

Five Steps to Managing Your Online Brand

If your reputation on the Internet is not a positive one,
it could sabotage your practice.

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in a matter of seconds through an online network.

The number of patients who report using review sites has grown.

ty-one percent of patients would be at least “moderately likely” to choose one similarly qualified doctor over another based on positive

Social media is word-of-mouth amplified, which can work for or against a medical practice. A positive online reputation can position you as an industry leader, in addition to building patient trust and loyalty. On the flip side, if your brand is not effectively managed, it could sabotage your practice. Traditionally, when a patient had a gripe, it was shared with a small circle of friends and family. With the birth of social media, patients feel empowered to go online to share their experiences and search for the best healthcare options. As a result, negative comments can spread

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According to a recently published Software Advice Survey, 82% of patients use online reviews to evaluate physicians. Almost three-quarters, or 72%, of patients use online reviews as their first step in finding a new doctor, so your online reputation often is the first impression for many patients. Nine-

reviews.¹ This is why establishing a superior online reputation, which should be an ongoing process that starts at the practice level, is a critical component for practices to grow their business.

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Your Brand Online

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Five Steps to Manage Your Online Brand

1. Provide an Excellent Patient Experience.

Online reputation is affected by how a patient is treated and cared for in the practice setting. If you want to

when a patient calls in to the office and is greeted to how he or she is managed by medical staff—will affect online reviews and future business. That is why it is so imperative to have the entire process intact, as a first step.

2. Establish an Online Presence.

These days, conversations unfold online. Your practice needs to be

enhance a practice's website visibility and push negative reviews off the first page of search results.

3. Tap into Loyal Patients.

Once you have established your practice online, it is time to leverage your most loyal patients. They will be your greatest advocates. According to *Bright Local's Local Consumer Review Survey*, people trust consumer reviews more than ever, with 85% saying they trust reviews as much as personal recommendations. Twenty-five percent of people have to believe the reviews are authentic before they trust them as much as personal recommendations. If consumers get a sense that a review is "planted" or "seems too good to be true," they will take that into consideration, and that may sway their decision.³ One way to increase the number of authentic patient reviews about your practice is to create a system to follow up with patients as soon as they leave the office, so they can provide an instant endorsement. You can follow up with a phone call or personalized email that includes a clear "call to action" link asking a patient to share his or

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establish and maintain a favorable online reputation, your marketing efforts need to start at the practice level to make certain that it is up to par. An excellent patient experience will drive what is said on social media. Conversely, a mediocre or poor one can damage an online brand. Physicians must be providing first-rate quality of care, which, according to Software Advice, was among the most important information for patients on review sites. Twenty-six percent of patients seek information on review sites about the quality of care provided. It is also important for providers to consider a patient's perspective beyond the examination room.

Administrative information that patients value most on healthcare review sites include staff friendliness and ease of scheduling appointments (25%), followed by information about wait times (20%), as well as office environment and cleanliness (16%). This goes to show that online reviews are not focused solely on the delivery of care.¹ It is essential to instill in administrative staff the value of superior customer service and the importance of treating patients cordially.

You can assist staff with that mindset by arming them with a concise, one-page tip sheet to serve as an ongoing reminder. If a practice does not have an outstanding internal system, and a patient had a negative experience scheduling an appointment or felt the quality of care was not adequate, that likely will result in a negative review. The entire experience—from

part of the conversation. According to the Pew Research Center, the Internet represents a fundamental shift in how Americans connect with one another, gather information, and conduct their day-to-day lives. About half of all adults were online in early 2000. Today, roughly 9 in 10 American adults use the Internet.² Practices can establish and build their online presence on social media sites and

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online directories. You can post your profile, monitor reviews, and interact with patients through online directories, which, in essence, have taken the place of the Yellow Pages.

