

# How to Diagnose and Treat Your Online Reviews



As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, personal and professional relationships are changing through social media tools and platforms. A “Happy Birthday” message no longer necessarily means someone was thinking of you. It might just as easily mean that he or she was on FaceBook that day and was reminded of your birthday through “wall posts.”

The same way social media has created cultural changes in personal relationships (good or bad), it is now influencing professional relationships. This has created “culture shock” for many businesses and business owners, most notably for healthcare practices and physicians.

One reason for this culture shock is that few people know how to act and react toward social media relationships, especially when it comes to dealing with online reviews. Online reviews have become a major concern for many healthcare practices. Patients are writing reviews about physicians and practices more than ever. And the number of platforms to facilitate these reviews is growing rapidly. Review websites such as [www.HealthGrades.com](http://www.HealthGrades.com) and [www.Vitals.com](http://www.Vitals.com) are among the ones with the highest visits and traffic.

So, who cares about online reviews? They are just words on websites that few people read, right? Wrong! These reviews are quickly becoming the major factor affecting the decision-making process of any patient who visits your practice.



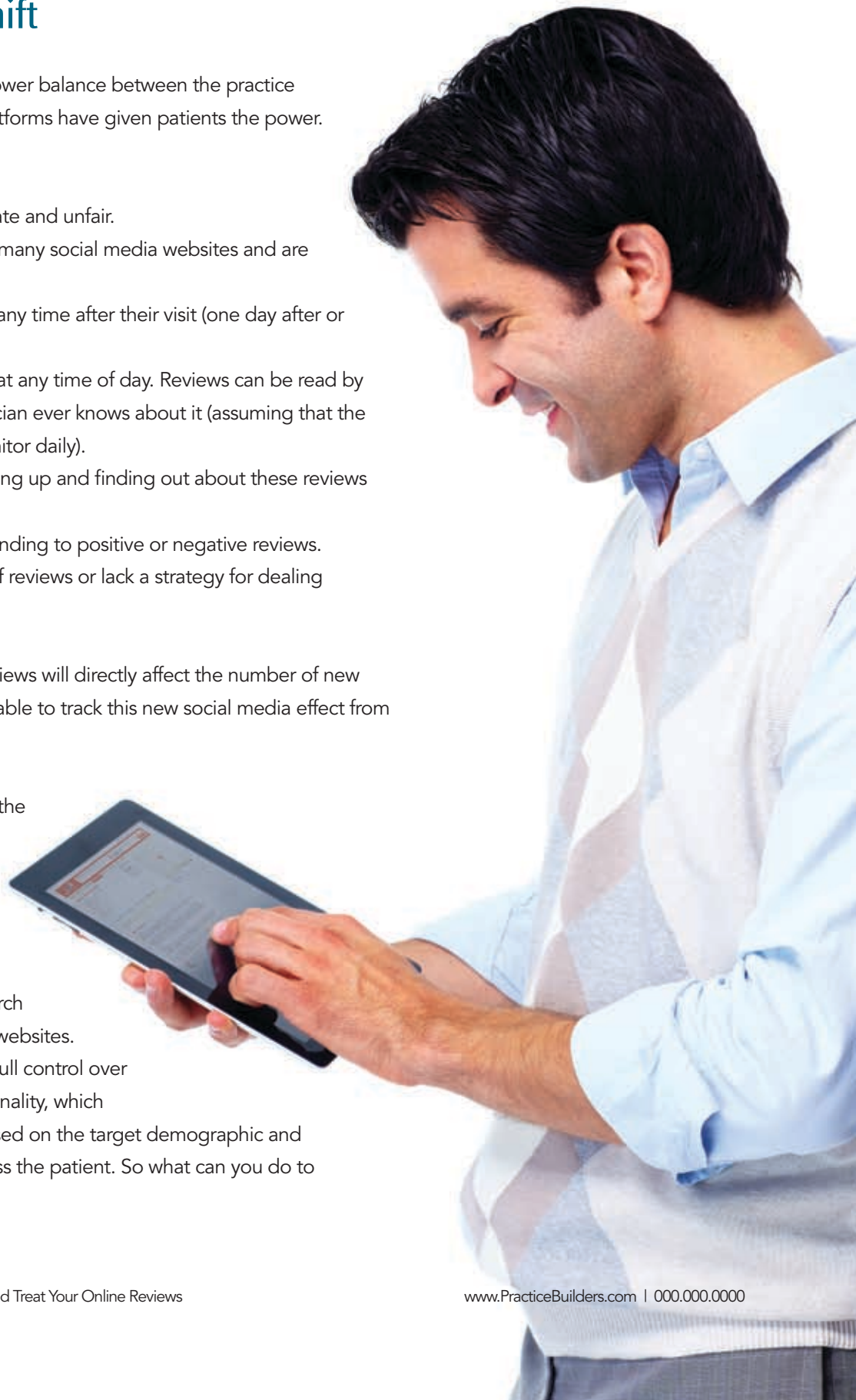
## A seismic power shift

Online reviews are shifting the power balance between the practice and the patient. Social media platforms have given patients the power. Consider these factors:

- Patient reviews can be inaccurate and unfair.
- Patient reviews can appear on many social media websites and are difficult to track and monitor.
- Patients can review physicians any time after their visit (one day after or one year after).
- Patients can review physicians at any time of day. Reviews can be read by many people before the physician ever knows about it (assuming that the physician has a process to monitor daily).
- Physicians have difficulty catching up and finding out about these reviews (let alone responding to them).
- Physicians have difficulty responding to positive or negative reviews.
- Physicians are often unaware of reviews or lack a strategy for dealing with them.

Last but not least: Your online reviews will directly affect the number of new patients you will see. You will be able to track this new social media effect from 2012 onward.

More and more patients look up the physician's or practice's name on the web before making the first visit (even if they were referred by a friend!). The search results typically include the doctor's website (with proper search engine optimization) and review websites. The good news is that you have full control over your website's design and functionality, which obviously should be branded based on the target demographic and have certain functions that impress the patient. So what can you do to manage review websites?



