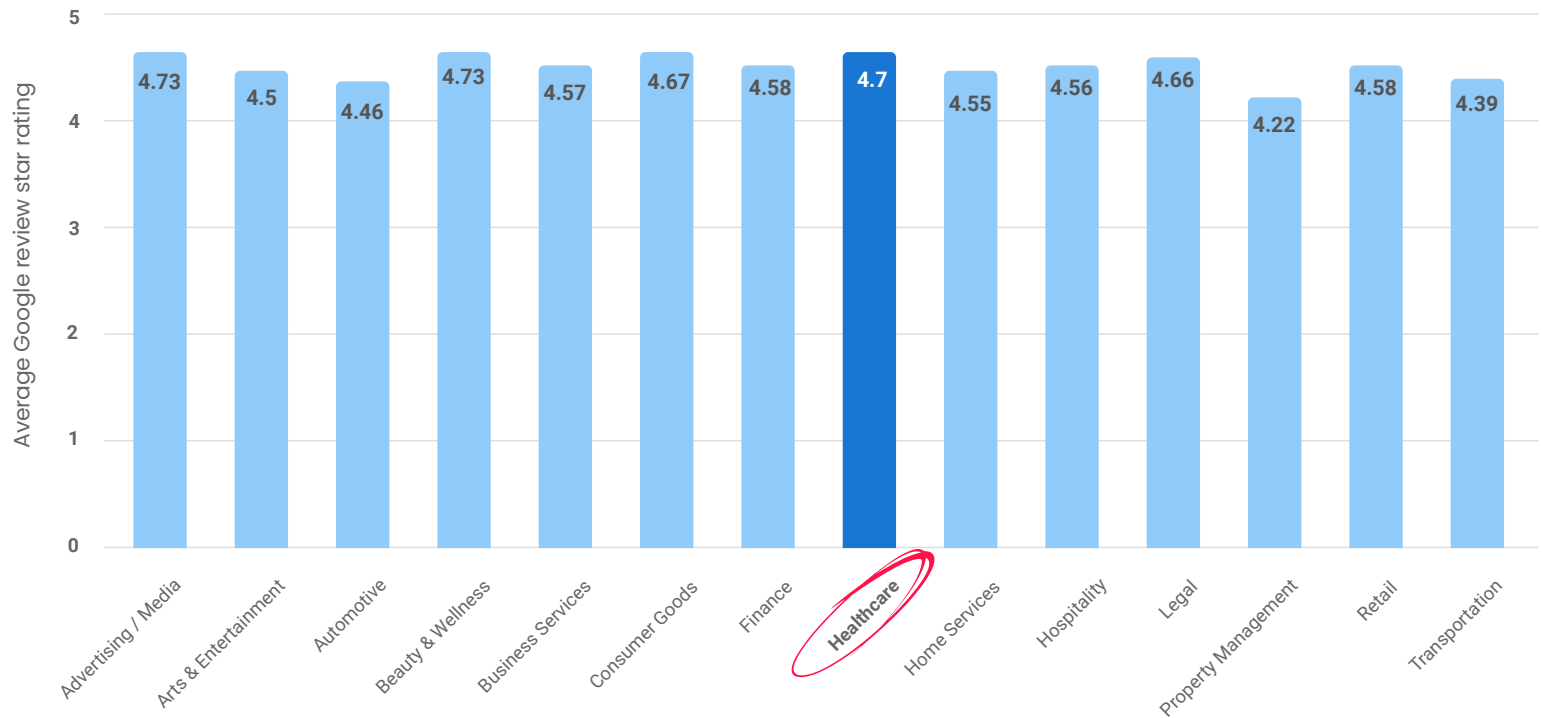
This is concerning because, according to industry data, about 50% of consumers need to see at least a 4-star rating to consider a business.



Reviews on different review sites are not given similar weight when brands are being considered – neither by consumers nor by Google. These industry-level ratings should therefore be taken with a pinch of salt.

BirdEye is a priority [Google partner](#), and therefore helps healthcare practices on its platform to conveniently get new Google reviews via its private API. As a consequence, new Google reviews obtained by healthcare practices on our platform had an average rating of **4.7 stars** in 2020.

**Average star rating of Google reviews by industry**





Given that just **53%** of consumers will consider using a business with fewer than 4 stars, this is a significant win for these practices.

However, effectively improving your star rating also requires the ability to scale your review requests. **Birdeye has integrations with a plethora of PMS systems**, empowering healthcare practices to automate review requests. This helps practices to *set it and forget it* while watching their Google review volume increase exponentially.

Here are just some of the PMS systems Birdeye integrates with:







An additional benefit of having more Google reviews with higher star ratings is that it helps to **boost local SEO rankings**. Google's local 3-pack typically features companies with the highest star ratings and most positive reviews. Having high Google star ratings can significantly increase clicks. Click-through rates (CTR) for the 3-pack make up a combined total of **48%** of clicks.

### **Pro tip:**

A majority of patients turn to online reviews when deciding on their healthcare provider. Search engines are well aware of this, and they factor it into a practice's SEO ranking. Learn how to **leverage reviews** to improve your company's SEO efforts.

Google is the most popular review channel and the go-to source for patients seeking to find practices. If you're looking to generate more leads, it's important to increase your Google star rating to help boost your online presence and reputation.

