

Managing Your Online Reputation



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Did you know that searching for healthcare related information is the third most popular activity on the web?

The world of marketing for your medical practice is changing and if you don't change with it, well, you'll be left behind.

As patients of all ages become more Internet savvy and social media-inclined, web-based businesses are responding by giving them more opportunities to voice their opinions via crowdsourcing to build online peer communities.

What does that mean for you?

Quite simply it means the ways you used to market your practice five or 10 years ago are all but obsolete; and, if you want to attract and retain more patients in today's world, you better know how to put your message in front of where they're looking.

Luckily for you this book will show you exactly how to do that.

Let's get started.



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Chapter 1: What's Hot in Medical Marketing



As you plan for the year ahead, it's important to lay out your marketing strategy and – gasp – budget for the New Year. No matter what size your practice is, you should be marketing and you should be thinking about it right now. This very second. Here are some things to look out for in the coming months.

Inbound Marketing Continues to Grow

It has been said multiple times before, inbound marketing is the way of the future. Inbound marketing (where customers find you through your lead generation efforts) is here to stay and it's only going to become more prevalent this year.

While traditional mediums such as print and television will always have their place, inbound marketing is about nurturing leads through relevant content and using social media interaction to gain loyalty, exposure and, ultimately, patients. Rather than shouting your message from the rooftops, or a billboard, the real value is being shifted into web-based marketing campaigns that can target and track the patients you're specifically looking for. This means your website will become your best marketing and lead generation tool. If you can't update your website or if it's just a static portal, it's time for a new site. Again.

Social Media Relevancy Becomes More Important

Throughout the coming pages and in our previous books, we always talk about the importance of having a strong social media presence, and there are plenty of good reasons why. Here are a few from our friends at Hubspot:

- Companies that use Twitter average 2x more leads than those that don't.
- Companies with 1,000 or more Twitter followers get 6x more traffic.
- 52 percent of companies using Facebook for marketing have acquired a customer from it.



With more than 1 billion active Facebook users, according to Yahoo! Finance, you are missing quite a large customer base if you don't have a Facebook page for your practice yet. Let's not forget 40 percent of Facebook's active users are over age 35 and 93 percent of U.S. adult Internet users are on Facebook.

But wait, there's more! If those stats aren't enough, Google and other search powerhouses have begun placing additional weight on social media relevancy in search results as more companies utilize the networks. What that means for you is that your social media presence (or lack thereof) will be used to help determine where you rank in search results. Social media allows you to create your own news and be your own publisher – you need to harness that power and use it to your advantage.

The bottom line is that your patients are social, and that means you should be too. This is in addition to all of the other benefits we continually discuss, such as positioning yourself as an expert in your specialty.

Physician Rating Sites Grow in Popularity

It's a simple process really: every year, as more people adopt new technology, old processes tend to fade and die off. Another year means less people will be using the Yellow Pages to find you and they will instead be looking online first before choosing a physician. That means they'll be looking at physician rating sites to see where you rank before checking out your website or your Facebook Page.

Thanks to sites like HealthGrades.com, Vitals.com and even Yelp.com, the searcher (your potential patient) has more power and information about you than ever before. And there's a very real potential that an incorrect phone number or a two-sentence review from an anonymous stranger is the thing that stands in the way of you and a new patient.

Now it's even more important to make sure your physician rating sites are up to date and correct. You should also have a process in place to continually monitor them for negative and false reviews.



Increased Emphasis on Customer Service

This goes hand-in-hand with the physician rating websites. As the popularity of these sites continues to rise, there's a real need to revisit and invest in customer service training with your office staff. All it takes is one rude encounter to ruin your rating and scare potential patients and dollars away. Patients have all the power, and they know it. Schedule one day a few weeks out to hold a staff lunch and go over some training.

To get the most out of your training day, your best bet would be to bring in an expert who can present an overview and run through activities and worksheets with your entire staff. It's the little things, people.

Video and Mobile Continue to Grow

YouTube is the third most popular site on the Internet behind Google and Facebook. We've seen video view numbers for our clients skyrocket in the past few months alone, and that trend will continue to grow in the coming years. Patients are looking to learn more about you, feel a welcoming connection and actually see you speak – especially if it's for something other than a routine checkup. In fact, we've had several patients tell us they've chosen some of our physicians because of a YouTube video they watched where we profiled the doctor or had a former patient go on camera to talk about a procedure.

According to Nielson, we're in an age now where smart phones outnumber traditional cellphones. It's true, and these customers are searching for your office on their phones. So, what are you doing to help them? Do you have a mobile-optimized site? Choosing the right physician involves a web of both online and offline platforms and you should have your content ready to be delivered however the user wants to receive it. A mobile site should clearly have options to make an appointment, find the closest office, learn more about the physicians on staff and present your specialties.

There you have it, some of the top medical marketing trends you should be paying attention to in your strategic planning. Now that you have the information at your fingertips, it's time to do something about it. Don't say we didn't warn you.

Chapter 2: An Online Reputation Management Overview



Patients are looking at you more closely than ever before. Are you sure they're looking at the right information? We continually harp on the importance of online reputation management (ORM) for that very reason – it's important.

Oh, and most of you who haven't done anything proactive have incorrect information floating around the Internet getting into patient's hands – be that the wrong office address or phone number or unwarranted negative reviews, they are out there and their importance is growing.

Last year we had the opportunity to speak at several medical conferences and to literally hundreds of independent practice administrators on this very topic and how it can impact your practice. Among other things, we presented what your office can do today to claim some of your most important profiles and why taking an active role in your ORM matters. Here are some statistics to consider:

- More than 100 million people choose HealthGrades.com to find out more about their doctor prior to an appointment and rate them following an appointment
- These ratings show prominently on Google, which averages 170,000,000 unique visitors each month
- More than 74 percent of searches are related to small businesses (like your office)
- 92 percent of buyers regularly check reviews online before making a purchase or service decision

Now that you know some of the reasons why it matters, you may be asking yourself what exactly does all of this mean to your practice. Let's explain in a bit more detail.

What is Online Reputation Management?

Essentially, ORM is the process of monitoring the Internet reputation of a person, brand or business. In your case, acting as the physician and



figurehead of your company, you act as all three. Health-related searches are the third most common searches being conducted online. So, actively monitoring your online reputation to claim physician review site profiles and general review sites (such as HealthGrades.com, Vitals.com and Yelp.com) to ensure accuracy, respond to patient complaints, and using online feedback to influence future marketing and business decisions is critical to say the least. A complete plan will also include inbound marketing strategies such as a content management system (CMS), video sharing and a comprehensive social media plan.

In addition to just monitoring the review sites, the complete reputation bubble will use the CMS and social media aspects of the plan to drive content to your site, position you better on Google and create a loyal online following – all of which is designed to put more patients in your waiting room.

In essence, by fostering an environment for positive reviews and accurate information online, a complete ORM will leverage and focus all of your efforts to help your bottom line while simultaneously keeping your name out of the mud.

Do Patients Really Use These Sites?

Yes, they most certainly do. As stated above, the number of patients using the review sites and forming their opinions off of what is found there is continuing to trend upward. Unfortunately, there is no real way to know how many patients look at your profile and decide not to pick up the phone based on what they find there.

