

## 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 Patients are likely already searching for you online and may be finding outdated practice information or negative reviews on physician-rating sites.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 [www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts) and enter your name or your practice's name.

This report is based on the YouTube 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 [www.thedoctors.com/socialmedia](http://www.thedoctors.com/socialmedia).

## BUILD YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

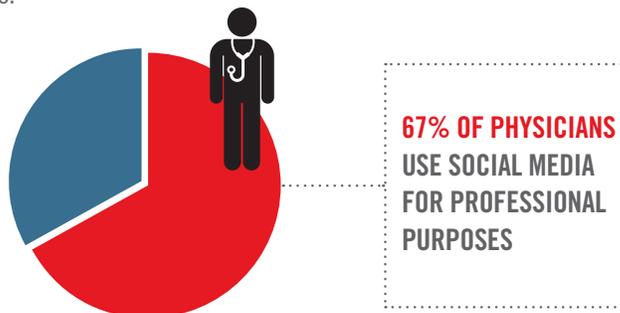
Begin by using physician-rating sites, such as Vitals, HealthGrades, Yelp, and RateMDs. These sites create profile pages for every doctor in the United States with name, contact information, board certification status, and hospital affiliation. These sites will also allow patients to rate you. Profile 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 or Doximity. 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.



SOURCE: QUANTIAMD

If you don't have time or energy to engage on social media sites, you can stop after creating your profiles on LinkedIn or Doximity and Google My Business, because just those acts alone are tremendously powerful. Your LinkedIn profile will get ranked high 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:

1. Provide reliable medical information to patients or guide them to health websites with accurate information.
2. 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.
3. Make your voice heard. Many decisions within healthcare reform 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.

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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 or even disappear, along with your content. 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. The more active you are on social media, the stronger your online presence will be.

## 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:

1. 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.
2. Don’t respond immediately. You may want to “set the record straight,” but online arguments rarely result in anything productive.
3. 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.”
4. 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.

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## 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.

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

**YouTube:** The Internet's second-largest search engine is an essential social media channel for sharing videos and creating playlists of your own videos or those created and posted by others.

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

**Twitter:** With 288 million monthly active users, Twitter is one of the 10 most popular sites on the Internet—and it continues to grow. About 500 million tweets are sent every day. This is a platform for sharing information and building relationships with other doctors and healthcare professionals.

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

**Facebook:** A Facebook page gives you access to one of the most established and popular social media platforms. 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.

[www.facebook.com](http://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.

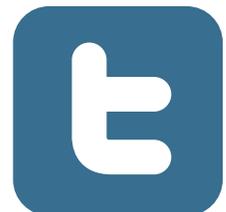
[www.doximity.com](http://www.doximity.com)

**SERMO:** A social network for fully verified, licensed physicians. The site boasts 300,000 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.

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

**QuantiaMD:** One of the largest online physician 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.

[www.quantiamd.com](http://www.quantiamd.com)



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## PHYSICIANS USING SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESSFULLY

Here are five doctors successfully using social media to build their online reputations and engage patients:

**KevinMD.com:** Healthcare’s leading social media voice, with over 1,500 authors—including front-line primary care doctors, surgeons, specialist physicians, nurses, medical students, policy experts, and patients.

[www.kevinmd.com](http://www.kevinmd.com)

**Dr. Val Jones:** Dr. Jones’ Twitter account (@drval) has more than 21,000 followers. She is the founder of Better Health, LLC, a network of healthcare professional bloggers.

[www.twitter.com/drval](http://www.twitter.com/drval)

**Dr. Zubin Damania:** This internal medicine physician in Las Vegas posts rap parody videos that have helped him make a positive impact on public health issues.

[www.zdoggmd.com](http://www.zdoggmd.com)

**Dr. Howard Luks:** Dr. Luks is an orthopedic surgeon in New York who posts blog articles on orthopedic issues he encounters in his practice.

[www.howardluksm.com](http://www.howardluksm.com)

**Dr. Rocco Piazza:** Dr. Piazza of The Piazza Center uses promotional handouts to encourage patients to rate him on physician-rating sites. He’s also active on all social media channels.

[www.thepiazzacenter.com](http://www.thepiazzacenter.com)

## ABOUT THE DOCTORS COMPANY

Founded and led by physicians, The Doctors Company ([www.thedoctors.com](http://www.thedoctors.com)) is relentlessly committed to advancing, protecting, and rewarding the practice of good medicine. The Doctors Company is the nation’s largest physician-owned medical malpractice insurer, with 76,000 members and \$4.5 billion in assets, and is rated A by A.M. Best Company and Fitch Ratings.

The Doctors Company is the medical malpractice insurance industry social media thought leader. For more resources for physicians, visit:

[www.thedoctors.com/socialmedia](http://www.thedoctors.com/socialmedia)

[www.facebook.com/thedoctorscompany](http://www.facebook.com/thedoctorscompany)

[www.twitter.com/doctorscompany](http://www.twitter.com/doctorscompany)

[www.linkedin.com/company/the-doctors-company](http://www.linkedin.com/company/the-doctors-company)

[www.youtube.com/thedoctorscompany](http://www.youtube.com/thedoctorscompany)



REMEMBER, IF YOU  
HAVE QUESTIONS OR NEED  
HELP, CONTACT US AT  
**SOCIAL@THEDOCTORS.COM.**