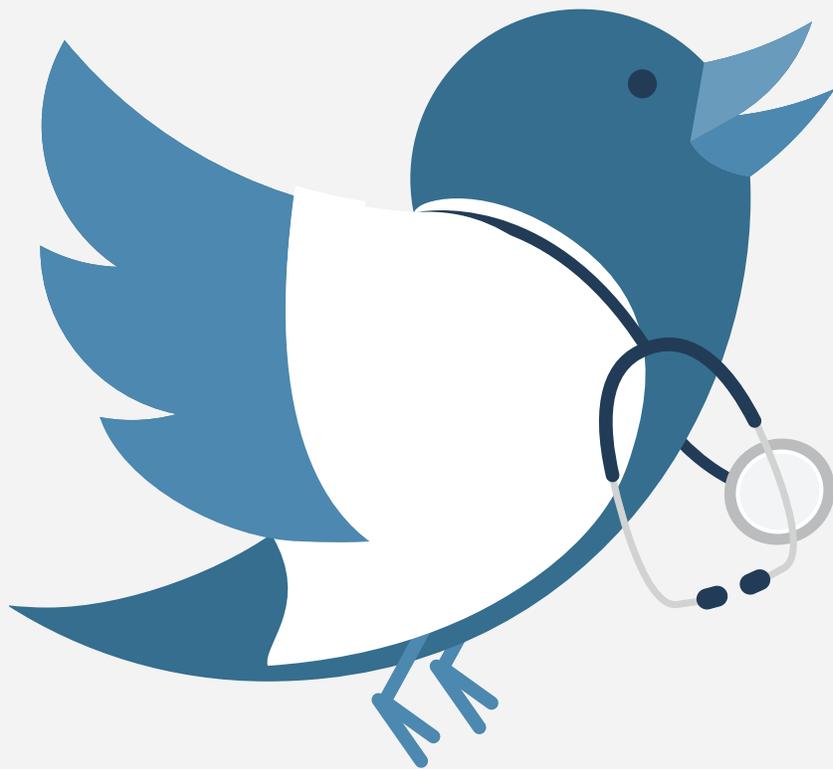


How physicians can harness  
**SOCIAL MEDIA**



## HARNESS THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The web is a powerful tool for physicians, and social media plays an important role in the changing healthcare environment. Seven out of 10 Internet users access health-related information on the web, and patients are increasingly going online to research their doctors. In this era of transparency, it's more important than ever for doctors to proactively manage their online presence—a physician's online reputation is now as vital as a physician's reputation in the community.

LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and other social media channels are transforming the way physicians and patients interact and allowing doctors to share experiences and insights with a vast audience. In addition, physician-rating sites are now giving patients a forum to make their voices heard.

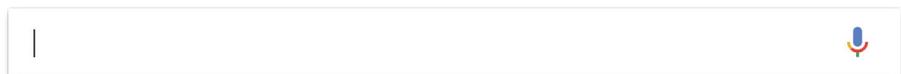
This report will help physicians use social media to increase patient satisfaction, influence the perception of the medical profession, and elevate the quality of health information available online—all while avoiding potential liability risks.

## TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE

Establishing your online presence allows you to engage with patients, grow your reputation, and make your voice heard. If a patient types your name into Google, what are the results? Patients are likely already searching for you online and may be finding outdated practice information or negative reviews on physician-rating sites. That's why it's important for you to take control of your name and presence online. Your online presence may be a patient's first impression of you.

## MONITOR YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

Negative news stories or negative online reviews could be part of your online presence, and you want to know when that happens.



Google your name weekly and read through the results—because that's what patients will see. You can set up automatic monitoring for free with Google Alerts. Go to [google.com/alerts](http://google.com/alerts) and enter your name or your practice's name.



This report is based on the video playlist “How Physicians Can Harness Social Media.” In creating this playlist of 12 videos, The Doctors Company worked with Kevin Pho, MD, founder and editor of [KevinMD.com](http://KevinMD.com). View the videos at [thedoctors.com/socialmedia](http://thedoctors.com/socialmedia).

## BUILD YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

Begin by using physician-rating sites, such as Vitals, Healthgrades, Yelp, and RateMDs. These sites create profile pages for every doctor in the United States with name, contact information, board certification status, and hospital affiliation. These sites will also allow patients to rate you. Profile pages from these sites appear at the top of Google search results, so it's important that you claim your profile and ensure the content is accurate.