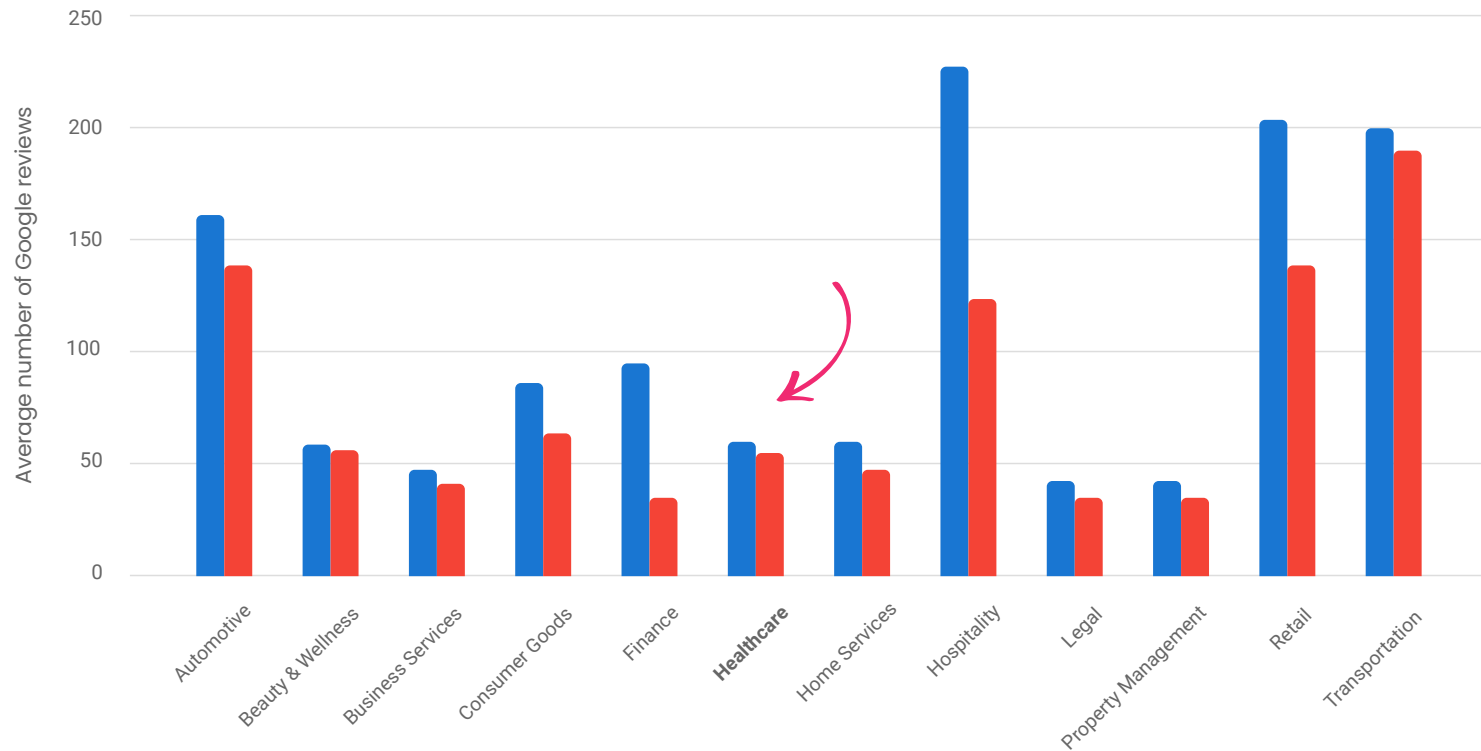


# The impact of COVID-19 on Google reviews

The average number of new Google reviews by business location by healthcare business dropped from 62 in 2019 to 57 in 2020. This is likely due to the fact that Google had [turned off](#) its reviews for local businesses for about 3 months.

**Average number of Google reviews by business by industry**

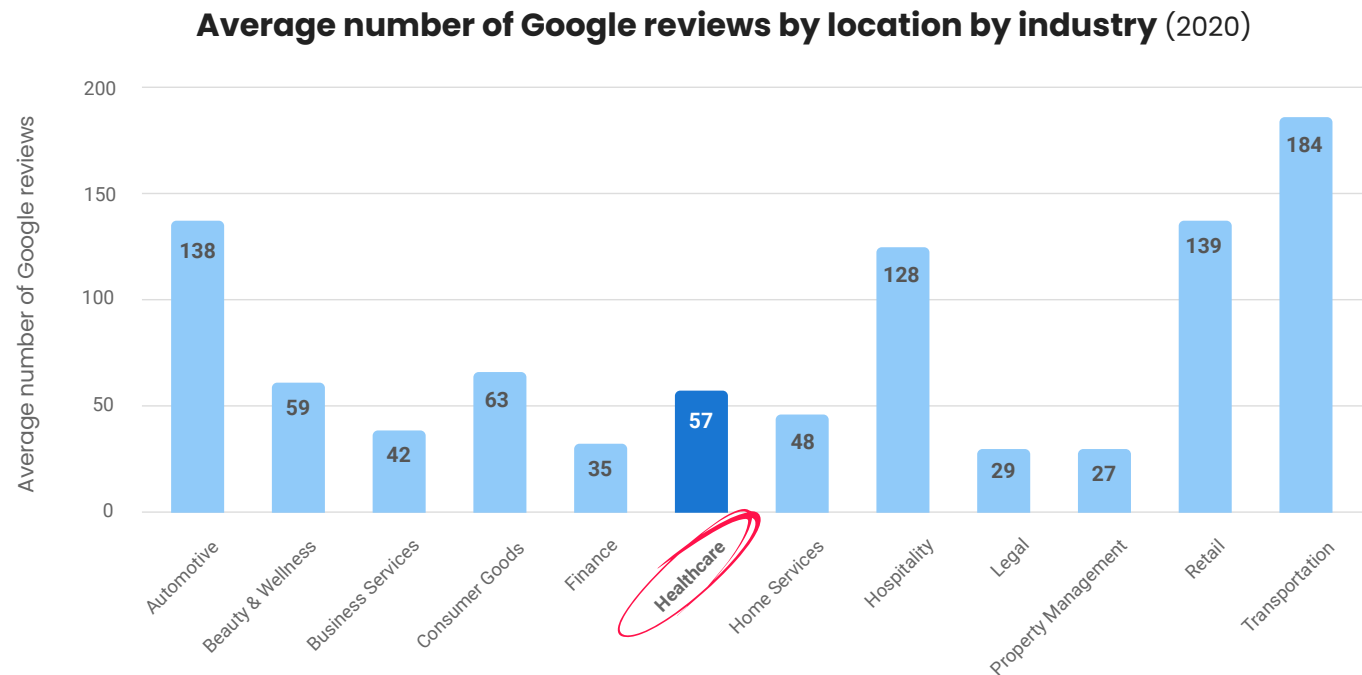
● 2019 ● 2020





# Average number of new Google reviews for healthcare in 2020

The following chart shows the average number of Google reviews each business location within different industries was able to add in 2020.



