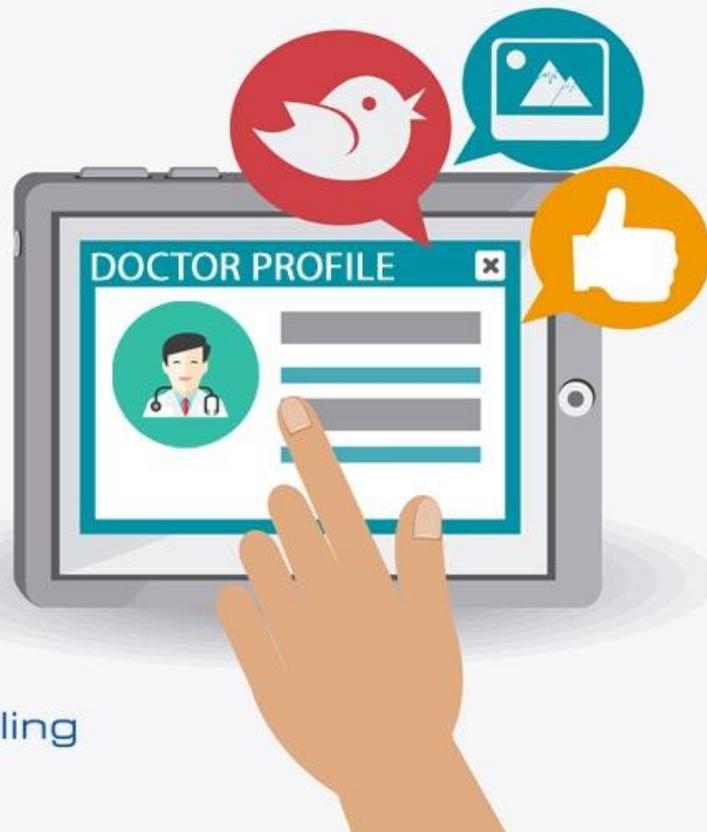


The Importance of Claiming Your Online Presence

Claiming
Your
Online
Presence



Patients are more in control of the patient-doctor relationship than ever before.

The proliferation of third-party [healthcare websites](#), including numerous sites dedicated to reviewing doctors and medical practices, opens up patients to a wealth of new information once restricted only to conversations with their doctor.

Patients can go comparison shopping online for a healthcare provider, just like they do for a hotel or restaurant. It's almost as if they were walking down the aisle of a supermarket. In fact,

there are over 70 popular healthcare-related websites that show information about specific healthcare providers and practices.

According to a 2014 [study on patient use of medical practice review sites](#), 42% of respondents said they consult such sites. That's a 68% increase over the number of people who visited such sites the previous year! Of those who use the review sites, 49% would be willing to see an out-of-network doctor who had better reviews than one in their plan.

Millennials are particularly plugged into [online discussions of their health care experiences](#). If they're a key demographic of your target patient persona, you're either ahead of the curve in managing your online reputation or you're losing out to those who are.

Today, managing your healthcare practice's online presence is no longer something that is nice to have – it's a critical part of your reputation, and it heavily influences patient decisions.

“ Nearly 50% of patients using medical review sites would rather see out-of-network doctors with better reviews. ”

What you see is what you get

Online, what patients see is what they know of you and your practice. According to Pew Internet, 80% of all US adults have gone online to research health information, with 25% of those searches about a particular provider.

Even if your practice relies primarily on referrals and word of mouth, chances are high that a patient or primary caretaker will head online to research you. Their first step? Head to a search engine like Google and type in your name.

Or, perhaps they [head over to Facebook](#) and ask their friends if they've ever worked with you. Maybe they fire up the Yelp app on their phone and look up what others have said about you.

Claiming your online presence, however, is not just about rating and reviews. Many of the healthcare websites that have created a profile for you or your practice have inaccurate or missing information.

Things such as your clinic hours, conditions treated, procedures offered and payments methods accepted are wrong. This could lead to patients heading to the wrong clinic, calling into the wrong provider OR worse yet, deciding not to call you at all.

There is no Neutral on Review Sites

Ignoring review sites, however, isn't an option either.

First, many review sites – especially large ones like Yelp or Google My Business – will have a page for your medical practice, even if you don't claim it. That means people can leave reviews about you and your healthcare practice without your participation in the review process.

Second, if you aren't managing your online review reputation, other healthcare providers are managing theirs. And these are the providers you're losing patients to.

BrightLocal's [2015 Local Consumer Review Survey](#) found that only 14% of those reading reviews would visit a business with fewer than 3 stars. So if you're not getting reviews and earning stars, you're losing out to the surgical practices that are.

Claiming Your Profiles Also Impact Search Rankings

Major search engines are starting to assign more weight to claiming the various profiles found online for you and your practice. For example, Google gives heavier weight in their search queries to healthcare clinics that have a clean NAP (Name, Address, Phone Number) profile across the internet.

While time-consuming and tedious, claiming the various profiles and listings found across the internet for you and your practice has an impact on your overall online visibility.

Search engines also value patient reviews more today than ever before.

Google ramped up its local ratings and reviews starting in 2013 when it launched “City Experts” to help grow hyperlocal content for Google+. Activity on a review site is assumed to be local content, which search engines want to provide to local searchers.

“Online reviews are important. Google wants searchers to have the most positive experience from a health provider.”

The lesson here is that claiming your online presence has a number of benefits.

Accurate profiles with correct information ensure that when patients find you anywhere, they’re getting the right details. Increased search engine rankings and search visibility help you pull in more patients. Authentic patient ratings and reviews are some of the most compelling marketing content available to practices.

Your online presence influences whether new patients schedule appointments with you, or decide to visit someone else they found first who had better information or more positive reviews.

Online Presence Checklist

Ready to take control of your health practice’s online presence? Here’s a checklist to get you started.

- ✓ Audit your practice’s search engine and review site listings
- ✓ Claim each of your practice’s search engine and review site listings and update them with current information
- ✓ Regularly monitor each review site listing for new reviews; you can set-up automated alerts to do this
- ✓ Implement a patient review/feedback loop via email that encourages positive reviews and provides a fast opportunity for you to respond to negative reviews



Garrett Smith is the founder of InboundMD, a digital marketing service for healthcare practices that allows them to acquire patients, protect the practice's professional reputation, and engage patients with social content campaigns without having to be a marketing expert. Garrett and the team and InboundMD have helped independent health practices, hospitals, and pharmaceutical companies across the US increase new patients, bolster their reputation, and establish themselves as leaders in their field using modern marketing methods. Follow him on Twitter @garrettsmith and @inboundmd.

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