However, by adding something as simple as “How Did You Hear About Us?” to your new patient paperwork, you may be able to identify if patients are coming to you because of your online reputation – don’t scoff at the idea, we’ve seen it with some of our clients. In fact, we’ve had a few patients tell us that they’ve decided to have surgery with some of our clients strictly because of an online video piece they saw about the doctor we shared on YouTube.

On the flipside of the spectrum, we’ve seen situations (more than once) where a hospital actually gained access to their physician rating profiles and



changed all of the “Call for an Appointment” numbers directly to the hospital’s. We choose not to think about the number of potential appointments lost because of the inaccuracy.

The bottom line is that this stuff works and if you aren’t taking advantage of it, frankly, you’re missing the boat.

What Should You Do?

We’ve heard it all before. Yes, we know it takes a lot of time to do and it’s relatively new and unstable ground to traverse. But the fact of the matter is if you aren’t, your competition down the street is. Our recommendation is to set aside some time this weekend or at the end of the night and educate yourself a bit on the topic. See what’s out there, find where your name pops up and read what people are saying about your office. You may be surprised at the results.

Then, schedule a time each week to tackle each site until you systematically make your way through the largest, most visible sites. At that point, it would be a good idea to consider writing some custom content for your website, scheduling social media posts and filming a few quick videos to educate patients about who you are and what you do.

If that proves to be too much to chew, consider dividing the responsibilities among your staff or hiring a specialist.

It’s a new world of marketing out there; make sure you’re a part of it.



Chapter 3: Rating Websites – Friend or Foe?

It has been reported that as much as 80 percent of shoppers will change their shopping habits based on a negative review online and more than 92 percent of shoppers actually go online before making a purchase decision. With that said, are those pesky online ranking sites a thorn in your practice's side? Or, are they quickly becoming one of your highest referral-building boosters?

Let's start from the top. In the world of instant online social communication, a recent trend has taken the web by storm. It can boost business to new heights and it can scare patients away from scheduling appointments in just a few seconds.

The phenomenon I'm referring to is online consumer rating sites, of course. These sites provide an outlet for patients to share their experience with others. Users post reviews, ratings and comments – and they all have an impact on whether a potential client will choose your office over a neighboring competitor. They also rank extremely high on Google and therefore should be taken very seriously.

Different sites use different jargon to determine rankings, but what you need to be concerned with is what patients are saying about their experience at your office. The more ratings you have, the higher ranked you become. The better the rankings, the more patients will call for an appointment, at least that's how it works in theory. Conversely, negative reviews will help to keep your waiting room empty.

There has been some question as to whether the sites matter for physicians as much as they do to a restaurant, let's say. A recent study released by Tara Lagu, a physician at the Tufts University School of Medicine, says that patients aren't too interested in rating their doctors, especially if the experience was sub-par.



The study examined 33 physician rating websites and they found that 88 percent of the reviews were positive, 6 percent were negative and 6 percent were neutral.

That's great news right? It could be. The data may prove to be inconclusive however, as only 190 reviews were used for the study. Either way, you'll want to make sure of two things:

- Your office is listed. You'll want to be listed and reviewed by, at least, several patients. The sites even give you an opportunity to claim "ownership" of the page if it is your business. Claiming ownership and spending ten minutes to update your profile is incredibly useful, not only for search engine optimization, but it also serves as a free listing for you to put your brand, phone number, location and even photos on the site. Take advantage of the opportunity.
- You aren't one of the negatively reviewed doctors. You want every review to be as positive as possible. Stars, thumbs up, numerals – whatever the system the site uses, you want to be at the top.

One of the most common questions physicians are asking right now include: "What are these sites?" and "How can I change my ratings?"

Truth be told, those are incredible questions, and answering them sufficiently would take more space than the allotted amount for this article. Instead, we'll give you a brief overview of some of the top general and doctor-specific rating sites, how they work and what they do. Following the overview, take a look at some of the most common problems reported and a few tips you can use right now to change a patient's perception of you and your office.

Top Rating Sites:

- Yelp (www.Yelp.com)

Offering ratings on everything from restaurants to library systems, Yelp is used by the common consumer. This is the populist vote. The site allows users to rank your practice based on a 5-star system and share comments, and easily share the review with friends/random readers. It is also one of the



top-rated sites on Google when searching for reviews of any kind. It's a good place to be – so be there.

- Yellowpages (www.YP.com)

Taking the book online has done wonders for the Yellowpages business, and it can for you, too. The site allows users to search for, rate and comment on their experience at any type of business that's listed. Basic profiles are free to set up and they also offer paid services and promotions as well. Depending on your specialty, and the package selected, it can provide a quality, measurable ROI.

- Health Grades (www.HealthGrades.com)

Physician and healthcare provider specific (if you couldn't tell by the name), Health Grades uses a star system to provide rankings and ratings for doctors. Listings can be sorted either by specific locations or specialties. The site lets you to claim ownership of your practice, although the focus here is more on you as an individual rather than your practice. Upon registering, you have the ability to add photos, your state of license, years since graduation, age, gender, insurances accepted and more. There are also tabs to include information about awards and even provide a background check. Patients can rate you based on several factors using a handy survey tool that includes level of trust, ability to help patients understand their condition and more.

- Rate MDs (www.RateMDs.com)

As of this writing, RateMDs has more than 990,000 ratings on their site with 680 new doctors added the previous day. If a user searches by zip code, they are provided with a list of the 200 top-ranked physicians in the area. The more reviews you have and the higher the rankings, the closer you are to the top. Experiences are on a 1-5 scale and include categories for staff, punctuality, helpfulness and knowledge. Upon registering, you can again provide additional information about yourself and your practice.

Common Problems Reported

By now you should have a relatively good idea about what these sites do and why people use them. But what are they using them for? A majority of



people are rating their physicians positively. However, many of the reviews aren't as high as they could be with a few minor tweaks to your practice. Some of the most common problems reported are:

- Waiting Time Conflicts

Nobody wants to wait, no matter how busy you are. Complaints range from having to fill out paperwork to having a disorganized reception area. Some easy solutions may include making paperwork available online through your website, not booking patients at the same time you arrive in the morning and, if there is a wait, providing a pleasant waiting room that is also kid-friendly.

- Billing Errors

This is a big one. Set clearly defined responsibilities in the office and it is an easy mistake to correct, saving you and the patient money in the end. It may also be beneficial to set up an archive system by date per patient or schedule periodic reminders for patients to update their contact information just to be sure the data is correct.

- Rude or Impersonal Staff

Most people expect there to be a wait. But when they have to deal with uncaring or impersonal staff, it can really turn the experience sour. Many of the complaints here revolved around front desk staff and nurse practitioners. Consider setting up a review/monitoring process to make sure everyone has a positive attitude toward patients. It's not as easy as it sounds, but it will go a long way in boosting patient perception.

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 (mainly because they will show up first on Google and because they have over 100 Million users). 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.

We 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 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. A good rule of thumb is to refresh your information at least once every six months to ensure accuracy, etc. You’d be surprised what can happen to data when you aren’t watching it.

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 you 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. Our suggestion is to get your feet wet with one of them 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 out there. Unless you need to know everything from every angle, there isn’t really a need to be on each and every site.