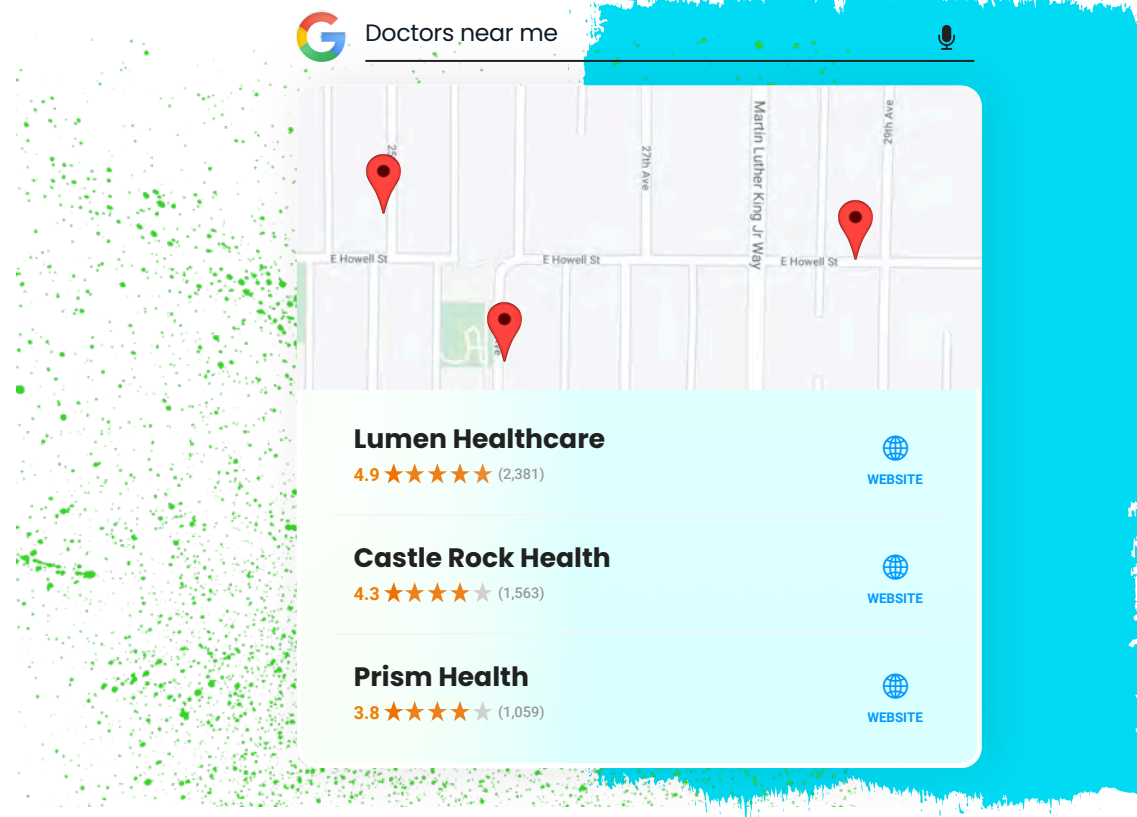
Healthcare practices added an average of **57 new Google reviews per location**.

Healthcare was at the center of managing the impact of COVID-19 on society, which is a likely contributing factor to such a small average increase in Google reviews. As more people get vaccinated we'll likely see practices return to normal operations and have the bandwidth to increase their Google reviews going forward.