Encourage your patients to rate you on these sites, but don't cherry-pick or pressure patients to give you a good rating. Studies show that the majority of online ratings are positive, so by simply asking a large number of patients to rate you, any negative ratings will be diluted and will look like outliers.

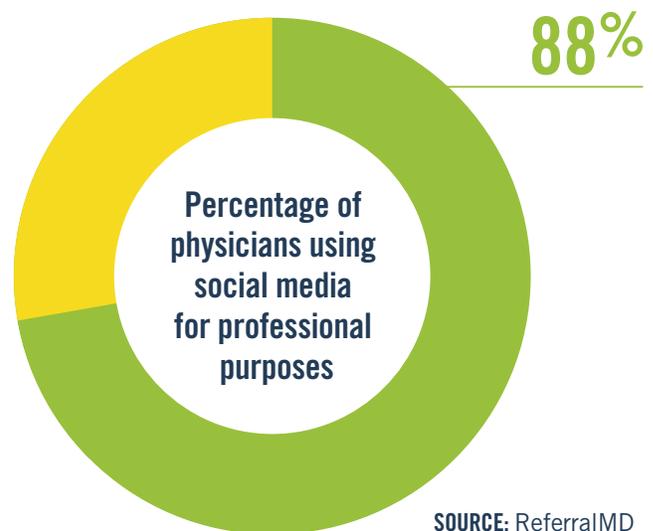
You can then create a profile on a professional networking social media platform, such as LinkedIn and Doximity, SERMO, or Univadis + QuantiaMD. Your profile is basically a digital translation of your resume.

Google My Business is a free service that allows you to feed your business details into Google so that patients see up-to-date information about your practice on the right-hand side of their search. Patients can get driving directions to your practice, your hours of operation, and a phone number they can click to call when using their mobile devices.

If you don't have time or energy to engage on social media sites, you can stop after creating your profiles on LinkedIn and Doximity, SERMO, or Univadis + QuantiaMD, as well as Google My Business, because just those acts alone are tremendously powerful. Your LinkedIn profile will appear toward the top of the list in Google searches.

If you want to engage further, take a step back and ask yourself, "What are my goals for social media?" There are many ways doctors can use social media, such as:

- ▶ Provide reliable medical information to patients or guide them to health websites with accurate information.
- ▶ Connect with colleagues. Following healthcare leaders on social media gives you an easy, quick way to stay up to date on all areas of medicine.
- ▶ Make your voice heard. Many decisions about healthcare are being made by policymakers and politicians with little clinical training. Doctors can use social media to make their voices heard, share stories, and influence the evolving healthcare world.



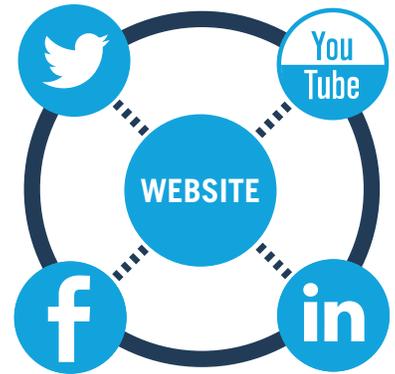
SOURCE: ReferralMD



Studies show that the majority of online ratings are positive, so by simply asking a large number of patients to rate you, any negative ratings will be diluted and will look like outliers.

Work on expanding your presence with a “hub and spoke” strategy. Have a central hub: either a blog or your practice’s website. Do not build your hub on a third-party platform (such as Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter), because that platform could change its design, altering how your content appears. Build the spokes (profiles on sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter) so you can reach your community, patients, and peers—wherever they are consuming information. It’s important to keep your branding (slogan, logo, and headshot) consistent across all of these platforms.

The goal is to own your name and reputation online by dominating the search engine rankings, so that you’re in control of the information patients see when they Google you.



## PROTECT YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

Once you establish an online reputation, you have to protect it—and that means posting thoughtfully and protecting patient privacy. Remember that whatever you post online is considered permanent. For example, blog posts are indexed by search engines like Google and can always be retrieved from the archives. Doctors and nurses have been fired or lost privileges for posting inappropriate content online and for sharing unique cases that allowed readers to identify the patient.

