

## Part 2: Online Physician Ranking Websites: Friend or Foe?

By Jennifer Thompson



You may remember that last month the “Marketing Your Practice” column was dedicated entirely to online physician ranking websites and how they can help or harm your practice. There was such a positive response to the article, I thought I would take this month’s column to expand on some of the details and answer several of the more common questions I was asked by physicians and office managers regarding their online profiles and personas on these sites.

But first, a little background to catch you up in case you’re late to the party (you know who you are). Online consumer rating sites (Yelp.com) have seen increasing popularity over the past several months, allowing the general consumer to rate businesses from a fast food restaurant to auto mechanics and – literally – everything in between. Recently, these sites have added the capability to rate health care providers just like you. In light of this, there have been several doctor specific sites (HealthGrades.com, RateMDs.com) cropping up that have allowed for increased functionality and in-depth information to be posted and reviewed by patients.

Information can range from hours to insurance accepted, and you can add locations, websites, photos and even videos in some cases. The most popular, most used aspect of these sites (here is where you need to pay attention) are patient reviews, however.

Depending on the site, patients have the ability to rate everything from wait time to staff friendliness. Positive reviews help you gain more exposure, appear more approachable in patient’s eyes and give you the edge when patients or referring physicians go to make an appointment. Negative reviews do the exact opposite of all of those good things, so we want to steer clear of those at all costs.

One of the most important things to remember about these sites, or any online activity really, is that you are creating an opportunity for people to find you in new ways. You’ve already built a sturdy community profile in your trade area (hopefully), and now it’s time to go virtual and do the same thing on the web. These services are free, and if you can harness their potential they will pay off for your office without a doubt. You just have to make sure you have a plan and you’re moving in the right direction.

Some of the sites will even allow you to “claim” your profile and make updates to it as you see fit. These profile sites are all free, but you can also purchase advertising if you so choose. More often than not, patients will click based on reviews and location rather than advertising, especially online banners, FYI.

Now that we’re all on the same page (get it?), it’s time to answer some of the popular questions that were asked in response to last month’s article. If I don’t answer your question here, don’t worry – it’s not because I don’t like you. That may be the case, but it’s not why your question isn’t listed.

*You talk about “claiming your profile” – what is that exactly and how do I do it?*

Let’s use HealthGrades.com as an example. Claiming your profile online means that you are registering as the doctor listed. By officially registering an account with HealthGrades.com, you are now given administrative control over your personal listing which allows you to customize options and see several basic statistics about clicks, searches and overall marketing goodness.

To get started and claim your profile, you’ll have to search and find your listing

or (if one isn’t already there) create one for yourself. On HealthGrades.com you’ll need a validation item to prove that you are, well, you. Choices include your NPI number or your state medical license number so be sure to have one of the two of them handy.

I highly recommend claiming your profile and spending a few minutes getting to know the capabilities of the site and customizing your listing using the tools provided to manage your online reputation. Add a photo. Update your location. Tell us your favorite hobby if it gives you the option – anything to set you apart from the other listings is a plus. And remember, it’s a completely free way to build your practice. Do it.

*I don’t have the time to update this thing every day and neither does anyone in my office. Is it still worth it?*

Hands down the answer is a resounding, “Yes!” With the review sites, you will not need to update them every day. In fact, after your initial setup, you shouldn’t need to update them at all – unless of course there is a major change in your practice.

With that said, you should take a few minutes at least once a week to monitor what patients are saying, if you’re getting clicked on and what people are searching for. This will allow you to tweak your content and, if you have the option, respond to comments by patients. These stats are available assuming that you’ve claimed your profile, of course. The ability to comment depends on which service you are using, but it’s a worthwhile avenue to explore – you get to show your care and have time for patients right from the comfort of your desk chair or smartphone. What could be better?

*How many of these sites do I really have to be on?*

That depends on you. Do you want to be seamlessly connected to multiple sites to manage the flow of information? Do you need to know whenever any patient says anything about you? It's personal preference because there are about a dozen or so medical specific sites out there. Some, of course, are more popular than others. My suggestion is to get your feet wet with one of them first to see what it's all about and then, when you're ready, expand your efforts into a few of the more popular ones, but don't worry about being on every one just to be there. Unless you need to know everything from every angle, there isn't really a need to be on each and every site.

*What should I use for photos?*

Again, this depends on you and the site. Your default should certainly be a recent (from the past four or five years) headshot of you. If they allow more images, consider putting up some photos of you interacting with a patient or spending time with your family. You want to appear personable, but not be too personal.

If you don't have a good photo of you with a patient, stage one.

*I still need more help. What should I do?*

It's understandable. The process can be overwhelming. If you or someone in your office doesn't feel comfortable setting up and maintaining the profiles, you shouldn't. Without the proper marketing expertise and familiarity with the sites, you essentially are flying blind. You wouldn't diagnose a patient without going to medical school first, would you? I hope the answer is no, otherwise you deserve some of those negative ratings you've been given.

The bottom line is this: if you don't know what you're doing, you're wasting your time. The point to remember about all of these services, and everything you do to grow your practice is that at the close of business each day, you want the next day to be busier. How you get there is up to you. How you stay there is up to your patients.


**LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?**

Contact Jennifer Thompson today for a free consultation and marketing overview at 321.228.9686 or e-mail her at [Jennifer@InsightMG.com](mailto:Jennifer@InsightMG.com).


*About the Author:*

*Jennifer Thompson is a Central Florida small business owner and serves as President of Insight Marketing Group, a full-service marketing company focused on medical office marketing, community outreach efforts and public relations. In this capacity she is responsible for developing and implementing the long-term strategic vision for the overall organization including publishing the company's community-based monthly news magazine and hosting the company's weekly small business networking group.* ■


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