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# Protecting and Managing Your Professional Online Reputation

In the brave new world of the Internet, your professional reputation is on the line every day. As the Internet continues to be more prevalent in our society, savvy business owners understand the importance of proactively building a strong online reputation. At a time when most consumers research a product or service online before making a buying decision, it is imperative that providers pay close attention to what's said about them and their business online.

Local search has evolved into a diverse research system of available products and services to be marketed and found in any given area, on all kinds of devices including laptops, desktops, tablets, and smartphones. Managing your online reputation is more important than ever, yet many orthodontic practices continue to ignore, struggle, or fail to keep up in a digital world.

## Managing Your Online Brand

There are two key aspects to managing your brand on the Internet: information and reviews.

First and foremost, your business information must be correct and consistent for the search engines to index your brand correctly. That includes business name, phone number, address, website, etc. Think of the Internet as one colossal spreadsheet. Hundreds of different databases are referencing your business 24/7. If your brand is not consistent across the board, then such search engines like Google, and major local databases like Localeze, Citysearch, and Express Update become confused and may reduce your ranking in local search.

Over the past decade, a myriad of review sites and databases have collected business name/address/phone number (NAP) on the Internet. NAP data categorizes every business imaginable, including dentists, orthodontists, and other health care providers.

Consequently, the Internet is inundated with duplicate, outdated, and erroneous business listings. If your practice

by **Mary Kay Miller**

has undergone a name change, buyout, partnership addition, or relocation in the past 5–10 years, chances are there's an issue with your branding. The Internet is "evergreen" and remembers everything. It is your responsibility as a business owner to notify the online world of any business NAP changes.

## Inaccurate Info Can Hurt

Unfortunately there is no centralized online database where you can update information correctly everywhere on the web. Each database and review site has its own system for categorizing businesses, updating edits and changes, and handling reviews. There may be a time in the future when centralization becomes reality, but for now, the process can be tedious and at times... overwhelming.

Depending on how long doctors have been in practice, how many locations are associated with their practice name, and the number of partners and/or business names that have come and gone, there could be tons of inaccurate information throughout the Internet.

It may not be your own doing that the wrong stuff is distributed online. But it is your business to protect your branded reputation. If you are looking for a place to start, visit [www.getlisted.org](http://www.getlisted.org). Enter your business name and zip code to see how your business is represented online.

Keep in mind that the Internet is imperfect by nature and its perfection is a pipe dream. Rather, it's an ongoing process throughout the life of your business. As the Internet grows, so will the increase in online databases, review sites, and all the bugs that follow. Your goal is to stay up to date as best you can.

## Your Goal: Clean Reviews

As the Internet evolves and the strength of consumer

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opinion increases the momentum of social media, your practice is increasingly vulnerable to what others say, right or wrong, in online reviews. A disgruntled employee, an impossible patient, an unethical competitor — even criminal extortionists who post bad reviews and demand a fee to remove them — all can leave a lingering stain on your reputation. When was the last time you Googled your name or branded business name to check reviews? The number of business owners that have no clue what's being said about them online is extraordinary!

No business ever has a credible 100% satisfaction rate. No matter how great your treatment expertise, or the quality of customer service delivered by the team, patients and/or parents are sometimes dissatisfied. We all make mistakes. It is inevitable that, sooner or later, someone will share a less than positive experience online.

At Orthopreneur, doctors and staff often ask us how to remove a bad review. The reality: the only entities that can take down such reviews is the reviewer themselves or the site where they're posted. Since reviews are subjective opinions, review sites rarely take them down. It can take a lot of time and money to remedy a besmirched reputation. So the best approach is to keep it from happening in the first place.

### **Be Proactive Rather Than Reactive**

If you are actively monitoring and managing what is said about you, there is a better chance of controlling the dialogue. If you are in the dark about the comments of others, events can quickly spiral into chaos. I suggest your office take charge, rather than leave it to someone else. Third party review programs and reputation management companies often fall short of the end goal — to build a well-rounded branding of your business, especially with Google.

I find the most successful long-term review programs are managed in-house by the team. And, what worked last year won't necessarily work today. After the latest Google algorithm changes that occurred in August 2013 — the largest change on Google in 12 years — the branded online reputation of your practice, both in local search and on mobile, is directly impacted.

In order to be proactive and not reactive, start with Google and Yelp. These are the currently two most important review sites for local businesses. Also, do a few Google searches to determine which review sites are showing up on the first two pages of search in your area. Results are different for every practice.

Always encourage satisfied patients to leave reviews. However, I recommend holding their hand through the process to build a well-rounded program for optimum success. In the event you receive a less-than-stellar review or are a victim of online extortion, it won't matter as much. If you have an abundance

of reviews across the board and the vast majority of them are positive, you can weather any storm. When was the last time you didn't buy a product on Amazon because there were a few bad reviews in comparison to the positive ones?

It is important to point out that soliciting reviews goes against the guidelines of Google, Yelp, and most review sites. The majority of these sites explicitly state that comments cannot be solicited, and rewards or incentives should not be offered for reviews. Google and Yelp have review filters aimed at identifying fake or solicited reviews. But the filtering algorithms may not be accurate and it can often be frustrating when hard-earned reviews are lost.

### **Tips for Reviews on Google**

- Avoid adding reviews in the office using the same IP address. Google tracks IP addresses and you risk losing those reviews.
- Avoid adding reviews too fast, especially with contests or promotions. Post no more than a few per month, but do so on a consistent basis. Keep in mind, for every 10 patients you ask to write a review from home, on average, only one will comply. Persistence reaps reward and asking personally always trumps an e-mail.
- Avoid duplicating a Google review on another review site or on your website. Duplication of a Google review on the testimonial page of your website is a no-no.

### **Tips for Reviews on Yelp**

- Ask the person reviewing if they are a regular Yelper! Yelp filters reviews from first time Yelpers. Direct them to another review site if they are newbies.
- Like Google, if it looks like you are soliciting, they will filter. Unlike Google, you still can find the reviews within your business listing.
- If it looks like a canned review, whether real or not, they will filter. Yelp acknowledges their filter isn't perfect.
- Like Google, persistence is key.

### **If it Sounds Too Good to Be True**

Be particularly wary of so-called "reputation management" programs that do not accomplish what needs doing. There are many companies out there that offer to take care of your reputation management for a fee. There's a bit of a feeding frenzy by Internet marketers trying to capitalize on this relatively new sector. When evaluating, I recommend against setting up a reputation program and then forgetting about it. All reputation management programs require staff involvement and due diligence to be successful for best ROI.

Rather than stacking 40 reviews on one or two sites, try to get at least 10 reviews across 5-10 different review sites, with Google and Yelp your highest priority. If you have at least ten 4- or

5-star reviews as a cushion, you will maintain a good rating based on averages. Then work on the other sites and return to Google and repeat the process. Don't put all your eggs in one basket. Facebook is now offering a review area but it shouldn't be a high priority until your reputation is managed well first in local search.

Be leery of any service or product that claims to post reviews for you on multiple review sites. New laws are being written to crack down on fake reviews. Before signing up for any online service (for reviews or otherwise), read the fine print and ask questions. Do you actually own your reviews or are they stored on a virtual portal? If you cancel your service, do you lose all reviews accessed from your website?

As the Internet grows and evolves, the priorities of a business owner will likely remain the same. Visibility will always be paramount. Accuracy will always be a close second. Being

proactive is perhaps the easiest effort you can make. Always stay current!

By staying on top of your reputation, you will reap immediate and long-term benefits. Neglect your online presence and you may risk future rewards. ☺

## About the Author

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