An easy way to help you prioritize is simply to search your name on Google and see what pops up on the first and second pages. Depending upon what you see should help you decide where you should spend your limited time. In the last 18 months or so, online reputation management has become a significant portion of business for our medical marketing firm.

Experience shows that you should budget roughly eight hours per physician to properly set up all accounts and then another four to five hours once every six months to refresh the data.



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.

Tips to Stay Ahead of the Game

So you've put in some controls to help the patient experience, now what? Obviously you can't control what the patient will say about you exactly, but you can control their experience. You should make sure that every person on your staff is doing everything within their power to make the visit a positive one – no matter what. Making the effort will result in positive reviews online, through word of mouth and in referrals to other physicians.

As for the rating sites, don't wait for a patient to review you. Take the proactive approach – have someone on your staff visit the websites listed above, set up profiles and update the information. Add photos and video if they'll allow. If you have a full profile set up, odds are, patients will be more likely to use the system. We recommend taking the time to set up a Google Alert for your name and the name of your practice so that you are automatically notified with a page is indexed online with your name in it.

Also, if you want high marks on the rating sites, don't be afraid to ask for them. Let's be honest – you know who your favorite patients are. You know when a patient has had a good experience. Use them. It's perfectly ok for you, or a friendly member of your staff, to suggest visiting one of the sites and putting their two cents in.

There are dozens of creative ways to implement a workable system here to that requires zero work on your part – things as simple as a sign at the reception desk work wonders.



Feeling a bit overwhelmed? That's perfectly normal. The truth is, with a little insight, the process can be a breeze, not to mention an effective way to integrate social media into your marketing plan and successfully grow your practice.

At the end of the day, it's up to you. Will the ranking sites be your friend or your foe?

Chapter 4: You've Claimed Your Profiles – Now What?



In the past, your patients had a voice. From praising your work to complaining about your office staff, you can bet they were going to tell their friends and family. That was then. Today they can tell millions of strangers in addition to their friends and family with the press of a button.

It's important to note that with the increased power in consumers (patients) hands that you need to react to them in real time. You need to put out the flames and make sure they're happy before the complaint spreads like a virtual wildfire – pun intended. The simple fact of the matter is that if you don't respond quickly, it shows that you're out of touch with your patients and that you, in fact, really don't care that it was too cold in your office.

Jokes aside, with 65 percent of adult Internet users now saying they use social networking sites (up 4 percent from one year ago) according to Pew Internet Research, many of these users have begun to leave comments and various spread status updates on the nature of their service, both good and bad. Everyone from the local convenience store to your practice has unknowingly put their reputation on the line.

A recent study from eMarketer found that consumer reviews were trusted 12 times more than descriptions supplied by offices and manufacturers. For patients and consumers, the ability to see performance and opinion-based reviews on services and products they are considering purchasing is a huge benefit. For businesses and offices just like yours, it can be a huge headache thanks to largely subjective reviews, dirty competition and a whole host of other factors. Let's say one of these reviews makes it online – what do you do?

Remember, the Glass is Half Full

The reviews are a good thing – both positive and negative. If they're positive, they let people know what a wonderful physician you are while also boosting your search engine rankings, according to new research. The researchers analyzed search results for roughly 150 small businesses and found that more than 80 percent of search results did not point to the



websites of these small businesses. Instead, it was pointing at review sites. Now if the review is negative, there is still merit to be had. Not only do you now have an idea of what your customers think of your business, you have the opportunity to correct the problem, show you care and want to be better. This can be a great asset in the eyes of a jaded potential patient if you are making a valid, visible effort to make a change.

Create a Game Plan

As discussed in our previous book “Marketing Your Medical Practice: A Quick Reference Guide”, a good game plan will start with being proactive. If you believe a patient had a good experience, encourage them to go online and share that. If you are perusing your Facebook page and you see you have a negative review, take this opportunity to reach out to the individual and address their concerns publicly. Remember not to take what they say personal. How can you fix the problem realistically and immediately? Consider what you would want to hear if the shoe was on the other foot. Then, write out what you want to say and have someone else check it for accuracy and read it over to make sure your point comes across clearly and in a friendly tone.

Reach Out to Them

According to BabyCenter LLC, 44 percent of moms use social media for brand/product recommendations and a whopping 73 percent trust online reviews. That’s why it’s imperative that if a review is there (especially a negative one) that you reach out to the reviewer and attempt to put a positive spin on the situation. That example is just for mothers, but trust that consumers of all ages, sexes and backgrounds trust in similar levels. This doesn’t have to mean you’re giving them something for free, or even offering an apology. What it does mean is that you have to accept that something was wrong and you will do your very best to fix it. If there is an opportunity to give them something, consider it, but remember it isn’t required to control the situation. Remember, there is a chance that the review could be false or misleading so you don’t want to give away the bank if you don’t have to.



One piece of advice we give our clients is to create something that can be provided to the patient while they are checking out or that the doctor can give to a patient whom he knows has had a positive experience. We suggest a 'Rate our Service' business card that the doctor can keep in his front pocket. When a patient has had a positive experience, hand them the card and ask them to share with others.

You'd be surprised how many of your patients are willing to give you a positive review – sometimes it just takes making the ask. Hint: This is also a great method for identifying patient testimonials that you can use as part of your content management strategy for attracting new surgical patients.

Damage Control

At this point it's all about positioning for your image and your reputation. Sometimes you simply can't make them happy or fix whatever they were complaining about. One thing you can do, however, is show you're sympathetic to their needs. You want to show that you care and will do everything within your power to stop the incident from happening again – whether it wasn't spending enough time answering questions or just a longer than expected wait time – you will at least try to fix it. This is called brand management and it's incredibly important.

Get Talking

Now that you have an idea of what you should be doing and saying when something about you comes up online, the next step is to get to it. Monitor your social sites and several of the most popular review sites and check to see if you are trending in a positive or negative light. From there, use your game plan and take your online communication skills (and reputation) to a whole new level.



Chapter 5: Dealing with Bad Reviews

No matter what you do or say, there will always be some patients who simply do not like you or your practice. Nine out of 10 times, a negative review has something to do with wait times, perception of an unfriendly staff or a billing issue out that very well may be out of your control. The fact is, bad stuff is going to get out there and it is going to affect your ratings on the relevant physician rating sites and ultimately, your standings on Google.

Have a Plan

The first step to dealing with a negative review or an irate customer is to have a game plan. All practices should have a basic social media policy in place that includes a main point of contact that is responsible for monitoring, reviewing and responding to items that may show up on the Internet. Be sure to see our chapter on the Do's and Don'ts of Physician Social Media Use later. What you don't want is a random doctor or front desk person trying to respond to a negative review. Make sure that you designate a point of contact and let the responses flow through that point of contact.

Disputing Reviews

Most websites have varying policies when it comes to disputing negative reviews. Again, you need to find out and then ask when something negative arises. We had an ENT client recently who received an extremely negative review from a patient about how the physician did not spend enough time with him while performing an examination. After researching the review, it was discovered that the physician had actually never seen the patient and had been called to the hospital on an emergency.

The patient misrepresented the situation and used the Internet to anonymously post about our doctor. After a quick telephone call to the website, followed by an email explaining the situation, we were able to get the negative post removed.