# How do comments in reviews support a review rating?

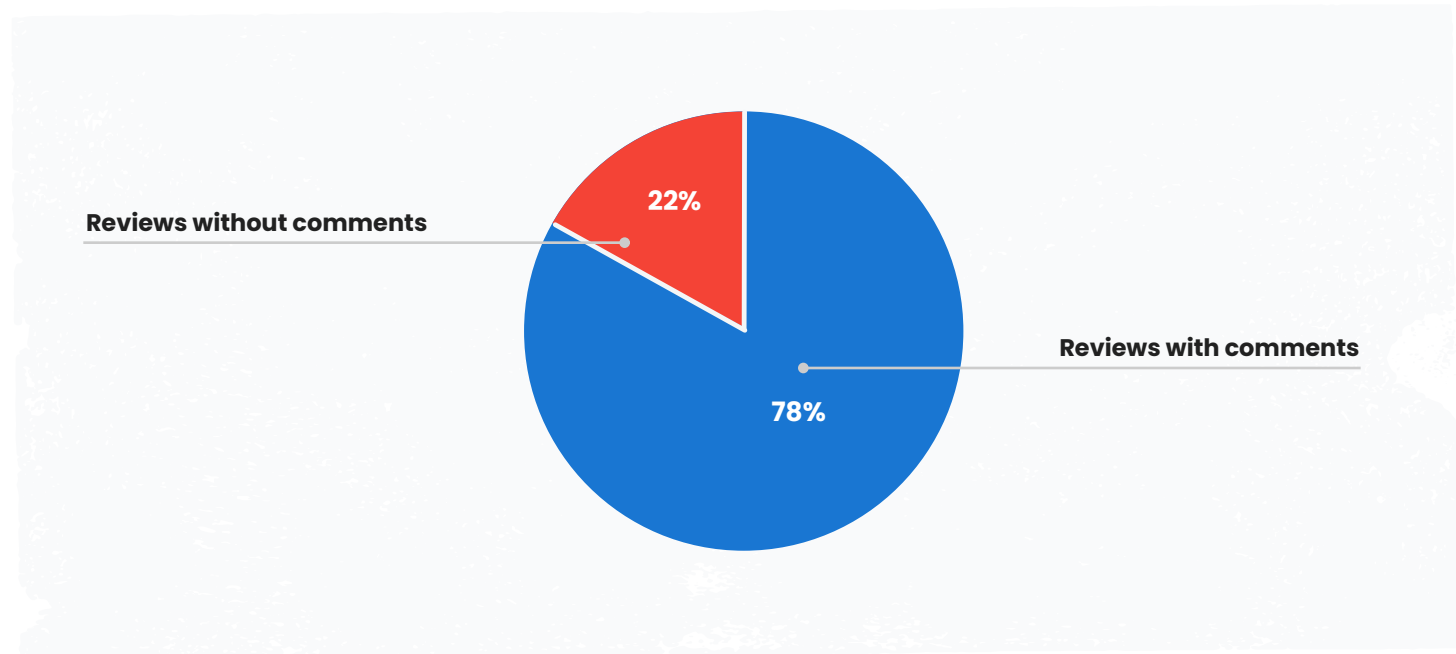
While star ratings help a practice increase local pack visibility in search results, the prospect's curiosity thankfully does not end there. Consumers want to understand why reviewers gave a specific star rating for a practice. That's part of the reason why **95%** of consumers read reviews before choosing a practice.





Star ratings alone aren't enough for a consumer to decide whether or not they can trust your practice. Comments in reviews help build trust with consumers and provide a more detailed picture of what they can expect from your patient experience.

Our research data suggests that close to **80% of reviews** written online have a description that supports why the review rating was provided by the reviewer. This contributes to the 'Trust Economy' of reviews.

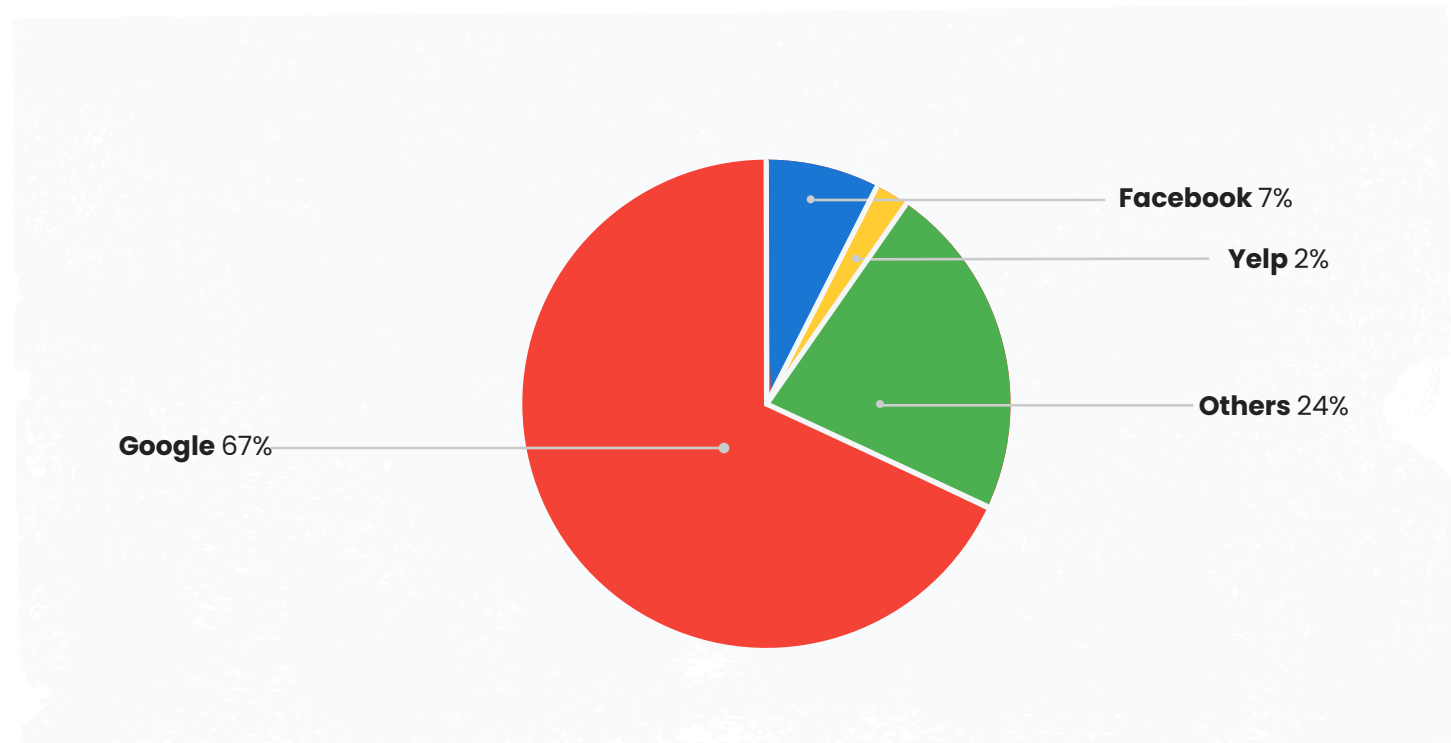




# Where are reviews being written?

Google continues to be the king of reviews. As we've previously pointed out, Google Reviews can help improve search rankings and general SEO efforts. By extension, this drives more (digital and foot) traffic to your business. In fact, [28%](#) of Google searches for products "nearby" or "near me" lead directly to a purchase. Additionally, an incredible [72%](#) of local Google searches result in a consumer visiting a store within five miles of their location.

