4 Steps to Building and Managing Your Practice’s Online Reputation
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3353 Michelson Drive, Suite 400, Irvine, CA 92612
(888) 775-2736 • www.kareo.com
Your Online Reputation Matters

Whether you know it or not, you have an online presence.

And it may be growing without any input from you. It’s time to take control of your Internet presence, engage patients online, and manage your reputation.

When you do, you’ll be able to:

- Improve your online reputation
- Ensure that new patients can find you online
- Grow your practice through referrals

Your current and future patients are online, and they are listening to what others have to say. One in five Internet users has consulted online reviews and rankings of healthcare service providers and treatments.

Staying competitive means being online, listening to what people are saying, and engaging in the conversation.

Follow these four steps to successfully build and manage your online presence and reputation:

1. Create a website for your practice
2. Engage with patients on social media
3. Own your online listings, rankings, and reviews
4. Be responsive to comments and reviews

Patients are increasingly looking for healthcare services online, and they expect you to be there and to be actively engaged. More than two-thirds of patients used online search prior to booking an appointment and over 40% of consumers say that information found via social media affects the way they deal with their health. If you’re not there, then you are missing an opportunity to build your business.

This guide describes how to get started and effectively manage your online presence and reputation to grow your practice.
Step 1. Create a Website

It seems so simple to say create a website, but of course, it isn’t simple at all. It is even more difficult for medical practices, which are required to consider regulations and compliance issues. See the companion guide to this one, 5 Simple Steps to Creating a Website Your Patients Will Love, for a more detailed explanation of how to plan and implement your medical practice’s website and patient portal. To get started, here a handful of best practices to consider.

WEBSITE BEST PRACTICES

1. **Select a website vendor that does only medical practice websites.** It’s more affordable than you think, and you’ll get more for your money.

2. **Keep it fresh.** You’ll need a content management system (CMS) so you can make updates and add new content once the site is done. A dynamic website improves search engine optimization (SEO) and is more engaging for patients.

3. **Stay flexible.** Technology is always changing. Make sure that your site can be accessed via today’s mobile devices and can grow with the changing times. Consider mobile services, such as text reminders from a company like Demandforce.

Nearly 60% of Americans own smartphones today, and they are using them to look for healthcare services.
4. **Make it actionable.** Employ tools that enable patients to take action, such as ZocDoc, which allows patients to instantly book an appointment online from your website, 24/7. A patient portal can provide many actionable features and help you stay more connected to patients while also improving their compliance and wellness.

5. **Keep it simple.** Avoid fancy, complicated designs. What patients really want are helpful resources, tools, and information. Make them easy to find with clear navigation.

6. **Market your site.** There is no point in having a website if no one can find it. Market your site via emails to patients, referral sources, and vendors; by adding your URL to all advertising and forms; and by instructing staff and providers to remind patients about your website at every interaction. It takes hearing something new about seven times to sink in, so stay at it.

7. **Once the site is live, expand your online presence.** Your website is the digital storefront for your practice. You can use it to help build a larger online presence, and you can use your online presence in social media, rating and review sites, and other sources to drive traffic to your website. They go hand-in-hand.
Step 2. Engage Patients on Social Media

Social media is not a fad or a fluke. It’s here to stay, and it will continue to grow. Today, 73% of U.S. adults use social networks and the average U.S. consumer spends 15 hours per week on social media channels.

Many healthcare providers are concerned about engaging patients on social channels because they worry about HIPAA and other compliance issues. You can no longer afford to let this fear stand in your way. Apply the same rules for security and privacy, and go for it!

CONTINUE YOUR CONNECTION OUTSIDE OF THE OFFICE

Think of social media as an opportunity to connect with your patients outside of office hours—41% of people surveyed say social media affects their choice of a doctor. Focus on the sites that get the most engagement from your target audience—Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.

- Use social media sites to help establish and promote your brand. Be consistent across your website and social channels with your look and feel.
- Once you create your pages, send out an email to your patients encouraging them to “like” and “follow” you on Facebook and Twitter. You can also put links to your Facebook and Twitter pages on your website, business cards, and in your email signature. Encourage your staff to “like” and “follow” your practice and share content.
- Build your presence by liking and following influencers in your community and groups that relate to your specialty (e.g., local cancer support groups if you are an oncologist).
- Post regularly and provide useful, informative, and actionable content for patients. Having a blog on your website (or other dynamic content) can make this easier. Including tools on your social media sites that allow people to do things like request an appointment and write or view reviews is also a great way to engage people.
- Interact with your social media followers. Reply to their comments and like their posts. If someone brings up personal health information, take it offline as quickly as possible.
- Make your posts both professional and social—patients want to be able to connect on a personal level with your practice, so don’t be afraid to share accomplishments of staff members or pictures from around the office. But also don’t forget that as a doctor, you are a trusted source of information for your patients. Keep it professional!
Step 3. Own Your Online Listings

Keeping track of your practice’s online reputation gives you the knowledge and the power to celebrate the good, clear up any misunderstandings, and fix the bad.