While we've talked a lot about claiming your profiles across the physician rating websites, we'll later discuss the importance of properly setting up your



social media accounts and local search engines. Setting these accounts up properly from the get-go will allow you to quickly respond to negative reviews when they arise and in some cases even remove them altogether.

When All Else Fails...

When you've done everything you can and the patient remain persistent in damaging your reputation, it is sometimes necessary to take control of the situation. If the situation calls for it, do not be afraid to hire an attorney. There is plenty of recent case law where physicians have done so in order to keep the situation from getting worse.

It's one thing for a patient to have a legitimate complaint about something having to do with you and/or your practice but it's a totally different thing to have a patient simply smearing your good name for something that is out of your control completely.

Chapter 6: Inbound and Outbound Marketing



Claiming your online physician profiles is not enough to protect your hard earned reputation. You need a strategic and effective inbound marketing program to work within your existing marketing mix (or independently if you don't market at all) to create more leads and generate more appointments. An effective inbound program will create lots of positive content to help you push potential patient reviews into a lower ranking on key search engines.

Inbound Marketing Vs. Outbound (Traditional) Marketing

Inbound Marketing = earning new patients by making yourself easily found and attracting potential patients to your website by consistently producing content like informational articles, custom videos, patient testimonials, newsletters, whitepapers, search engine optimization, social media marketing and other forms of content management.

Outbound Marketing = earning new patients and creating brand awareness by cold calling, direct mail, traditional advertising, sales fliers, spam, telemarketing, etc.

When using an inbound marketing strategy, your patients are finding you. They see you as an expert, read what others are saying and seek you out to schedule their next appointment. When utilizing an outbound strategy that means that you are interrupting them – like standing on a chair and yelling, “Look at me, look at me!”

Inbound Marketing is also highly quantifiable – meaning that you can see exactly how many people are visiting your website, watching your videos, sharing your most recent article and scheduling an appointment. Outbound marketing is typically measured in total impressions and brand awareness.

Inbound is easy to adjust, reacting to what the real-time data is saying. Whereas in outbound, it's often too late to make changes to your program because once you figure out it's not working, you've already spent your budget printing items and attempting to gain impressions.



According to HubSpot (known for coining the term 'inbound marketing'), inbound marketing is especially effective for small businesses that deal with high dollar values, long research cycles and knowledge-based products. In these areas prospects are more likely to get informed and hire someone who demonstrates expertise.

If you are concerned about your online reputation (and you must be because you are reading this book), then you need to incorporate an inbound marketing strategy into your overall marketing strategy if you haven't already done so.

You might be asking why? Well, it's pretty simple.

As stated before, an inbound marketing program puts you where your potential patients are looking for you at the time they are seeking you out. Meaning: Your potential patients are searching for you on Google and there you are located on the top of the front page.

Quite often what pops up on the front page of Google are those pesky reputation management websites coupled by their name, your name and a few stars to signify whether you are a two or four star practice. An effective inbound marketing program will help move your negative reviews down onto subpages while keeping positive information and news about your practice front and center.



Chapter 7: Why Content Matters and How to Use it Effectively

Creating content for your website is essential to help you achieve the highest possible organic rankings in search engines. If you think content creation is for the birds, you're right. It's for the really smart birds that get lots of traffic on their site. In this day and age, content is king – and it's the most important element any successful inbound marketing strategy. Roughly 68 percent of online searchers don't go past the first search results page and roughly 85 percent of all Google searches result in someone only clicking on the organic content – the stuff that's not paid for. Obviously, that's where your site needs to be if people are going to look at it. So, how do you get your site there with content?

Let me take a moment to stress that content is not the only key to appearing high up in search engine rankings. You also have to have a stout search engine optimization (SEO) strategy, utilize some form of social media and constantly monitor what you're doing. But content helps. A lot.

What Do I Write About?

I hear this question a lot and quite frankly, it scares me. You're a doctor. You have got to be an expert at something, right? Your next patient better hope so. Write what you know. Remember, not everyone went to medical school, so you could start a series of articles just answering common questions from patients if you aren't sure what to write. Or how about explaining the risk factors for potential diseases or discussing new treatment technology in your field? Maybe a quick "Top 10" list would work for you (which are popular reads) instead. The possibilities are endless, and that's a good thing as you'll see below.

You'll want to write about relevant content and use meta keywords (important terms found on your site and in the article) whenever possible. Basically this means you should write specific content and highlight those specifics on your website's pages/posts using your site's backend software when you post. If you don't have that ability, you need a new website. Sorry about that.



One of the biggest keys is to set a schedule and then meet that deadline every single time. Ideally you'll want to add a few hundred word article or two every week. It's important that you realize this is a never-ending process. You are essentially competing with every other specialist around so you have to produce more content (while remembering quality matters as much as quantity).

Where Should I Put My Content?

On your website, duh. Your content should be put on your site wherever you see fit. It can range from a "Latest News" section to select pages to multiple patient education sections. Wherever you put it, make sure that the content is also loaded into your website's Site Map so search engines can pick it up a bit easier.

Again, in a perfect world, you'll have a patient education section for articles and a blog where you write quick updates and post helpful articles or links. This not only will help with organic search rankings, but it will also help build your site as a resource and position you as an expert.

Here is where your social media initiatives also become important. You can post links to your content from your Facebook, Twitter, Digg and whatever else you have pages that drive traffic to the site and help boost your rankings. Posting to quality directories and syndicating the content can also create a huge uptick in traffic and thereby boost you up in search rankings.

Promote Your Hard Work

You're not writing all this quality content for your health. You're writing it to boost business so tell people about it. Post it wherever you can, create signs and put them throughout your office advertising some of the free resources available, mention it while you're networking or during lectures and seminars – basically you want to tell the world by whatever online and real world interactions you can muster. Do everything short of literally shouting it from the rooftop. Talk to an expert about getting your content out there via a public relations effort and/or a link sharing program online as well. If you don't know what that is, ask someone who specializes in the field.



Get Writing!

Although this was a very broad overview of what you should be doing with your content management plan, it's important that you get started as soon as possible. The longer you drag your feet, the more competitors you'll have to race to catch up with.



Chapter 8: What are People Looking for on Your Website?

Searching for health information is the third most common online activity behind checking email and using a search engine, according to a February 2011 article from *amednews*. A Harris study in January 2011 found that most people search for physicians based on location first and foremost. Then what?

Have you ever thought about what you can actually do on your site to drive traffic and, ultimately, get patients to make an appointment? It's OK if you didn't, because we did. Take a look below to learn about several tools your website should be using to attract patients and convert them to appointments.

Optimized to the Core

Once your website is built, optimized and loaded with popular keywords that relate to your specialty, you're all done, right? Not exactly. You should know by now that you should always be generating new content, making sure to focus on specific keywords that relate to your practice. This helps search engines pick up your website when potential patients are searching for those keywords. It's also helpful to continually create new content and post it on your site so you can point to your photos/articles/news/etc. pages from your social media channels.

Get Your Header Right

Make sure your website header (the part on top that appears on every page) includes links to your social media icons and a phone number. You want to make sure the process to "like" or "follow" you is as easy as possible for patients, otherwise they won't do it. We're all lazy, so put a phone number in your header as well. That way, patients don't have to search around the entire page to find it because, well, they will give up if it's too hard. You may want to consider having some type of social media feed on your home page so visitors can read what you've been up to and follow along if they like what they see.



