

Your Online Identity

Whether you realize it or not, as a licensed health care professional in the United States your name is already online. Websites like healthgrades.com and US News have your information publically available. Sometimes this information is limited to only your name and location. Sometimes they list office numbers, office addresses, and ratings. This information can be provided by commercially available databases, your existing consumers, or anyone who has access to your information more locally. Information on these websites can be incorrect or out of date.

When these ratings are created for you by outside sources or potentially even disgruntled consumers, you deny yourself the true benefits of having an online presence.

In order to put your best face forward online, it is vital that you claim your online profiles and keep them updated. There is a short list of recommended sites on which you should search yourself and claim your profile later in the next section.

Claiming Your Online Identity:

For most websites, there is an easy locate option for providers to claim their profile. The options usually say something like, "Are you Dr. Bashar? Click to claim your profile." Check the headers and footers of the page for these links, and if you cannot find it, use the site's "Contact Us" feature to inquire about claiming your profile.

As previously stated, claiming one's profile is fairly easy. The trick is finding all of your online profiles. Start by googling your name, then do it again with your credentials, then again with your specialties. If you have a common name, you may have to click through several pages of Google results. The more time you spend on this process, the more likely it is that you will find the majority of places where you are listed. Once you have put in the time for the first round of identity claiming, you will not have to spend that much time again.

Keep a list of all the websites where you have an online profile so you can make updates if your office locations, service hours, or contact information changes. Review the short list of popular online doctor profiling services in the next section to get you started.

Do a thorough search for new profiles and reviews with a Google search every 4-6 months. You can set calendar updates in Outlook or Gmail to remind you to do this.

Popular Online Profiling Sites

1. **Healthgrades**
Claim your profile on the top right <http://www.healthgrades.com/>
2. **Vitals**
Claim your profile on the doctors' side <https://my.vitals.com/>
3. **RateMDs**
Go to your listing page. Near the top of the page is your profile information, and just below it is a button labeled, "Update Doctor's Listing." Click this button and then submit what needs to be changed. If you do not see your name listed and do not have an online profile, you can click to "Add a NEW Doctor," and then register yourself as a new physician. <http://www.ratemds.com/>
4. **Google+**
Search for yourself on Google+. Double check the location if you have a popular name to make sure it is the right profile. Once you have clicked on your profile there is a "Is this your business?" prompt on the lower middle of the page. <https://plus.google.com>
5. **Psychology Today**
Claim your profile on the top right
http://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/?utm_source=PT_Psych_Today&utm_medium=House_Link&utm_campaign=PT_TopNav_Find_TherapistA
Note* Psychology today costs \$30 per month to be listed unless you have a promotional offer from them (which I hear are quite common). It's a great asset if you choose to purchase this membership but is by no means mandatory. If you're already on this list, great!
6. **Yelp**
Similar to Google+, start by searching for yourself. If you find your profile, scroll to the bottom of the page and click on the "Is this your business?" prompt. If you cannot find yourself on the list of search results, scroll to the bottom and click on the "Not here? Add a business" prompt. www.yelp.com

Filling in Your Online Profiles

Correcting Outdated and Incorrect Information

Review the information already presented on your newly claimed online profiles. Make sure the following things are all listed correctly (if applicable):

1. A link to your Inpathy profile
2. The hours you offer services
3. Your current contact information (phone, email, office address)
4. Your academic history (schools, hospitals, years attended)
5. Your specialties
6. Your credentials and training

Using Online Profiles to Tell Your Story

Free online profiles provide a unique opportunity to promote your business, your reputation, and your thought leadership. Take the time to make these profiles as robust as you can. Share your story, your mission, and your personality. A good way to go about this is to create a master document with your story and brand well outlined. Think of this document as an extension of your CV.

Keep a live copy of your 'About Me' as well as any more in-depth descriptions of your professional experience you think you may need. You can use this content to fill out the 'about' sections of any online profiling platform (LinkedIn, Google+, Facebook, Psychology Today, etc.) as well as for 'about the author' sections of publications or presentations you may do.

From your personal mission statement to the reason you chose your specialties you can keep well-organized, well-written biographical information on hand in a Microsoft Word document as you work through the most popular online profiles.

Your 'About Me' should cover most or all of the following things:

1. Your experience and expertise
2. Your online practice via Inpathy
3. Your specialties and service capabilities
4. Your leadership in your field
5. Years in practice
6. Education
7. Awards/recognition
8. Objective as a provider
9. Areas where you would like to grow professionally and personally
10. Your favorite parts of being a provider
11. Causes you believe in that pertain to your profession

Ratings

Many online profile sites also have ratings. All services, from airlines to restaurants, to hospital systems, can be rated somewhere online. While it is true that your ratings may not be a good reflection of how you see yourself professionally, you must not disregard them. Your professional development depends on consumers making well-informed choices in their health care. When people can see who you are through your online presence, they can make a more informed decision about seeking your services.