For the sake of simplification, use the process below as a basic guide:

## Step #1 (even before receiving a review)

- Make sure your website includes best practices and reflects your brand and identity.
- Be proactive in setting up your own “basic” social media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. The advantage of doing so is that you will have full control over these platforms. With full control, you will be notified as soon as any review/comment is posted and you will also be able to delete any wall posts on your Facebook page. The above-mentioned basic social media platforms will appear on search results for your name and you are in control.
- Use best practices and a proper strategy to set up your social media accounts. Best practices include proper branding to represent your practice, creating geo-targeted followers on Twitter, incentivizing visitors to “like” and “share” your Facebook page, etc.
- Be proactive in setting up your own “secondary” social media accounts such as Yelp, Google Reviews and HealthGrades.com. Although you will not be able to delete the comments/reviews on these pages, you will have the opportunity to complete your profile and include your contact info, office images, branding, specialties, offers, etc. In other words, leave nothing to the imagination of online visitors who might be misled by an inaccurate review.
- Monitor your accounts for any new activity (some can be automated to receive alerts through email).



## After you receive a review:

### Is the review “positive”?

- Thank the reviewer: If the reviewer is not anonymous, it is good public relations to contact them and thank them for their kind words. If the reviewer is anonymous, thank them by responding to the review directly on the social media platform.
- Ask for a referral: The “Thank-You Call” is a great opportunity to ask for a referral.
- Use marketing messages as testimonials: During the “Thank-You Call,” ask permission to use the patient’s review as a testimonial in your marketing efforts. The testimonial can be a great addition to your print advertising as well as your website content.
- Invite a video testimonial: If you are planning to enhance your website with a video or add video to your YouTube channel, this is a great opportunity to ask the patient on the “Thank-You Call” if he/she might be interested in doing a video testimonial about his/her experience at your practice.
- Focus on the positive: Focus on what made the patient happy (e.g. diagnosis, waiting time, staff, bedside manner, etc.). Consider incentivizing those who helped create that positive experience at your practice.