Having and pushing a strong social media presence helps connect patients to your practice, and it helps you easily communicate and share messages with patients without spending a dollar. The bottom line is the more they're connected to you, the more likely they are to schedule an appointment.

Printable Forms

Your website shouldn't just be a place to talk about the dozens of procedures you offer and a means to locate your office. Are those important components to a good website? Of course, but you'll also want to be a resource for patients. For instance, one of our client's sites averages 4.31 page views per visitor on their new site per month since building it with our help several months ago.

Of these visits, 22.19 percent are on the home page and the next most popular page is the Patient Info Center with 17.23 percent of all traffic. Here, patients can view and print any forms they may need prior to coming into the office. They can also learn what they should expect upon walking in the doors for any number of reasons and patients appreciate that. In case you're curious, the next most popular page on their website is the staff page with 11.47 percent of total views followed by locations with 9.97 percent.

Videos

Why read when you can watch? Whether you want to believe it or not, video will continue to gain popularity with patients and you need to get some on your site as soon as you can. Not only do videos provide credibility for your practice, they also help to put patients at ease. Some popular video topics include tours of the office and physicians speaking about a specific procedure they perform.

For our clients we also create profile videos that talk about what doctors are like outside of the office and, you guessed it, these are consistently the most popular videos. Patients want to know that you're not just a white coat; but like them, you have a family and enjoy having some fun or soaking in the sun. It makes them feel connected to you, and thus more likely to schedule an appointment. Whenever possible, try and create testimonial videos as well with patients discussing their story and how wonderful your practice is. All



you'll need is a camera and a YouTube account to get the job done sufficiently.

Online Appointment Request Forms

The fact is, some people just don't like to talk on the phone. No matter what. For this reason, you should have an option to either schedule an appointment online, or at least schedule an appointment request with a promise that someone from your office will follow up with them to confirm their date shortly. Quite simply, we've done this with clients as well and the results have been stellar. Without the option for an online form, you could be missing out on hundreds of clients potentially. Even if you only get 10 requests a month online, one could argue you wouldn't get those 10 requests if that page wasn't there. In other words, it's worth the space.

Google Analytics

Hands down, Google Analytics is the best way to track your website statistics. This free tool allows you to view: hits over selected date intervals you control; demographics of visitors; behavior of visitors; browser technology; content success; average time spent on pages and much, much more. Best of all, all you need is a Google account to get started. You'll have to place a small code on your site and from there, you simply sit back and let the stats roll in.

Are there more tools your site should be employing to get the most visitors in and converted? You bet, but this list is a surefire way to improve your site and get you headed in the right direction toward a successful web presence.



Chapter 9: Measuring Your Content Marketing Success

Whether you want to face it or not, the Internet has fundamentally changed the way people find, share, discover and connect.

In today's digital world your online reputation can be the difference between a patient scheduling an appointment with your office or a competitor's down the street.

That's why, in part, so much of marketing efforts today are focused inbound marketing strategies that include content management and social media. But, how can you tell if you're getting a quality Return on Investment (ROI) for your content creation and management?

The truth is, it's hard to quantify because there aren't always "hard numbers." If you create content once a week for a month, will you get more leads? What about twice a week? There's really not a set way to tell.

It may take up to six months or more before you start to see your leads grow. The key, however, is continuing to provide consistent, quality content in your posts even if you think no one is looking at them. After all, you have to tend to your garden if you want it to be beautiful. And we all know that doesn't happen overnight.

The bottom line is that content costs money to create, whether you spend time creating custom content yourself or you pay a medical-focused content management marketing firm. Success is measured in brand awareness and lead growth. Ultimately, those factors will lead to phone calls and appointments set. That's why you're spending your money.

In fact, a recent study by Hubspot says that customers who practice inbound marketing (where patients find you and content is a core element) increase leads an average of 4.2 times within a few months.

So what should you do? Here are four steps to effectively measure your content strategy:



Understand What You're Measuring

Let's start with the big issue when it comes to measuring content conversion rates: What exactly are you measuring? Traditionally, media companies would use readership, viewership and ad revenue as the measuring stick for content's success. But with content marketing, the goal is to achieve a conversion (like a phone call, for instance) or to build the ever ambiguous brand awareness of your office. Our recommendation to measure your "immeasurable" content is to set a goal.

First, set up a baseline for a number you'd like to try and grow. If your normal inbound call rate sits around 20 per day, plan to increase your call volume by two calls per day by the end of the quarter. Then, measure your results in a few months against the baseline. Admittedly, two calls per day doesn't sound like a lot, that is until you realize it's 40 new potential appointments by the end of the month.

Measure a Few Forms of Conversions

Let's stick with the phone call example. You want to increase phone calls, so that's your goal. But content in the social media landscape is viral, evolving, and ever finding new ways to survive. In other words, just because your goal is to increase incoming appointment calls, that doesn't mean that's all your content is doing.

Of course you'll want to track your target metric (phone calls) but don't put the blinders on to other forms of success your content may be responsible for creating. And create it will.

We see it all the time with our clients, we'll post a piece of customized healthcare content or video designed to generate website hits and suddenly we're earning more Facebook fans and gaining quality inbound phone calls. It's a bonus and it's worth tracking.

Some of the easiest ways to track how you're doing and what's working are free, simple to understand and provide more data than you can shake a stick at. For Facebook, simply use the Facebook Insights that come built-in to



every fan page. You'll be able to track upticks in fan count, how many people you're reaching with each posts, demographics and much more.

For your website we recommend using Google Analytics. After placing a simple code on your page, Google will provide you with all sorts of free data including unique visitors, time spent on each page of your site, what content is popular, demographics, search engine terms and so much more.

Enjoy Your Initial Successes

Odds are your practice is starting out small in the world of content management and social media integration. No worries. Take a second to enjoy those small victories, and keep key measurements handy. They're easy to track and far more encouraging (initially) than Search Engine Optimization (SEO) measurements – which may take some time to manifest.

A few ways to tell if your content is working:

- Likes or comments on Facebook
- Retweets
- Other shares (LinkedIn, email, etc.)
- Comments on the blog itself
- Average page views per visitor (a great metric provided by Google Analytics)

These factors will help you monitor how well you're building your audience and how much they trust you. That trust will eventually turn into loyalty, which will put patients in your waiting room.

Be Patient!

Content creation and management take time to grow before you'll fully see their benefits. It's important not to expect overnight results and not to get upset when you don't instantly jump to the top spot on Google. That's why we talked earlier about ROI taking time to become clear.

It's a different world in the digital space, and you have to adjust your expectations accordingly.



Chapter 10: Getting Results vs. Making Noise

In the high-cost world of advertising, how do you know you're spending your dollars in the right place? Tracking your advertising and marketing results is incredibly important to ensure your campaign is not only branding your medical practice (making noise), but it's also driving viewers/readers to your office (getting results). Better still, if you know what's working you'll be able to really drill down and focus your campaign that much more, bringing in more patients and more dollars to your practice.