Which is why it isn't surprising our data found that **67% of all reviews written online are on Google**. This is despite the fact that Google had turned off its reviews at the onset of the pandemic for three months to safeguard the online reputation of small businesses. Simply put, consumers turn to Google to write and read reviews more than any other channel.





In the last decade both Facebook and Yelp have been losing ground to **Google** in terms of online reviews. From 2013 to 2014, Google reviews grew by 80%. The next year it grew by 114%, and from 2015 to 2016 this growth sped up to an incredible 278%.



### Cumulative growth of reviews

- Google
- Facebook
- Yelp
- TripAdvisor
- Foursquare

2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017

Source: BrightLocal



# Is Facebook losing its 'review' face?

In late August 2018, Facebook decided to change their reviews from “ratings” to “recommendations”. This move from a 5-point rating system to a binary yes/no rating system appears to have impacted how reviewers and consumers seeking to read reviews perceive Facebook. Birdeye research data shows that in 2020, **22% fewer reviews were written on Facebook** compared to 2019.

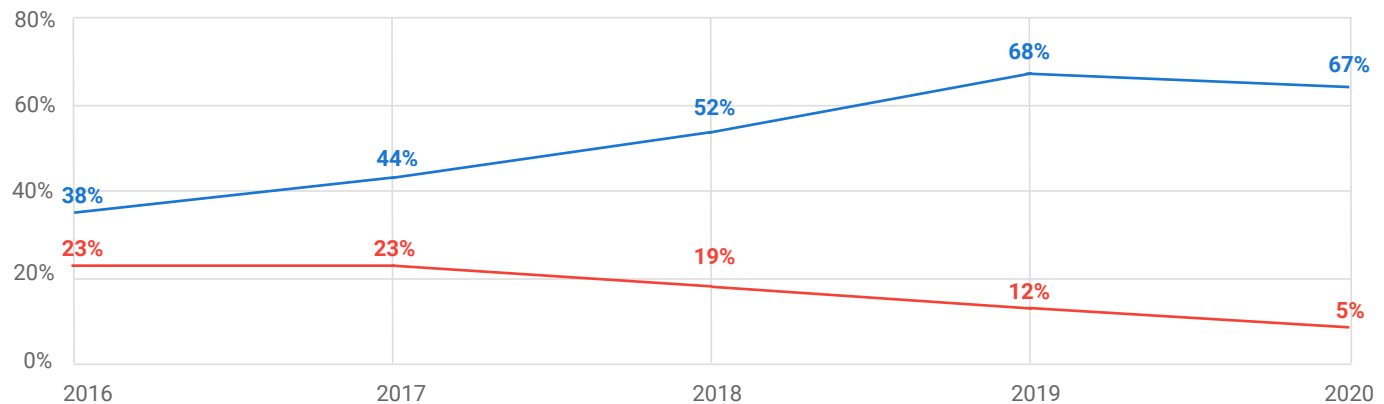
Since its launch, Facebook’s “recommendations” has experienced a steady decline each year as a percentage of overall reviews. In the same timeframe, Google review volume, as a percentage of overall reviews written in each year, has been growing steadily.

It appears that consumers are slowly moving away from viewing Facebook as a review site and seeing it more as a social media platform.