Many practices aren’t aware that they have online listings on physician search and rating sites. These sites use the physician blue book and other sources to populate their pages. Most will allow you to own your information and make updates. Some offer more advanced features, such as online ads, for a fee. In addition, there are sites that provide helpful tools like text reminders and 24/7 online scheduling, and offer patients the opportunity to find a provider or leave a review.

MANAGE YOUR ONLINE LISTINGS

Find and own every listing that you can. You want all the information about your practice and providers to be as accurate and up to date as possible. And, you want to be able to add your website and social pages if you can. Some sites require the physician to approve changes and may even ask for an NPI to verify the physician is really signing off on the changes.

HOW: The best way to find all the sites where you are is listed is to conduct Google searches several times over the course of two to four weeks. Create a spreadsheet to track the sites, links, what information is available, and current reviews or rankings. Repeat the process to find them all. Once you’ve collected them all, go to each one and follow the instructions to confirm the listing information or make any changes.

Don’t forget about payer directories, medical societies, and patient communities. You might already have listings that should be updated or you may want to add one. If you are a rheumatologist, for example, consider listing your practice on local, regional, and national resources for patients with rheumatoid arthritis.

WHY: Accurate listings, particularly prominent ones like those in Google Places, help improve your ranking on search engines, which, in turn, raises your placement in online searches. In this way, taking ownership of your listings is about more than accuracy, it’s about visibility and credibility.

Provider-to-Provider Social Networking

Networking is an important part of medicine, and online platforms provide new ways for healthcare providers to connect. Web and mobile applications help bring professional networking in healthcare into the 21st century—physicians and other clinicians can now reach out to each other and communicate with the click of a mouse. Some companies, like Doximity, make these tools HIPAA compliant, which is essential for the transmission of patient information. As healthcare strives to increase efficiency and reduce costs, online applications make provider-to-provider outreach easy and affordable.
Step 4. Be Responsive

Nearly 90% of consumers research a company online before making the decision to do business with them, and according to Nielsen’s 2011 Global Trust in Advertising Survey, 70% of global consumers trust online reviews, making them the second-most trusted form of advertising. But only 3–4% of Internet users have posted their experiences with healthcare service providers or treatments.

A small number of people may be influencing what others think of you. Become part of this conversation.

Whether it is a comment on your own social media page or on a third-party site, there are three things you need to do to effectively manage your online reputation:

1. Stay aware of online reviews.
2. Respond to reviews and ratings whenever you can—good and bad.
3. Encourage your patients to post reviews.

Once you own all those listings, regularly check back for new reviews or ratings. It’s important to know what people think of you. Keep track of what they say in a spreadsheet and share the reviews at regular staff meetings so everyone else is aware, too. Use meetings to both talk about any problems and celebrate your successes and good work.
HOW TO RESPOND—FOR BETTER OR WORSE

It’s important to respond to what people have to say. A simple thank you for a positive review is enough. But if the review is negative, consider these options:

1. It’s a general complaint or constructive criticism about a process or procedure in the practice:
   a. If it is a simple fix, do it and respond to the review by saying something like, “thank for letting us know about this problem, we value our patients’ feedback. We have addressed it in [XX] ways. We hope you’ll give us a chance to show you what we’ve done.”
   b. If it is more complex, simply say, “thank you for letting us know. We are looking at how we can address this issue.” If you are able to make changes, let them know.

2. Someone is angry because of a legitimately bad experience. Respond quickly, apologize, keep the lines of communication open and offer to talk more about how to fix it and avoid having it happen again.

3. If it is inaccurate or inflammatory, many sites will allow you to appeal the review. If it is found to be inappropriate or unsubstantiated, you may be able to get it removed.

Encourage your patients to post reviews on sites like Demandforce and ZocDoc, which list only verified patient reviews making them more representative and trustworthy than other review sites. More often than not, your patients have great things to say about you, they just need a reminder to do so. And their feedback can improve your overall ratings. For example, a practice with one negative review and three positives listed on a medical review site will receive a 66% recommendation score, while a practice with one negative and nine positives gets a 90% recommendation score. That’s a big difference, and it’s just because there are six more patient reviews posted for the second practice.

