

# LIVE UP TO YOUR REPUTATION



Five steps to maintaining your positive online reputation.

BY NAREN ARULRAJAH

**A**s a doctor, you understand the importance of preventive medicine. You probably spend a fair amount of time explaining why your patients should take care of their skin, even when they aren't having a problem. The same principle applies to managing your online reputation.

A strong online presence is the foundation of a solid professional reputation. The essential elements include:

- **Website.** Your website is the heart of your online presence. Make sure it looks good, reflects your brand identity, and showcases your skills. It should also be search engine optimized for visibility.
- **Social media.** You need to be part of the conversation. There are countless social networks out there. Choose a few and take time to create fantastic profiles.
- **Business listings.** Your practice will probably be listed on most review sites and local business directories whether or not you add it. The listing is based on information scraped from the web and user-generated content. It might be unflattering, inaccurate, or incomplete. Take control by claiming and customizing your profile or adding it, if needed. The No. 1 most important listing to claim is "Google My Business," but you should try to complete others as well.
- **Reviews.** About 84 percent of patients look at online reviews before choosing a doctor, according to Yelp's blog. The most effective way to gain reviews is also the simplest. Ask! A verbal request will do the trick, but you will see even better results with an in-office hand-out or follow-up email. These materials should include instructions for leaving reviews, which helps to direct patients to your preferred platform.

People have short memories, new dermatology offices open regularly, and trends change. Getting the word out about your practice is not a one-time endeavor. Without ongoing maintenance, the results of your hard work will quickly fade.

Don't let that happen. Do this:

**1. Manage reviews.** Respond to every review, not just the negative ones. A simple "thank you" can improve customer loyalty. Sign up for notifications when you receive new reviews (most rating sites have this option) and respond promptly. To simplify the process, many doctors use a review tracking service or software.

**2. Acquire positive media attention.** Nothing boosts

credibility quite like having your name in the news for the right reasons. Make yourself available to local health reporters, who often need expert comments on deadline stories. Also, send out a press release when something newsworthy happens at your practice such as a community event or the publication of a new study in a peer-reviewed journal.

**3. Keep your social accounts active.** Post regularly, share content, and respond to comments. Paid advertisements, especially on Facebook, can help build your follower base and attract new patients.

**4. Update everything.** Much of the content on your website and profiles is meant to be permanent. However, employees come and go, office hours change, you add new services, and old devices are discontinued. Update information everywhere, as needed.

**5. Act fast.** It's almost inevitable: no matter how high your standard of care, someone will leave a horrible review. Don't ignore it. First, give a simple, generic, HIPAA compliant response inviting the complainer to contact your office. Replying to old reviews can bring them back to the top of the list, so you want to respond immediately. If the review is false, report it to the hosting platform, but don't be surprised if they leave it up. Lastly, ramp up your efforts to gather new, positive reviews on the affected platform. The best solution to bad reviews is to accrue good ones.

## DO THE MATH

Being proactive is especially beneficial with star-based review platforms. If you have just two Google reviews, and they are both 5-star. Your overall rating, which people may see in search results, is 5-stars. But suppose an unhappy patient leaves a 1-star review. Overnight, your rating drops to 3.6. What if there were 20 pre-existing 5-star reviews, instead of just two? Your overall rating would only drop slightly to 4.8. ■

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