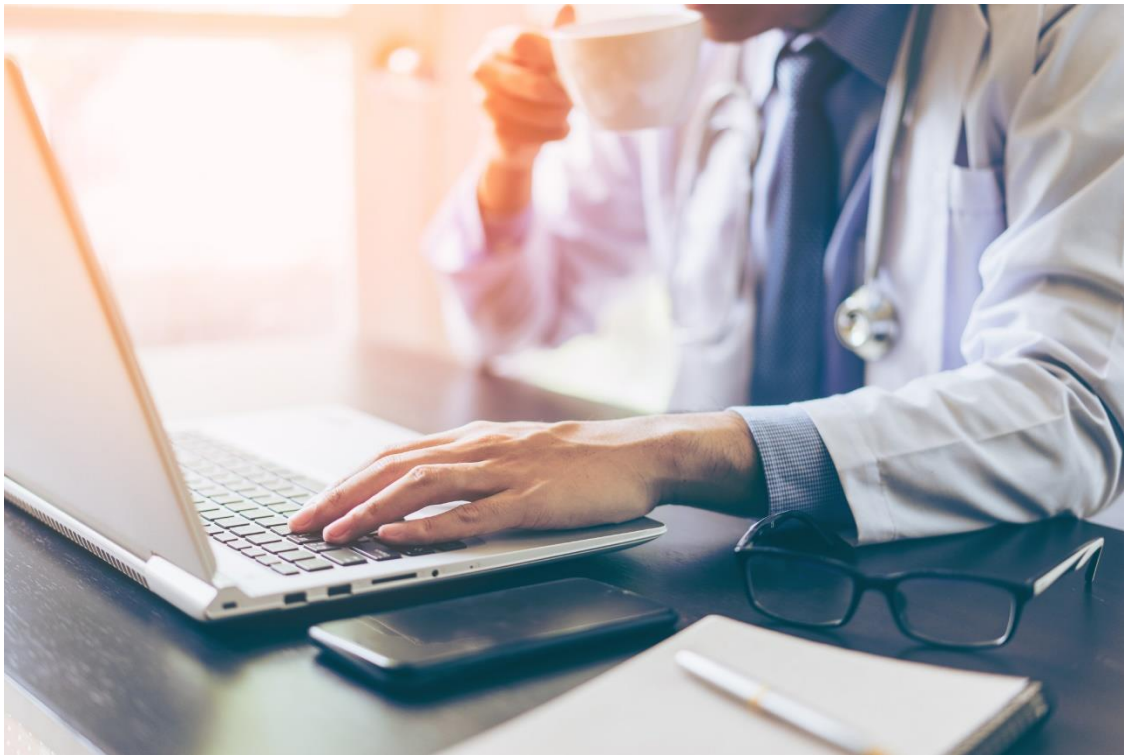




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4 Steps to Managing Your Online Physician Profile

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By Jennifer Larson, contributor

Physicians, do you know what people are saying about you online?

When was the last time you looked yourself up on [Medicare's Physician Compare](#) website? Or checked out your ratings or reviews on Healthgrades, Vitals,

Zocdoc, Google Reviews, Yelp, or another website that allows patients to comment on their physicians' performance?

Online reputation management might not be at the top of your "to do" list, but it also can't be ignored. It may be time to start managing your physician profile more proactively—whether you run your own practice or are employed.

"Most believe that their online reputation doesn't matter, since many physicians have existing and returning patients or work on referrals," said Henri Isenberg, chief operating officer of ReviewInc, which offers online reputation management software. "As such, they do not perceive that their online reputation is having any effect on their business. But when it comes to getting new patients, a better online reputation has a huge impact and is worth more than what they can charge their patients."

A [May 2019 report](#) in *JAMA Internal Medicine* found that only 23 percent of clinicians have quality information available about them on the Physician Compare site. Physicians are not required to submit information to the database—and that may be why many don't.

The fact is, patients have turned into healthcare consumers who are likely to look up doctors online before they schedule an appointment. And as Aaron Clifford, senior vice president of the online reputation marketing platform Binary Fountain puts it, "Online reviews can greatly swing a potential customer's opinion about a brand or product." You want your online physician profile to reflect the best you.

4 Steps to Get Started Managing Your Online Reputation

1. Start with a self-assessment

Maria Todd, PhD, MHA, isn't surprised that some doctors don't realize the importance of paying attention to their online physician profiles. But Todd, an international healthcare consultant who works with physicians to build their brand and improve their patients' experience, has some words of wisdom for doctors who want to change their attitude.

"First, do a self-assessment," said Todd. "How seriously do you take social media? That's the first 'to thine own self be true' moment. How seriously do you take your own presence on social media? Have you looked yourself up recently? Because a lot of doctors don't."

This assessment can include a review of your online profiles on a variety of platforms, as well as an assessment of your practice's website. Then you can do a gap analysis to determine what you need to achieve to improve and what it will take to get there, said Todd.

2. Decide on your strategy

Once you have a sense of your current situation, it's time to start taking action.

“The best thing that physicians can do is develop a reputation management strategy that fully embraces online reviews and addresses them head-on,” said Clifford.

You have choices as to how to handle this task. You can monitor your online reputation personally. You can designate someone in your practice to do it. Or you can hire outside help, which can range from a solo consultant to a large public relations firm. Your budget and your needs may help you determine the right choice.

“The key word here is *manage*—take control of your reputation,” said Isenberg. “Online reputations don't just magically happen.”

3. Take a close look at your practice

The reality is that people take their concerns about offline problems online, noted Don Silver, chief operating officer of BoardroomPR in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

“You've got to look at the way that you run your business,” Silver said.

People can and do post complaints about anything ranging from the front desk staff's manners, the amount of time they spend waiting to see a doctor, and the cleanliness of the exam room. They may like their physician, but those factors are part of their experiences as healthcare consumers. If you're seeing this kind of comment pop up in your online reviews, it may be time to address those concerns so they don't turn away future patients.

4. Ask for reviews

Want to generate more positive comments on your online profiles? Pay close attention to patients who seem to be having a positive experience, and then talk to them about it. Ask them what social media platforms they prefer, and politely ask if they would consider leaving you a positive review when they're happy with the care that you've provided.

“Every physician who wants feedback needs to ask for it personally,” said Todd. “Ask for it, face to face with your patients.”

Another option: make it easy for patients to leave comments when they're satisfied. Silver noted that some offices even provide tablets for happy consumers to leave comments or provide feedback right in the office.

Also, never ignore a comment, good or bad, added Todd. Even if you just respond with a “thank you,” your patients will know that you are paying attention.

Many experts caution physicians to never argue with a patient or poster online, or to even acknowledge that a patient was in the office, as that may violate HIPAA regulations. Isenberg also suggests keeping documentation of negative posts and your responses.

Physicians who work for a practice or health system may want to work with their employer to strategize responses to patients and help manage their online profiles.

But remember: authenticity is key. You should never, ever post fake reviews. Besides being unethical, it could land you or your practice in trouble.

If you’re already working on your online reputation and physician ratings, keep it up. If you’re not, experts would encourage you to get started.

“It’s your reputation, and in today’s world, it’s how people check you out,” said Silver.