

I've been having issues with my gall bladder, and like many of you the first place I look for information is on Google. I researched gall bladder surgery and found a snippet of an article that was very interesting. It said that the average person loses 130lbs after having a gall bladder removed! That cannot be true. I would be down to the same weight I was in 3rd grade. That's the problem with the internet, although we can get a lot of facts from the internet, anyone can write anything they want and have it posted. That leads to articles that say crazy things like people are losing 130lbs after a gall bladder surgery.

What does this have to do with Rural Prosperity Nebraska? Well, if gall bladder surgery can have false information about it on the internet, then what is on the internet about your community? If you search for your own community online, what do you find? Do tourists find the same thing that you do? Does your phone receive the same results as a computer? How can we figure out these things?

First Impressions Online is a program developed by Rural Prosperity Nebraska. When a community requests the program, we have a survey that is completed by two different people with no connections to the community. One of them searches through the computer, and another through the phone. They search fill out the survey and it takes them several hours to compile all of the information. They keep screenshots of the results and provide comments about what they find.

One community that I searched had two hotels. On one travel website, each hotel had one single review and that review said that they had a bedbug infestation. If you kept looking you would find that the reviews were exactly the same, written by the same person on the same day. Neither hotel had ever responded to the fake review. If you were planning on being a tourist in that community and were searching for hotels, would you look closely enough to figure out that these reviews were fake? The hotels could have taken the time to respond so that at least there is alternative information. You can't always get people to tell the truth on the internet, but many times there is a chance to respond, especially to bad reviews. If you own a business and have bad online reviews, take the time to respond in a polite and professional manner.

When I searched one community on YouTube the first video that comes up is a driving tour of town...with a fisheye camera view centered on the yellow line and no commentary or music. It is pretty horrible. The other videos on that community are from a realtor trying to sell a unique property in a rural area near town. A community can come together to fill YouTube with positive videos about

their community. Don't let strangers who don't know and love your community to be the only voice describing your community to the world.

Our First Impressions Online program lets you see what others see. It brings awareness to the community about what is online. We help you to see places for improvement and places where your community is doing an excellent job. We also provide information on how to improve and connections to providers that could work with you to improve your online profiles. So far, several communities in Nebraska have completed the First Impressions Online program and were pleased with the results. If you are interested in bringing this program to your community, please contact me today.

If your community could benefit from any of the Rural Prosperity Nebraska ideas that I've discussed in this column, please reach out to me. I'd love to speak to your community about these topics. You can reach me at jason.tuller@unl.edu or at the Thayer County office at 402-768-7212.

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