So, how can you judge if your advertising is effective or not? Here are a few simple tips you can start using today:

Pay-Per-Click

If your practice is using an online pay-per-click (PPC) strategy to generate hits via Google AdWords or a similar program, you can track your ads down to the keyword level to see what people were actually searching to land on your ad. This is an extremely helpful technique that will help determine what your practice's potential clientele are interested in and how you can tailor your ad campaign to further meet those interests. Although this tracking technique can only be applied online, it is crucial for planning future strategies to lure in potential patients. These campaigns can be pricey though, and you should have a budget outlined before starting any campaign.

Splash Pages

Let's say you're running a fancy new promotion and giving away free Botox samples if people go to your website, fill out a survey and schedule a consultation. Instead of just having that survey on the main page, create a special splash (or sub) page for it. This is beneficial for several reasons. For one, you can now advertise this special page (www.YourOfficeName.com/BotoxSurvey, for instance) on all of your advertisements, social media sites and in your office. This will help keep the survey from cluttering your website's main page and, more importantly, allow you to track the number of views for that particular page, where the links are coming from, viewers vs. entries, what program they're viewing your website



from and much more. This information is invaluable when scheduling further ad campaigns and other giveaways, cluing you into just what your patients are interested in. This method can be expanded across the board to include any other promotion your practice is running. By creating different splash pages for different promotions, you can compare which ones your patients are most interested in and which ones are a waste of your time. We suggest using Google Analytics to keep track of your web statistics.

Dedicated Numbers

Does your practice run ads in area publications? No problem, tracking these is incredibly easy as well, thanks to dedicated phone numbers and/or free tools like Google Voice. You can set up dedicated phone numbers through your phone company that will forward directly to your main line. Then, simply insert one of the new number in "Advertisement A" and another in "Advertisement B" so you can tell where you're getting more calls from. This will tell you which has a higher return on investment (ROI) for your medical practice marketing efforts. This is an extremely easy way to keep track of which advertisements are cost effective and which are just wasting your effort, money and time.

The above methods of tracking your advertisements are just some of the many ways available for you to make sure you're spending your medical practice marketing dollars in the right place. And like with any money spent, you want to make sure you're not wasting it. Remember that whenever you're spending money on advertising, a tracking method should be included on your "to do" checklist. Neglecting to do so could mean losses in advertising dollars and time, and you would never know unless you were quantitatively tracking your results.

After your advertising money is spent, you want to make sure the noise your making is reflected in the results your practice is seeing.



Chapter 11: Little Known Secrets to Moving Up on Google

Did you know that 75 percent of searchers don't go past the first page of Google search results? Yes, 75 percent. That being said, the next point is pretty obvious: you need to be on the first page of Google if you want to grow your practice. But how can you get your website to rise to the first page of Google?

How Google Works

Before we get into all the fun (read: necessary) tips to get your website ranked on the first page of Google, let's start by discussing a bit about how the world's largest search engine actually works.

We're all familiar with the end result, you type in a phrase you're looking for, let's say "Dermatologist Orlando" for this example. Google uses an advanced algorithm to come up with these results. The process starts, however, on your computer screen when you're either creating or updating content on your practice's website.

You write a blog post, Tweet, Facebook update and create a page on your site (or add content to the web in any form really). Then, Google "bots" crawl the web, searching for new content and come across your additions to cyberspace. From there the page is indexed and Google estimates the page's overall authority based on links.

Fun fact: according to Hubspot, companies that blog have 434 percent more indexed pages than companies that don't. These indexed pages help determine search rankings in that the more pages you have, the more lead's you'll see.

Once your content is checked against Google's editorial policies, your content is ready to be found. As a user queries Google for "Dermatologist Orlando" the search engine suggests keywords and searches for synonyms of phrases you've typed to produce an initial result set – the front page of Google.



These results are then ranked by authority, relevance and several other factors, ideally to provide the user with the closest possible matches to what they're looking for.

Now that we know how we arrive at the end result, let's discuss tips on how to get there.

Moving on Up the Front Page

There are really two major things you can do (or hire someone to do) to get to the top of Google: do what the top sites on Google are doing and create good content and websites.

The first tip is a pretty self-explanatory – if you want to be like the best, well, be like the best. Take a look at what the top sites are doing in your specialty and copy them. After all, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, even nowadays.

Of course, it's a little more complex than just making your page look like theirs. You'll have to do some legwork to research your niche and find keywords that searchers are looking for when looking for what you do. From there, you'll want to follow many of the best practices your competition is using – be that professional website development, Google Adwords campaigns, strong social media presence, etc.

And that, unsurprisingly, leads us into our next tip: you have to be creating relevant, quality content that is easy to find when Google sends out the "bots" looking to index your page if you want to rise to the top of the front page of Google.

That means you have to have a plan for blogging, creating social media posts, videos, website updates – the whole nine yards. It also means these updates must be optimized for relevancy and consistency within your specialty.

It's simple to talk about and much harder to accomplish: build quality sites that are search engine optimized, write good content that people and Google will look for and earn your traffic, links and ranking the right way. It's



also worth noting that you should plan to build sites that are scalable and updatable by you to avoid unnecessary charges down the road to change content.

Not only will creating this quality content plan help build your website, move you up the ranks of Google and thus increase your patient count, it also will have numerous other statistically-backed benefits as well.

Benefits and Things to Remember

Again, the best strategy is to *have* a strategy when trying to move up to the front page of Google. You don't want to just start creating randomly and hope for the best.

Ideally your efforts will have a clear, definable goal with a schedule and accountable manager in place to make sure each post, picture and video is doing what they're supposed to. If not, we know someone who may be able to help. Shameless plugs aside, there are numerous benefits to creating organic content (the stuff that isn't paid for on Google search results). In addition to helping position you as an expert in your field and increase your practice's exposure on search engines across the web, you'll also gain patient loyalty, word of mouth advertising and more.

For instance:

- 70 percent of consumers prefer getting to know a company via articles rather than advertisements
- Organic content is clicked on more than 70 percent of the time when searching
- 84 percent of all marketers agree that building consumer trust will become marketing's primary objective in the near future
- Being on YouTube puts you on the third most visited site on the Internet, behind Google and Facebook
- You can help control reviews on doctor review sites, such as www.HealthGrades.com (where more than 100 million people choose to determine who their next physician will be)

So, as you can see, taking the necessary steps to move up to the front page of Google are beneficial in a variety of ways, both obvious and otherwise. When you get started however, remains to be seen.



Chapter 12: Found Dead on Arrival: Public Relations



Some people out there will argue that traditional public relations, as it was once known, is dead (or, rather, dying a slow death). Others will say that traditional public relations has simply evolved – that the message is the same, but the delivery of the message is what has changed significantly. Either way, if you're over 40 and aren't an early adopter, you may very well be looking at a career change if you're in the public relations field. If you haven't evolved the way your office delivers its public relations announcements, your efforts could be dead the second they arrive in the news editor's inbox.

Today, there are two types of public relations and then there's a whole bunch of stuff in between.

Proactive Public Relations – has an inbound marketing strategy at its core, and contains a strong content creation program and social media strategy which includes news releases, timely story pitches and media alerts for media-friendly events.

Reactive Public Relations – includes managing your reputation and responding to what's being said about you, your medical practice (or any type of business for that matter) and your specialty across the Internet and in the real world.