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), the federal privacy law, should be the minimum standard; doctors should aim above that. You should be as professional on the web as you are in the room face-to-face with patients.

You should also be careful when handling online criticism. These tips can help:

- ▶ Listen to the criticism—online reviews are sometimes the only avenue patients have to express their concerns. Read what the patient has to say to see if there is anything in the criticism that your practice can correct.
- ▶ Don’t respond immediately. You may want to “set the record straight,” but online arguments rarely result in anything productive.
- ▶ Take the conversation offline. Have a standard reply thanking the patient for the comment and asking him or her to call your office. Resolve the dispute over the phone or in person. Often, once the issue is resolved, patients will take down their comment or add an addendum that says, “The office listened to what I had to say.”
- ▶ Avoid the courts. There are very few lawsuits where a doctor successfully sues a rating site to take down negative ratings, because that would infringe on patients’ right to free speech. Also, don’t sue patients—that will bring more attention to the criticism.



You should be as professional on the web as you are in the room face-to-face with patients.

## SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FOR DOCTORS

**LinkedIn:** As a leading social networking site for professionals, LinkedIn is a tool for showcasing your expertise, creating and strengthening relationships, and more. LinkedIn delivers almost all of the functionality of Facebook for professional usage, with additional features like forums, recommendations, and endorsements. In addition, you can publish articles on the site, which are then prominently featured on your profile page. This is an ideal way to highlight your expertise on key topics.

[linkedin.com](https://www.linkedin.com)



**YouTube:** The Internet's second-largest search engine is an essential social media channel for sharing videos and creating playlists. You don't have to create your own videos to make the most of YouTube—you can create playlists of videos from trusted third-party publishers, building a helpful library of expert content for those who subscribe to your channel.

[youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)



**Twitter:** With 330 million monthly active users, if Twitter were a country, it'd be the 12th largest in the world. About 500 million tweets are sent every day. This platform is ideal for sharing medical knowledge and updates, participating in online conversations around medical conferences, and building relationships with other doctors and healthcare professionals worldwide.

[twitter.com](https://www.twitter.com)



**Facebook:** A Facebook page gives you access to one of the most established and popular social media platforms—79 percent of Internet users use Facebook. Facebook reaches the greatest number of people and also offers great potential for your posts, infographics, videos, and photos to be shared with other doctors, patients, and the healthcare community.

[facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com)



**Doximity:** The largest private network of physicians in the country, with more than half of all U.S. physicians as members. This platform promotes collaboration across specialties and academic medical centers.

[doximity.com](https://www.doximity.com)

**SERMO:** A social network for fully verified, licensed physicians. The site boasts 800,000 verified U.S. physicians from 96 specialties and subspecialties, representing 40 percent of the American physician community. SERMO's mission is to provide physicians with a safe, private, and trusted platform for free and open discussions about medicine.

[sermo.com](https://www.sermo.com)

**Univadis + QuantiaMD:** One of the largest online medical news and education communities and collaboration platforms. Members share real-life experiences from clinical practices nationwide and engage directly with healthcare institutions to meet a variety of objectives that reduce costs and improve the quality of care.

[univadis.com](https://www.univadis.com)



Visit [thedoctors.com/socialmedia](https://thedoctors.com/socialmedia) for in-depth training on getting started on the four primary social channels.

## READY TO GET STARTED?

We have more tools and expertise to help you get started on social media, expand your online presence, and protect your reputation. At [thedoctors.com/socialmedia](http://thedoctors.com/socialmedia), you'll find a series of short presentations to learn how to get started on each of the four primary social media channels, as well as the basics of running a social media campaign.

## WE'RE TAKING THE MAL OUT OF MALPRACTICE

As the nation's largest physician-owned medical malpractice insurer, we know what keeps you up at night—from the complexities of a changing healthcare environment to the ever-present threat of litigation. We are devoted to supporting the medical profession and partnering with those who provide care. That's malpractice insurance without the mal.

## JOIN THE CONVERSATION ON TWITTER

How do you #advancegoodmedicine?  
Tell us your story and join the movement.



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@doctorscompany

We're thankful for the incredible work doctors do every day and we want to celebrate it. Tell us your story—how do you #advancegoodmedicine?



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