How Consumers Use Online Rating Sites

There have been studies done to assess the value of online rating sites. Findings indicate that most providers do not have any reviews on their public profiles. Those who do are likely to have more positive reviews than negative ones. Most consumers do not post to doctor rating sites, but their use of these sites for their own reference is increasing.

Consumers and caregivers of consumers with chronic conditions are more likely to use online doctor review sites (Pho, MD & Gay, 2013). While most people do not use provider rating sites as their sole means of choosing a provider, some studies report as many as 80% of healthcare consumers do take them into consideration (Pho, MD & Gay, 2013).

You can reference these articles for a more in-depth discussion of how these sites are used by consumers:

- How Patients Use Online Reviews <http://www.softwareadvice.com/medical/industryview/how-patients-use-online-reviews/>
- Using Doctor Rating Sites <http://www.webmd.com/health-insurance/insurance-basics/using-doctor-ratings-sites>

How Ratings Affect Your Practice

Rating scales vary widely between sites. Some allow anonymous commenting while others require consumers to submit their names. Rating sites are by no means the sole definition of your success or failure as an online brand, but they are a useful tool for analyzing the way you present yourself online and in service.

If you notice a lot of bad reviews about one issue in particular, it may be a good idea to consider taking that critique seriously. For the most part, a few bad ratings on one site will not do too much harm to your potential client building or thought leadership development, but consumers airing real grievances should be taken seriously.

A Note on Consumers' Use of Reviews: Even though the majority of consumers do not make choices based solely on online reviews, many do use online reviews in tandem with social media presence, blog posts, and other forms of name recognition around the internet to guide those choices. The Pew Internet and American Life Project found that 40% of consumers report being influenced by social media in their choice of a specific doctor. Thus, physicians who have positive reviews and good online presence will come out ahead in the consumer-recruitment game. In fact, consumers are more likely to be willing to go out of network for a healthcare provider if that doctor's reviews are higher than those of an in-network provider (Softwareadvice.com).

Fixing Online Ratings

There is not an easy way to fix online ratings. Some websites, like Yelp, have features built in to prevent serial bad reviewers from participating in the site. Others, like Rate MDs, require negative reviews to be based on personal outcome and/or customer service related issues.

The simplest way to improve bad ratings is to provide information that combats them. If consumers see you take your online presence seriously and are able to understand who you are as a provider from your online profiles, they will put less stock in what the reviewers say.

If you come across reviews that verge on or clearly violate defamation and libel laws, contact the site's administration and let them know. This is usually in the Contact Us portion of the website which can often be found at the very top or very bottom of website pages.

It is best to avoid leaving yourself rave reviews or having family and friends create reviews on your behalf. However, you can respectfully ask consumers to write reviews of your services. You can use automated email services to send a message to your consumers asking them to review your services on a certain website along with specific instructions. Many of these services allow you to customize your messaging to include your consumers' name in the messaging as well.

Template Request for an Online Review

Provider Name
Provider email

Dear Jamie,

I hope you have received satisfying care working with me.
Right now, I am trying to raise online visibility of my practice and would like to request you to write a short review of your experience.

You can write a review at Google by following these steps:

1. Please go to <http://maps.google.com>
2. Search for "Linda Thompson, PhD in Omaha, Nebraska"
3. Click on "more info"
4. Click on the "Write a review" link

I sincerely appreciate your assistance.

-Linda Thompson, PhD

Responding to Reviews

If you come across a particularly upsetting review or comment (that does not break libel or slander laws) on an online review site, you may wish to respond. Not all review sites allow providers to publically respond to reviews, however. Negative reviews are still a piece of your reputation and when you can, you should aim to correct any negative press from both a branding perspective and a customer service perspective.

If you do choose to respond, be courteous and reassuring. Most negative reviews relate to nonclinical aspects of the practice (Pho, MD & Gay, 2013). If this is the case, respond generally to the addressed concerns without so much as a hint of identifying who the reviewer is. You do not have to respond to these types of complaints, but if you believe you can do something to address the concern, speak up.

If the complaint is centered on clinical issues like bedside manner or issues of clinical judgment, do not respond publically. The risk for personal health information of the consumer becoming clear is too high. You can reply privately to patient reviews on some sites. Yelp, for instance, allows business owners to reply directly to their reviewers. However, if you are able to identify the concerned consumer's identity, sending a note to call the office to further address the concern is appropriate (Pho, MD & Gay, 2013).

The benefit to responding to negative comments and reviews is that you can increase your chances of retaining clientele while simultaneously showing consumers reading the reviews/comments that you care about the quality of your service and your consumers' experiences.