Encouraging your patients to write reviews protects your practice’s overall review score.

Negative Reviews Aren’t All Bad

A ZocDoc study found that patients are willing to book appointments with doctors who have received some negative reviews—as long as their reviews aren’t overwhelmingly negative.

It is not until a physician’s overall rating falls to 2.5 stars out of five that patient preference for that provider significantly declines. In fact, of the 10 percent of doctors who receive the most appointments through ZocDoc, about 75 percent have at least one negative review.
Also from Kareo

Explore more of Kareo's brief, informative guides by visiting www.kareo.com/resources.

- Meaningful Use: A Small Practice Guide (April 2014)
- EHR Implementation: A Small Practice Guide (July 2013)
- Selecting the Right EHR for Your Practice: A Guide for Small Practices (June 2013)
- HIMSS 2013: A Small Practice Point of View (April 2013)
- To Hire or Not to Hire a Billing Service: How to Make the Right Choice for your Practice (February 2013)
- Engage! 10 Powerful Ways to Engage Patients in Every Aspect of Your Practice (January 2014)
- 5 Simple Steps to Creating a Website Your Patients Will Love (May 2014)

Watch for more coming soon!
**Contributors**

**Jessica Aptman**
Jessica Aptman, director of communications at ZocDoc, has been with the company for more than two years. Her work focuses on reaching new audiences, as well as keeping ZocDoc's existing patients and doctors informed, connected, and engaged. Prior to joining ZocDoc, Jessica represented a broad range of consumer technology products and services including Amazon Kindle, TurboTax, and Jawbone. She brings her consumer-focused expertise and approach to ZocDoc, applying best practices garnered through her work across other leading consumer industries to her work in the healthcare space. [Follow ZocDoc on Twitter](https://twitter.com)

**Kacey Burr**
Kacey Burr, channel marketing associate, has been a part of the Demandforce marketing team for more than two years. She manages corporate partnership relations, advertising, content creation, and industry events, and specializes in optimizing the Demandforce marketing and communications product for medical practices across health industries. [Follow Demandforce on Twitter](https://twitter.com)

**Lea Chatham**
Lea Chatham is the content marketing manager at Kareo, responsible for developing educational resources to help small medical practices improve their businesses. She joined Kareo after working at a small integrated health system for more than five years developing marketing and educational tools and events for patients. Prior to that, Lea was a marketing coordinator for Medical Manager Health Systems, WebMD Practice Services, Emden, and Sage Software. She specializes in simplifying information about healthcare and healthcare technology for physicians, practice staff, and patients. [Follow Lea on Twitter](https://twitter.com)
DEMANDFORCE

Demandforce is a leading online marketing and communication software service from Intuit, Inc. (Nasdaq:INTU), that helps local businesses thrive in the Internet economy via email communications, text messaging and online services. Demandforce combines an award-winning communication platform with best-in-class reputation and networking tools for a web-based application that seamlessly integrates with existing workflow systems to help businesses build strong online reputations and leverage local network marketing. Since 2003, Demandforce has collected more than four million online consumer reviews, and has generated more than $3 billion dollars for its clients. Through the Demandforce Network, its end clients are connected to more than 45 million local consumers. For more information, visit www.demandforce.com

KAREO

Kareo is the only cloud-based medical office software and services platform purpose-built for small practices. At Kareo, we believe that, with the right tools and support, small practices can do big things. We offer an integrated solution of products and services designed to help physicians get paid faster, run their business smarter, and provide better care. Our practice management software, billing services, and free, award-winning fully certified EHR help more than 20,000 medical providers more efficiently manage the business and clinical sides of their practice. Kareo has received extensive industry recognition, including the Deloitte Technology Fast 500, Inc. 500/5000, Forbes Top 100 Most Promising Companies, and Black Book #1 Integrated EHR, Practice Management and Billing Vendor. Headquartered in Irvine, California, the Kareo mission is to help providers spend their time focused on patients, not paperwork. For more information, visit www.kareo.com

ZOCDOC

More than four million patients use ZocDoc each month to find a nearby doctor or dentist and instantly book an appointment online. By revealing the ‘hidden supply’ of appointments, ZocDoc helps patients receive faster access to care and optimizes doctors’ schedules. With ZocDoc Check-in, patients complete paperwork online prior to their appointments, and physicians receive more complete and accurate patient information. ZocDoc has raised $95 million in investments to date, is available in more than 1,900 cities, and covers 40 percent of the US population. ZocDoc is free for patients via ZocDoc.com and the ZocDoc app for iPhone and Android. A Spanish-language version, ZocDoc en Español, is also available for iPhone and Android.