



Managing and Marketing Your Online Reputation

By Tammy McCausland

Your cancer facility works hard to deliver quality patient care and ensure a positive patient experience. But even a few negative reviews—about your physicians, your staff or even your facility—can tarnish your reputation and negatively impact your bottom line. Jennifer Thompson, president of Insight Marketing Group, presented on “The Changing Face of Customer Service” at SROA’s 35th Annual Meeting. In a follow-up interview for this article, she explained why online reputations matter and how administrators can be proactive.

We’ve all done it—reviewed what others have said online about a book, a product, a restaurant, a business, and even a physician or hospital to help in our decision-making. And just as the positive comments might sway us in a favorable direction, negative comments can easily dissuade us. “Negative reviews are seen as more trustworthy and are perceived as being of greater use,” said Thompson. “Fifty percent of customers will stop doing business with a company if it takes that organization longer than a week to respond to a complaint.”

The social media dynamic has changed from being “on” social media to being “in” social media. Historically, being “on” social media meant sharing positive news such as a new hire, or posting information two to three times a week. “Whereas before maybe you just pushed stuff out, now you’re interacting and creating a dialogue with a potential patient,” Thompson said. “Being ‘in’ social media from a customer service standpoint means ongoing monitoring and proactively managing your social media channels, just like you would monitor your voicemail, your website and your email.”

Providers need to appear engaged, caring and professional to current and potential customers online. Social media customer service matters because unhappy customers may go to Facebook, Twitter, Healthgrades, YouTube, etc., to complain if they’re unhappy. Facebook, in particular, is powerful because people log into Facebook every day. Facebook’s reach is instant and broad, and feedback is immediate. Thompson shared some statistics about social media compared to other channels for customer service: social media (40.7%), website/live chat (29.2%), email (22.9%) and phone (7.2%). And 36% of people have used social media to shame a company for poor customer service.

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“If marketing your practice and protecting your reputation are important, you’re going to have to put resources into it,” Thompson said. There are inexpensive tools—for example, HootSuite and Google alerts—available to monitor what’s being said about your physicians and your facility online. If financial or human resources are an issue, you can outsource the job to a company that specializes in online reputation management (ORM). “For a relatively small amount of money, similar to going out for dinner once a week, you can have the ORM done for you,” she said. If you opt to do it in-house, Thompson suggested choosing somebody you would trust to have a discussion with a vendor or with patients. “You don’t want to task an intern to do it. You want somebody that can make decisions on behalf of the practice, but maybe isn’t the ultimate decision-maker,” she said. It could be someone in human resources, communications or in a customer management role, and it may be a matter of adding it to an existing employee’s job



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description, rather than hiring a new person.

Managing your organization’s reputation online entails making sure information is accurate on all websites. This includes your address, contact information, services and physician bios. Photos and bios should be the same across the board. Check Google,

Yelp, Healthgrades, RateMDs and Vitals. Focus on the ones that show up on the first two pages of Google search, Thompson said. Regarding negative reviews, do not lash out, do not get defensive, do not blame and do not justify your actions, she added. Thompson recommended that providers have HIPAA-compliant responses ready to go, and respond quickly to positive and negative reviews. For negative reviews, post a delicate and tactful reply. And don’t respond to any comments from disgruntled ex-employees.

Don’t just manage your reputation, market it. Adopt a patient-forward mindset and tell your success stories in a way that new patients will notice. “Your stories are unique to you, so leverage the stories that nobody can duplicate,” Thompson said. “When you share and re-share your positive patient testimonials, things caregivers have said or positive stories coming from your facility, then from a reputation standpoint, you’re leveraging these as part of that ongoing social media.”

Thompson suggested several ways to market your reputation:

1. Create contests with staff. Grab a photo or video of providers with patients when they’ve had a positive experience. Video testimonials work well. Use Rev software to caption videos.
2. If you’re doing community engagement, share it on social media.
3. Encourage patients to share their stories. Send an email newsletter with instructions on how to leave a review. Text/email review invites. Hand out feedback cards. Create a feedback page on your website. Have signage in the office encouraging patients to provide feedback online. Ask for feedback similar to what Press Ganey asks for; namely, clinical, bedside manner, administration, facility, billing, geography, etc.
4. Capitalize on great feedback and share it across social media channels.

The benefits of using social media include: patient engagement, increased exposure and reach, bolstered search results and a reason to create team-building activities.

Going forward, Thompson said people are going to become more comfortable sharing experiences and leaving reviews online. “There are going to be more opportunities for the general public to leave reviews, and the first amendment is going to protect the consumer,” she said. “I think we’re going to see more websites where people can share, and providers will need to embrace the online customer service experience and dedicate resources to it.” She envisions the customer service side of social media evolving to where marketing and operations will work together to manage reputation and proactively solve patient challenges.



If it seems overwhelming, it shouldn’t be. “Start by getting a handle on what your digital footprint looks like, and don’t be afraid of it,” Thompson said. “Don’t wait. Even if you think there’s nothing out there about you, there is, and you need to be proactive to manage, preserve and advance your reputation.”

Jennifer Thompson speaking about managing and marketing your online reputation at SROA’s 35th Annual Meeting

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