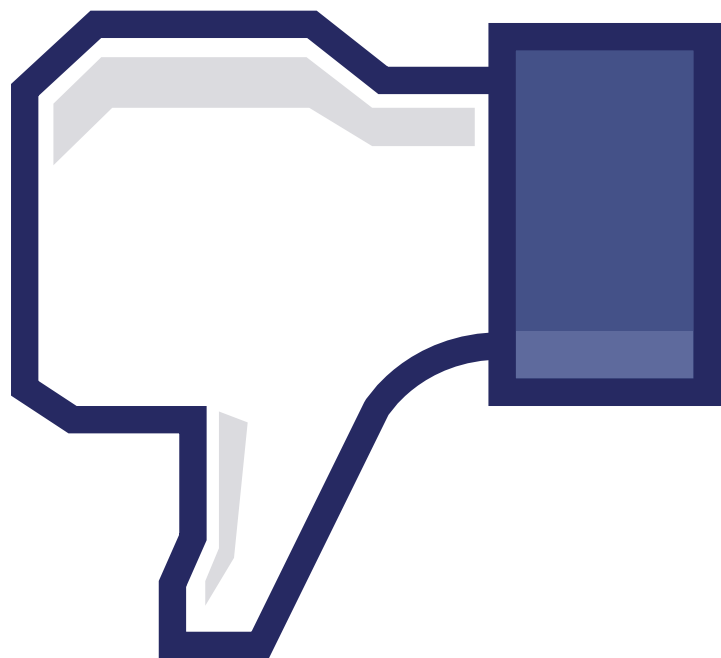


## Is the review “negative”?

*If the “negative” review is correct and accurate:*

- Analyze and improve services: Read the review more than once, analyze it without getting emotional and consider what went wrong with that specific patient. Answer these questions: Does this happen all the time? Why did it happen? How can I fix it? This is the time to learn from mistakes.
- Contact the patient (if not anonymous): Someone from the practice should contact the patient and check if there is any way to make it right for him/her. If he/she then turns into a happy patient, you can request that they delete the negative review.
- Private message if anonymous: Many review websites have the functionality to send a private message to the reviewer. If the reviewer is anonymous, it is best to send a private message, explain the situation and promise that you will make it right. Ask the reviewer to contact you.
- Comment on the review: If the patient was not reachable (or was anonymous and did not respond), take the high road, accept any fault and explain the situation along with steps that have been taken to improve the situation. Do not get into any discussions or arguments with the patient. It will not reflect well on you and it will be open for everyone to read.
- Appreciate the knowledge: You are always better off knowing. Now that you know what might not be working well in your practice, you have the opportunity to correct it and achieve happier patients and more referrals.

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*If the “negative” review is incorrect and inaccurate:*

- Think again: Is the review really incorrect and unjust? It is usually difficult to hear and accept negative reviews, especially if we are not used to hearing feedback through social media platforms.
- Contact the patient (if not anonymous): Find out what has bothered him/her. Maybe it was a miscommunication or a misunderstanding that can be easily resolved. Explain your side of the story and politely ask the patient to remove the post.
- Private message if anonymous and explain.
- “Flag”: Most review websites give you the ability to flag a review as inappropriate or inaccurate. In doing so, you should explain in detail why you think the review is inaccurate and should be removed. Some review websites remove poor reviews based on sound reasoning.
- Comment on the review and explain your side of the story: Be respectful. Your comment will be open for everyone to see. You don’t want to paint your image as being argumentative and unappreciative of patient feedback.
- Take legal action: If none of the above tactics work, you can take legal action to make sure the review is removed. There are some companies that can represent you, but it will likely be time-consuming and expensive. It is much easier to resolve a negative review through the above-mentioned steps.

Remember, “Knowledge is power.” You now have the chance to know more about your practice than you ever did before. The downside is that your patients will also have the same knowledge. Change this downside to an upside! In the brave new world of social media, we need to change our mind-set and practice operations accordingly.



If you are not proactive in monitoring and managing your reviews, you will lose the game. Your profiles will automatically be created on sites such as Yelp and HealthGrades. And no matter how good your care is, you will likely end up getting a few bad reviews over time. So be prepared.

Starting today, you would be wise to launch a beautiful website, start setting up your basic social media platforms with best practices, maintain them properly and be proactive in gaining enough positive reviews to outweigh any negative ones. Now is the time to improve your operations and services. Improve your staff through regular training. Improve the look and feel of your practice's reception area for a better patient experience... and then improve everything else. Everything about your practice will be visible to everyone through the power of social media.

Last but not least, read your reviews regularly to know the positives and negatives of your practice through your patients' eyes. Don't let a social media website visitor know more about your practice than you do yourself.

To learn more about today's social media for healthcare practitioners and about monitoring and managing your online reviews and reputation, call Practice Builders at 800.679.1200.



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