## Google Reviews vs Facebook Reviews

● Google Reviews ● Facebook Reviews

YOY growth/decline in review volume



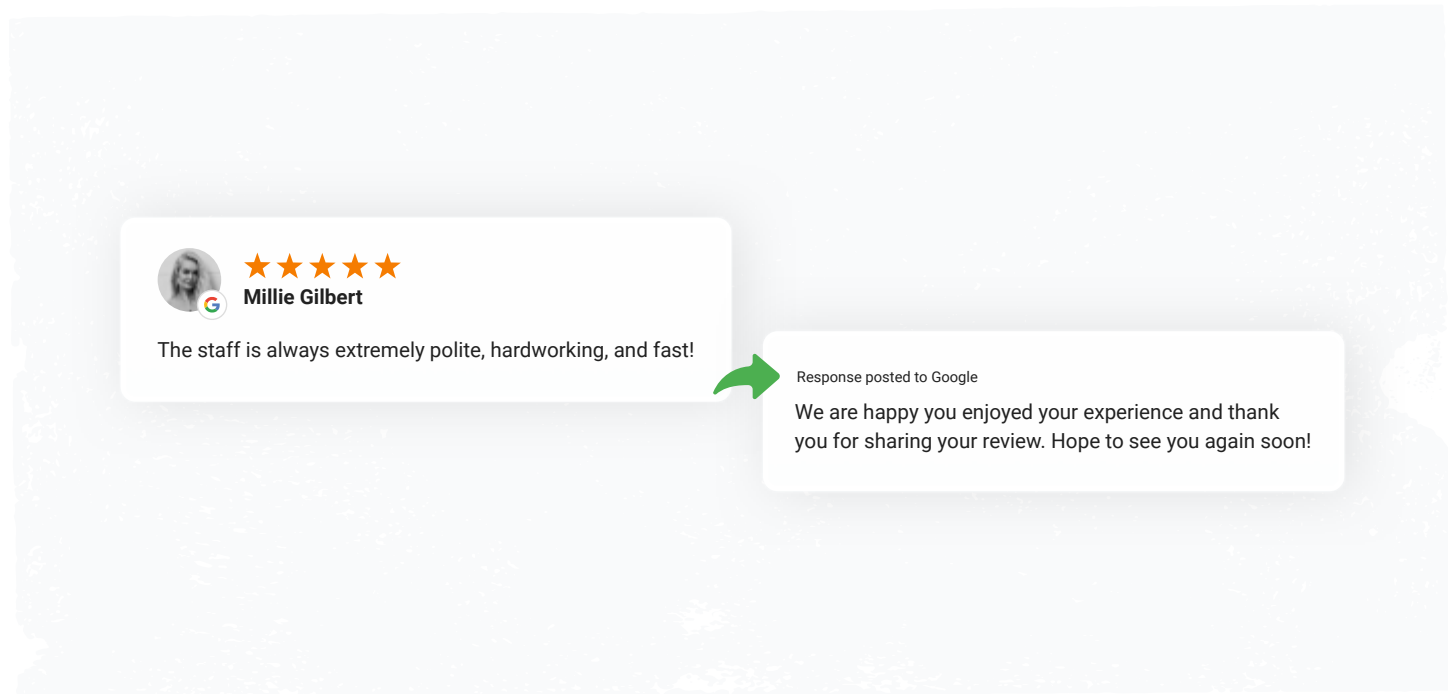




# Do healthcare practices respond to reviews?

Responding to patient reviews not only tells the reviewer that you care, but according to [Google](#) it also helps you [improve your local SEO](#). Responding to reviews also plays a pivotal role in attracting new patients to your practice. Given that [70% of patients](#) think it's important for practices to respond to online reviews it can be a competitive differentiator that fuels conversion.

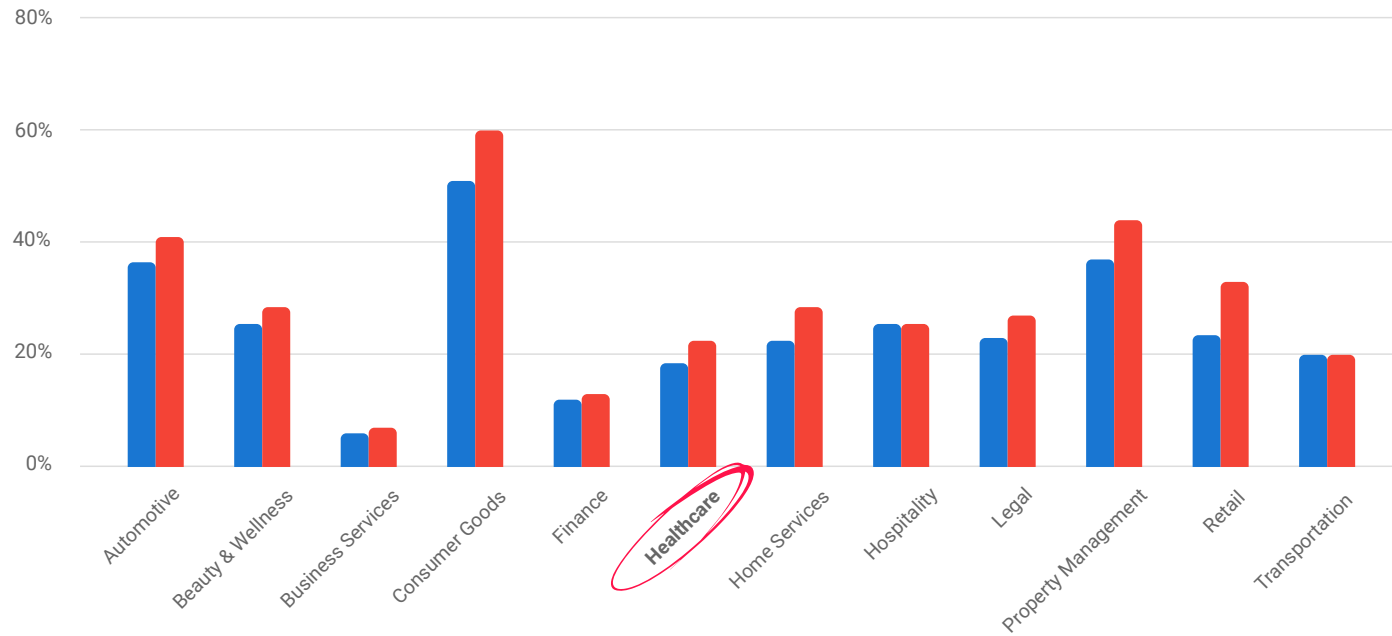
Yet despite this, the data reveals that **only 28% of reviews are responded to across industries**. That is low as it is, but in the case of healthcare it is even lower with **only 21% of reviews being responded to by practices**. There is significant room for improvement.