Why Your Business Needs to be Proactive:

If your practice is strictly reactive, you're missing out on all sorts of free media attention and opportunity. The trick is knowing the proper ways to deliver the message so it's most effective in garnering attention for your practice.

Here are some stats that help illustrate why proactive public relations are so important:

- 84 percent of all marketers agree that building consumer trust will become marketing's primary objective in the near future.



- More than 92 percent of buyers regularly check reviews online before making a purchase or service decision.
- 78 percent of consumers trust peer recommendation while only 14% trust advertisements.
- 4 out of 5 people say they have received advice via social media regarding what product or service to purchase.

A recent study by Hubspot says that businesses that practice inbound marketing (where customers find you and CONTENT IS KING) increase leads an average of 4.2 times within a few months. It was also reported that 70 percent of customers (patients) prefer getting to know a company (your medical practice) via articles rather than advertisements.

If you want potential customers to find you, then you need to put stuff out there for them to find (such as videos, articles, announcements, photos, presentations, etc.) and you need to do it consistently.

You also need to post these efforts and push them through your own channels, rather than just relying on the traditional means of sending news releases and pitch letters. Do those still work? Sometimes. But having all of your bases covered and making sure your inbound Internet presence is strong is part of the evolutionary process.

When well executed, an effective content management plan will increase your organic search listings, protect your online reputation and drive traffic to your website. I would argue that if you are thinking about hiring a public relations firm to increase your visibility in the marketplace, consider hiring an inbound marketing firm that specializes in content development, social media and online reputation management in lieu of, or in addition to, a traditional PR team.

They should have a clear understanding of the do's and don'ts in public relations but also a clear understanding and ability to get your messaging out there in the non-traditional outlets. Long gone are the days where the only way to get noticed was to get picked up in your local newspaper or television station. Today, the Internet (including social media and blogging)



has afforded us the opportunity to bypass the traditional media outlets altogether and deliver our messages directly to patients. Public relations today has become more about search engine optimization (SEO) and getting your news indexed on the first page of Google than about getting your story covered on the evening news.

If you are looking to get picked up in the traditional sense, one thing that certainly hasn't changed in the realm of public relations is the need to make your business relevant to the news cycle. Making yourself relevant will increase your odds of getting picked up tenfold.

Being relevant to the current news cycle is a great way to get your business and brand some good publicity and a nice way to help improve your online reputation at the same time (this means you are practicing both proactive and reactive public relations).

For example, the Florida State Legislature recently passed a new youth concussion law requiring that all high-school athletes receive clearance from a physician following a suspected concussion-related injury on the field in practice or during a game. We saw this as an opportunity to get one of our clients positioned with the local television news as an expert on youth athletic injuries and overuse injuries.

We also saw this as the right time to announce our client's new baseline testing concussion program for area high schools. Not only were they able to create some great content for their website, which will go a long way for their online reputation management, but they have received a good deal of traction with the news program as well.

It's this combination of traditional, nontraditional, inbound, outbound, proactive and reactive public relations that comes together to create the desired results and put more patients in your medical office's lobby. And at the end of the day, after all the buzz words and trends, jockeying for position on Google, edits and rewrites, submissions and rejections, that's what it's all about. When evolution is put into practice and PR lives to fight another day, we know we accomplished our goal.

Chapter 13: Telling Your Story Through PR



We've all got a story to tell. Every doctor, every nurse, every office has something that sets them apart from every other doctor, nurse and office around the corner. What makes you unique? Why should patients go see you over a competing practice?

Now, hopefully, that's not the first time you've ever asked yourself those questions. Certainly, you have an answer for them, right? To market your practice in the ever-changing, instant gratification society we now live in, odds are you have a multi-pronged approach to marketing whether you know it or not.

You might have some fliers and posters made up, ads in local magazines, a Facebook page or even a few public relations/community outreach efforts – whatever the case may be, there is a good chance you have some type of “marketing mix” at your office. And that's a good thing. A very good thing, actually. But, which method is most effective at drawing patients in the door of your practice?

The answer depends on who you ask. Having a healthy marketing mix is a great thing, allowing you to reach potential patients through a variety of mediums. But for the most value, and the most impact, you have to have a strong community presence – you have to have a story to tell.

One of the best ways to grow your awareness in the community and establish a positive reputation (as I've said before) is effective, strategic public relations. This can be anything from pitching news stories, to attending community events, and even hosting charity drives or sponsoring local school programs.

Be sure to choose causes, stories and events that mean something to you – it will not only make the job of actually attending these promotions a lot easier, but it will also give you something to talk about (and thusly build trust) with your new patients.

But what makes effective public relations? The key to taking your efforts from a desperate, cheap media grab to something meaningful that patients can



identify with is the story you tell. That's the key. If you have a good story, something people want to hear about – patients will begin to believe in it, and in you, in the end.

Where to Start

The key in creating a good story starts with a strong foundation and builds from there. Take some time to plan out stories/trends you see developing within the next several months that relate to your specialty or your community so you're prepared when they hit. Have you ever noticed that the calendar never stops sneaking up on you?

An effective story is told through pacing and, in the case of public relations, pacing is your timeliness. So be ready or the opportunities will pass you by. Brainstorm about some of the ideas that make you unique.

Choose a niche that you want to carve for yourself and concentrate your efforts there – are you a family-friendly small business owner or are you a leading edge, state-of-the-art powerhouse? Sure your office may have elements of both of those things – you can be small and still be paperless or have fancy tech – but, when you're marketing yourself choose one image and stick with that. Too many messages will cloud your story and people won't have anything to remember you by.

If you want to include every aspect of your practice, they should be limited to background text and bullet points.

Many practices make the mistake of trying to be too much – remember, most of the time, patients only hear a few seconds of what you have to say anyway, so make sure you're telling them the right story.

If there is anything unique that sets you apart, now is the time to figure out what it is and own it. Make sure your story is rooted in reality, and it always helps to add a human or personal side. If your story is compelling, patients will be compelled to your office, it's as simple as that.

Let's take a moment to discuss your story. You don't have to have a tragic tale of heartbreak and redemption – so don't overthink the process. Focus



on what makes you unique and then work toward telling others about it – that is your story.

If you're unsure of what to do, one good tip to start with is keeping in touch with your current patients. Work with them to build trust on a personal level and make time to tell them a few of the stories you were thinking about – see how they react. Use them to help craft your image. This is the perfect captive audience to run beta tests and market research on.

Listen and really apply their feedback – it will go a long way toward setting you in the right direction at no cost. Warning: Patients can be brutally honest when you sit down and talk with them for a few minutes, so bring a tissue just in case.

What to Do

Now that you've hopefully got a few good story ideas relating to your practice, it's time to do something with them. Every marketing activity you do should be geared toward building on your image and maintaining the stories you've chosen.

As I mentioned before, become a part of a local charity or fundraising committee. Open your ears for patient feedback and be proud of your extracurricular community involvement. Tell the community at large what you've been doing.

Another great tip to save you and your office manager a headache is to remember that if you're going to send something to media to announce news, hire a company that specializes in medical marketing or public relations to send the story out for you. They can offer tweaks, edit for grammar and they already have all of the local contacts in place so you don't have to worry about getting reporters to talk to you, what you should say and what you have to do. It will save you what hair you have left, trust me.