If you do not already have a *Google My Business* account, that should be the first step to launching your practice online. This includes creating the My Business page, updating it with crucial information (e.g., name, address, phone number, hours/services) and initiating the verification postcard to be sent to your business location. From there, you can post photos and updates to your Google page, just as you would do on your other social media channels. To manage and gain control of online conversations, declare all public listings of your practice on online directories. These directories also can

her experience online. The *Bright Local* survey also mentioned that 68% of consumers left a local business review when asked. Fifty percent of consumers have been asked to leave a review about a business and have actually left one.³ With those statistics, it is certainly worth asking!

4. Monitor Online Reviews.

Monitoring your practice's reputation online has to be a 24/7 ongoing process. You can use services such as Google Alerts to get instantaneous feedback about what your patients are saying about your practice. You also need dedicated and skilled professionals to constantly monitor and accurately represent your brand when responding on your behalf. Reading negative

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reviews makes 40% of consumers not want to use a local business, also according to the *Bright Local* survey.

When researching a business, most consumers look at the top reviews first. If the most recent reviews

positive reviews make them trust a local business more, whereas 50% say they will question a business's quality after reading negative reviews.³ You have to address online issues right away to show that you care about patients and what is being said about your practice. The Software Advice

appropriate, and also would show that you are on top of what is being said about your practice. By immediately addressing an issue, you have an opportunity to steer the situation more positively by giving the patient a solution. This will increase the chances of stopping a patient from advancing negative information, which could affect future business.

Patients undoubtedly will continue to have a massive impact on a practice's online brand. Social media is going to continue to grow and become even more dominant in the integrated marketing communications mix.

Accordingly, implementing a proactive social media marketing campaign is imperative, because it is a cost-effective way to stay top-of-mind, improve your reputation, and build and foster new and existing relationships with patients. It is important to get online practice management in place. A powerful brand supersedes the negative and also affects future growth potential. To be sure your online brand is being properly represented, as well as to overcome issues and challenges as

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are negative, they can significantly damage a consumer's trust, and prospective patients may not read past them, even if there are many positive reviews just below. Therefore, it is important to monitor online comments and interactions regularly and focus on generating consistent, positive reviews so that bad ones are pushed down further on the list.

Businesses also should see it as an opportunity to engage with their customers and get honest feedback. Businesses should actively look to grow their positive endorsements and be proactive in managing any negative comments they receive.³ You have an opportunity to transform negative feedback into a positive interaction. If you do not have the time or skills to effectively handle your online reputation, and a patient has an unfavorable experience, the experience could land on social media immediately unless it is addressed. Let's take that one step further. If a disgruntled patient posts a negative comment on a Friday and someone is not dedicated to constant monitoring, it could go viral over the weekend. You need to be well informed about what is out there online at all times because the damage that could happen in a brief 48-hour timeframe could be significant.

5. Take an Immediate and Proactive Approach.

It is critical for medical practices to take a proactive approach to online reputation management. Seventy-three percent of consumers say that

survey found that most patients believe doctors should respond to negative reviews. Sixty-five percent of patients responded that they want to know that they are being heard and want quick action. The majority of respondents (65%) also felt it is "very important" or "moderately important" for doctors to post a response to a negative review. Only 27% believe it is "minimal" or "not important."¹

To be sure your online brand is being properly represented, as well as to overcome issues and challenges as they happen, it would benefit you to work with professionals who are experts in this area.

Smaller practices could have an issue with this, if staff is already overwhelmed or are young and inexperienced in this area. If you do not respond immediately to a negative comment, it could have a wildfire effect by quickly spreading through a patient's online channels. The best way to overcome negative reviews is to bury the bad by posting more recent and relevant information about your practice. Responding to both negative and positive reviews also is an excellent way to stay engaged with patients and build trust. Medical practices must be careful about how they respond to reviews online because of patient confidentiality rules. Leaving a neutral comment in response to a review would be appro-

they happen, it would benefit you to work with professionals who are experts in this area. **PM**

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