## Review response rate

● 2019 ● 2020



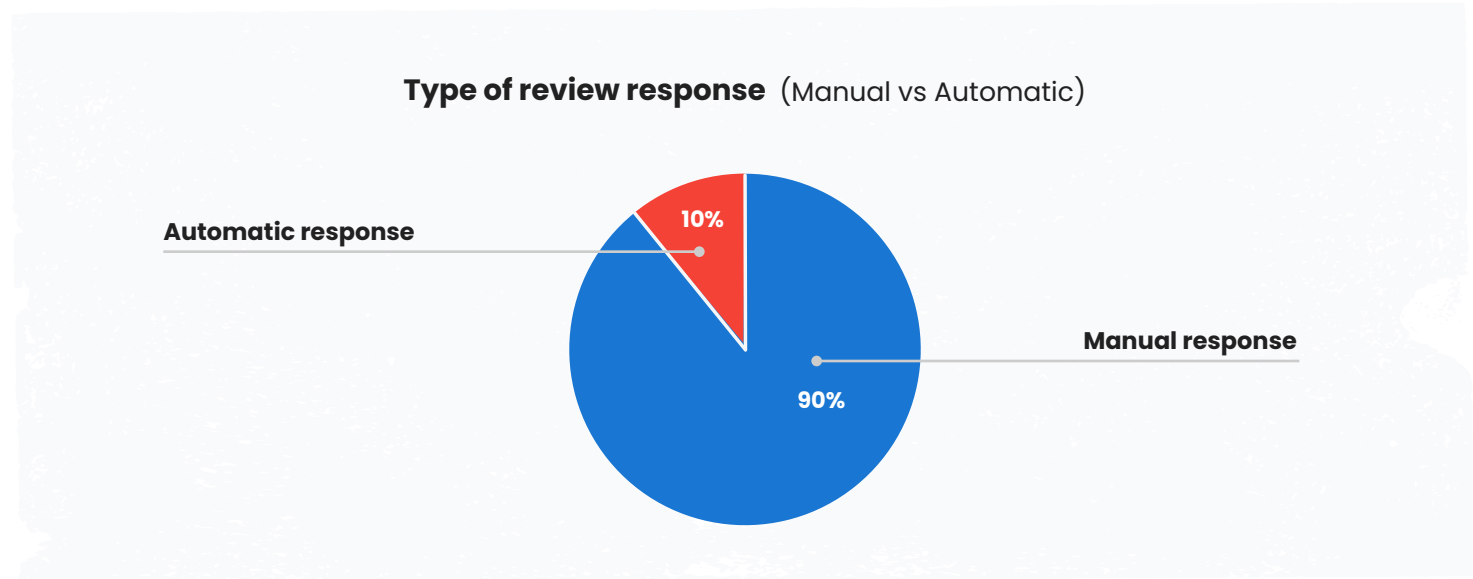
This finding implies that there is opportunity for healthcare practices to set themselves apart from the competition by responding to reviews more frequently and, most importantly, by implementing changes based on feedback and the insights gained from patient reviews.



# Personalized responses say it best

When patients take the time to write a review, they feel appreciated when the practice responds to them – whether thanking them for a [positive review](#) and taking action on [negative ones](#).

Personalization of responses is key. Birdeye research data suggests that businesses understand the importance of personalization, and that **90%** of those who respond to reviews do it manually.



Even though there's always the option to automate responses to save time when responding to reviews, there's the risk of such messages coming across as impersonal. Taking the time to manually craft personalized responses to reviews will make your patients feel acknowledged and will help to build loyalty.



# How are reviews being used by practices?

By now you likely have a firm understanding of the significant influence reviews have on growth. They can help increase traffic, generate more leads and grow revenue. This is why leveraging your reviews as social proof to optimize your conversion rates is an effective marketing tactic.

In fact, according to industry data, healthcare practices that regularly use customer reviews as part of their marketing efforts can generate approximately **62%** more revenue than businesses that don't.

More practices are beginning to implement this tactic as part of their marketing strategy. According to our data, 7.3% of reviews obtained on the Birdeye platform are promoted on websites and on social media, up by 1% from 2019.

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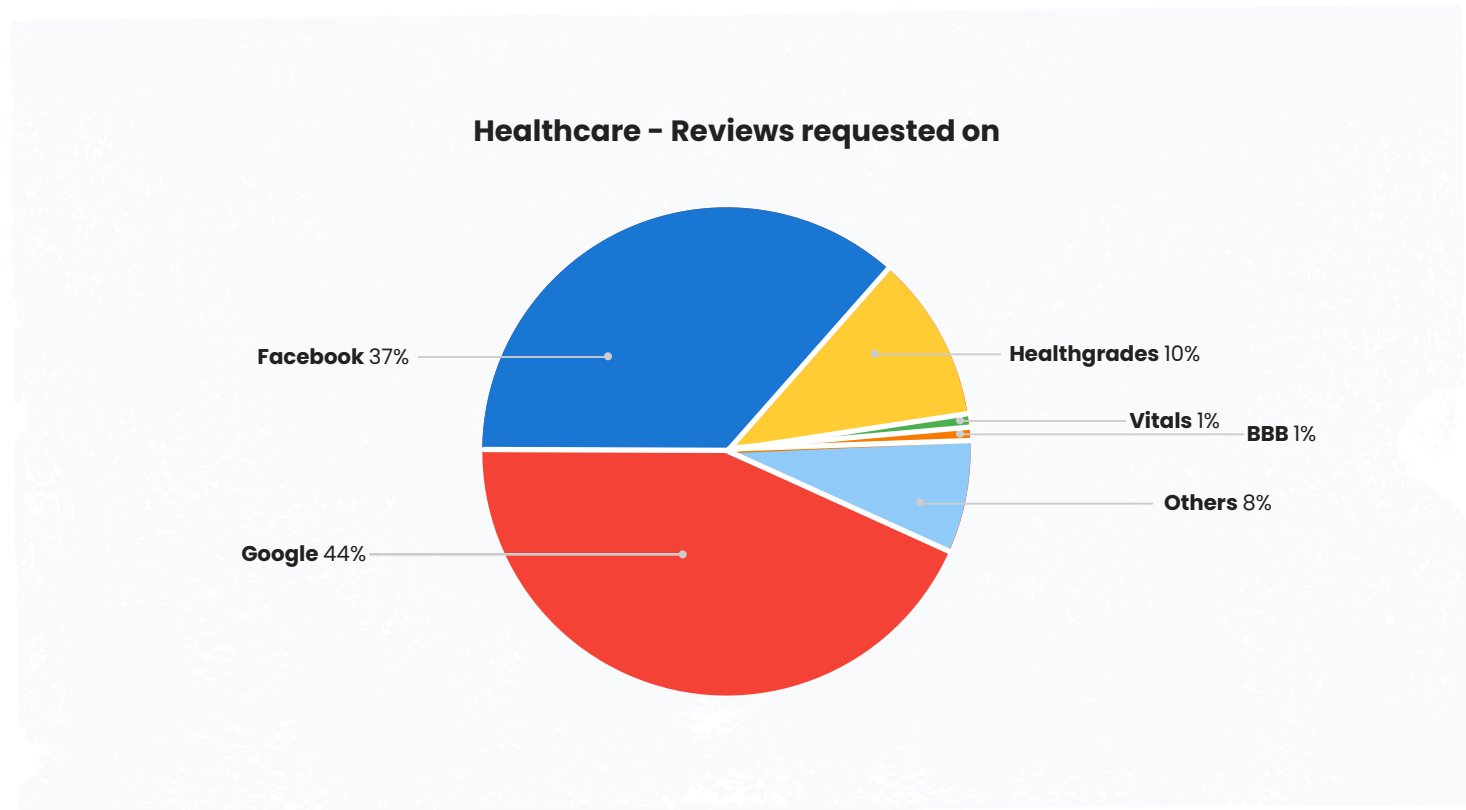
Review management has become an integral part of fueling growth. A key element of an effective review management strategy is getting more reviews on sites your audience frequents. With this in mind, we examined which review sites each industry is requesting reviews for.