These companies can also help in the process of creating your image. Consistent efforts are required for attracting new patients. Everyone wants to feel like they have an "inside" track when it comes to healthcare – everyone wants to know and be connected with a doctor so they feel like they get



special treatment. When working with patients, make them feel this way and then tell them your story. You'll be surprised at how fast word of mouth can travel.

What to Avoid

So you've got a story in mind to tell. You've decided on an image for your practice. It's compelling. Real. Newsworthy. Or is it? One of the biggest mistakes you can make is over exaggerating or creating a story when there really isn't one there. Failing to deliver on a claim you've made can be a practice nightmare and it's difficult to recover from.

There's a fine line between reaching out to media to share when something newsworthy and timely has happened to you or your practice (say, winning an award or adding another doctor to the team) and when you just feel like you need to get in the paper. If you aren't sure where that line is, a marketing and public relations specialist can tell you. Basically, if you burn bridges with local chambers of commerce and/or the media, the majority of time they can't be rebuilt so be very careful when submitting ideas if you ever want one to get chosen for a story, especially if you're trying to do your own PR.

You also want to be sure that whatever image or story you've chosen to create for your practice is an achievable one. Don't choose an image of community activist if you hate being active in the community. It sounds easy enough, but it happens all the time.

Patients will turn on you and leave your office if your actions don't match with the story or image you've worked so hard to create. Next thing you know, you've got negative reviews all over the place and patient traffic will decrease rapidly – so don't lie.

The Bottom Line

The thing to remember is this: PR tells a story. It connects you to your community, and to new and old patients alike. Used correctly, it can be one of the most powerful tools in your marketing materials and can drive your patient count through the roof. Used ineffectively and the only story you'll

have to tell is how you had to close your practice. Everyone's got a story, but no one wants to be the author of that one.



Be clear, be concise, be honest and be ready. Once people hear your story, they'll come knocking. Make sure you're there to get the door.



Chapter 14: The Do's and Don'ts of Physician Social Media Usage

In recent years, social media has dramatically changed the way you as a physician can interact with patients. But what are the guidelines you should follow when interacting with patients on social media accounts like Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and YouTube?

The Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) developed ethical and professional guidance with the help of The Special Committee on Ethics and Professionalism in 2011 to answer such questions.

And it's a good thing, too. According to a recent survey in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 92 percent of all medical and osteopathic boards in the U.S. have encountered complaints of online physician misconduct.

The FSMB guidelines are meant to protect physicians from unintended consequences and maintain public trust by:

- Protecting the privacy and confidentiality of their patients
- Avoiding requests for online medical advice
- Acting with professionalism
- Being forthcoming about their employment, credentials and conflicts of interest
- Being aware that information they post online may be available to anyone, and could be misconstrued

The same survey also reported that 56 percent of medical boards have either restricted, suspended or revoked at least one physicians' license for online missteps. State medical boards have the authority to discipline physicians for unprofessional behavior on social networking sites including, but not limited to:

- Inappropriate communication with patients online
- Use of the Internet for unprofessional behavior
- Online misrepresentation of credentials



- Online violations of patient confidentiality
- Failure to reveal conflicts of interest online
- Online derogatory remarks regarding a patient
- Online depiction of intoxication
- Discriminatory language or practices online

Chapter 15: Responding to Social Media Posts



By now, we hope your office has set up the social media channels that make sense for you. Whether that's Facebook, Twitter, Google+ or YouTube, ideally you've set up your profile and you're interacting with the 91 percent of online adults who use social media regularly, according to Hubspot. A client of ours recently asked a question that's often overlooked so we thought we'd share our answer to, "What do I do when someone comments on my practice's Facebook page?"

Now, for the purpose of this article, we're going to expand Facebook to include any of the social sites and share some of the tips and ideas we use to respond to patients when they interact with us in the social media world.

Phase 1

The whole point of interacting with patients online isn't to make you feel good about how many people you know (really, we don't care). The point of interacting with patients in an online or social environment is to generate leads, cultivate potential patients and ultimately put their butts in your exam rooms.

To do that, you'll want to create a two-phase plan that accomplishes a few key things. Creating the content plan will also help you craft responses and prepare when someone interacts with your practice's social media profiles. Phase one should include creating a content and publishing plan that:

- Builds Off of Quality Content – The more quality content you have posted on your blog and you share through your social channels, the better your chance for increasing your organic page rank thereby showing up higher in search engines and ultimately garnering more clicks.
- Positions You as an Expert – That same content will also help position you as a leading expert in whatever your specialty is in the area. If you're everywhere and you answer lots of questions, you must know what you're talking about, right?



- Engages Your Audience – By providing this relevant, useful content you'll also be engaging your fans/followers/patients/haters/etc.

Now, of course those are just the broad strokes of what the first phase plan should entail. We'll cover more of what your plan should entail in future writings.

As you come up with your content, make a note of questions, answers and references you came across while writing. That way, if it's ever asked, you can produce everything you need to respond quickly.

For phase two, you need to create a plan for responding when your audience becomes engaged. Remember, the more engagement you create from your content, especially on social sites, the better traffic potential for your website.

Phase 2

When someone finally posts or comments on something you've posted, what do you do? The obvious answer is to respond, duh. But, how do you respond? Here are a few tips:

- Be Timely – You have a very small window to respond to a comment to show your appreciation toward a positive comment or answer a negative comment. You want to show patients that you care what they have to say and you appreciate the fact that they took time out of their day to interact with you. As for how long you have, if the shoe was on the other foot, how long would you want to wait to get a response? That's your answer. It should be within a few days at the absolute latest.
- Be Positive No Matter What – You can curse out the patient all you want behind closed doors, just make sure you get all that anger out of your system before you start typing. Being snarky, short, condescending or worse will do you no good and it will destroy your reputation. We've seen case studies where it happens. Take a chill pill. Because you're a doctor, get it? Anyway, If you can rise above the



comment, those who read your response will also be inclined to trust your word a bit more. It was recently reported by SocialMediadd that 70 percent of consumers trust social media reviews from strangers. That's a huge number, and it's exactly why you need to respond and respond well to negative reviews. Although there may be no way to stop people from posting negative reviews, no matter how good of a job you can do, you can mitigate their damage with a proper response.

- **Have a Few Responses Ready** – It would be handy (and a real timesaver) if you had a few canned responses already created. Did someone post on your Facebook page asking for medical advice? No problem, copy and paste your previously typed response detailing that you can't give medical advice via the Internet but you would be happy to schedule an appointment for them in your office. The same survey mentioned above also reported that 61 percent of users rely on user reviews before making a decision, no matter what the review is. Your responses can also play into if a user sees you're honest, transparent and friendly. All things they'd want in their new physician.
- **Always Brand Yourself** – Remember, your name or your practice's name is a brand. You have standards to uphold and you want to be seen in a certain light – all the time. Your responses should always fall in line with those standards. In other words, if you're rushed or aren't sure what to say, revisit the post when you have a moment.

By interacting with patients, increasing your engagement levels and ultimately growing your office's brand in the social marketplace, you'll see increased leads and quantifiable benefits that you can't really match anywhere else. Especially for the relatively low cost of maintaining these pages or paying a group to do it for you.