# Sites healthcare practices request reviews for vs where patients write reviews

## Top 5 review sites where healthcare practices requested their patients to write reviews

Healthcare practices largely request that their patients write reviews on Facebook (37%) and Google (44%).

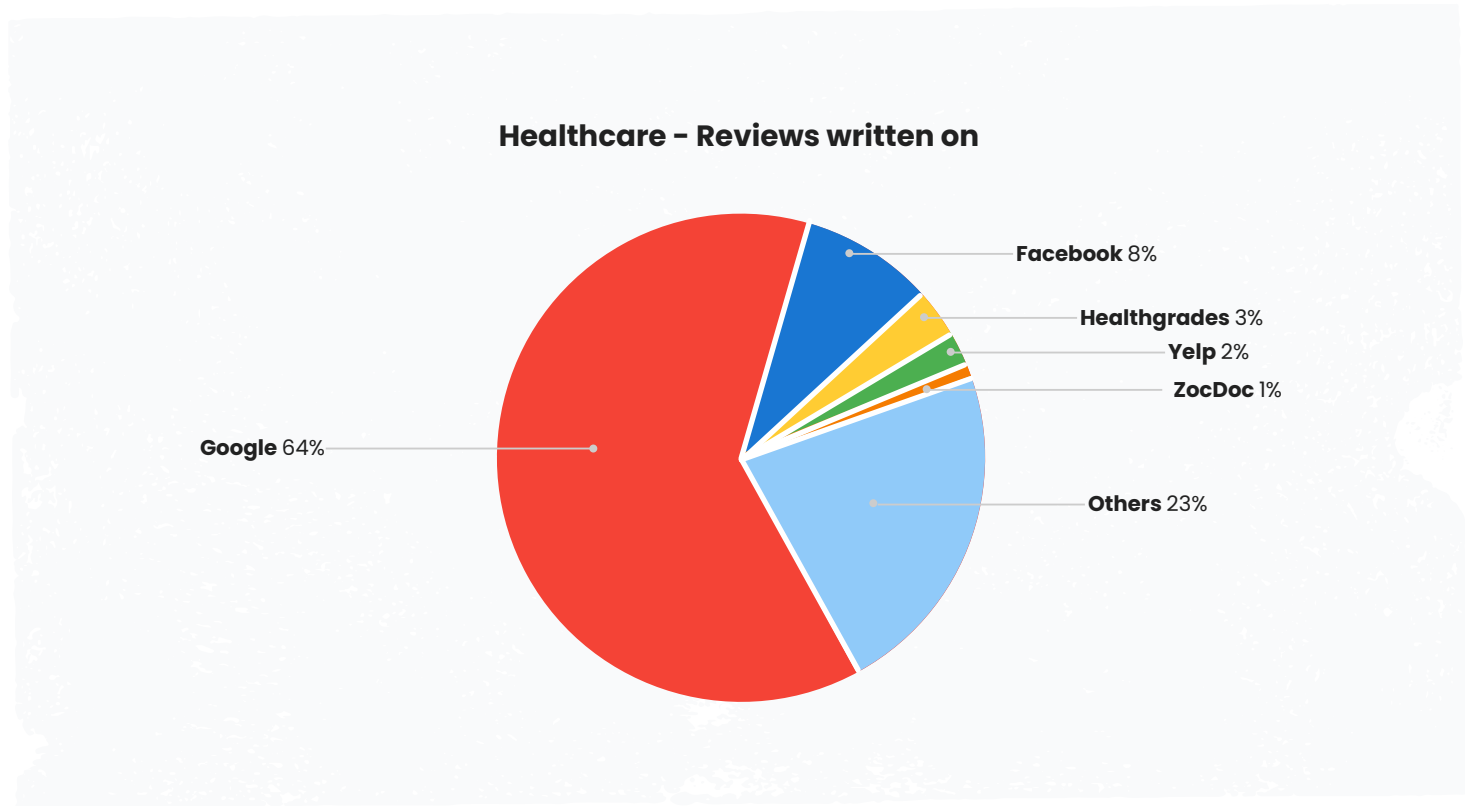




## Top review sites where their patients actually wrote reviews

Despite this, a significant portion of customers are writing reviews on niche sites such as **RateMDs, Vitals, Realself & CareDash**. Dental patients are also writing reviews on **ZocDoc** and on **Wellness**.

Healthcare practices have the opportunity to increase their review request conversions by focusing more on niche sites, rather than on Facebook.





# Conclusion

Our data shows that despite the impact of the pandemic, reviews continue to play a pivotal role for healthcare practices seeking to fuel growth. The data we've shared will help you understand how to optimize your review management strategy, equipping you with powerful social proof to attract new patients.

Want to get started getting more reviews and improving your patient experience? Birdeye's award-winning, all-in-one Experience Marketing platform can help you achieve your goals and fuel growth.

**Want to know more about how Birdeye can help your business?**

**Schedule a demo**, call **1-800-561-3357** ext. 1, or send an email to **[sales@birdeye.com](mailto:sales@birdeye.com)**.