



Surgeon specialist branding or what do surgeon specialists need to know about their brand

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ABSTRACT

As the world has widely adapted the principle of searching for relevant information online, many practicing physicians, especially those who are involved in specialty - must pay a close attention to their brand and their reputation on the World Wide Web. There are numerous web pages available to the general public about particular physician and where he/she practices. Most of those pages are either managed by a third-party company or created for promotional use. Some physicians are not even aware of this and are found by surprise when their patients bring up the information, they found on them online. Physician's name is a brand that he or she carries throughout entire medical career, and it might make or break the legacy of academic or private physician on the long run.

INTRODUCTION

The modern physician leadership skills have tremendously shifted from academia to patient advocacy within the hospital walls. Nowadays, modern physician leaders, particularly surgeon specialists are required to have a proper information about their brand online, if they want to actively engage in the patient advocacy, improvement of medical techniques, drive better brand awareness about their practice or ultimately raise a better return on investment for their department.

By owning and optimizing physician's brand image online, physician showcases his/her professionalism exactly the same way, as it would be presented in the real world. A first impression is an exact trademark - how patients as well as colleagues are going to perceive a particular physician, whether it's online or in-person.

METHOD

This research publication demonstrated the latest techniques and practices that available for surgeon specialists to implement on their

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behalf - in order to improve their branding or reputation online. The strategy employed in this paper is widely used by marketing professionals and could be applied to any surgical subspecialty to improve physician's brand awareness and recognition.

Basic online search

A very first step in identifying your presence online is to perform a simple online search. By searching your name in any popular search engines such as Google, Bing or Yahoo will bring the results associated with your name. By doing so, a physician can see what comes up, what hospitals or educational institutions he or she is associated with, physician ratings and comments, social media profiles etc.

This is a very important first step that any physician should take in order to see where he/she stands online, as this helps to understand where the work needs to be done and how to improve or make it better. During a quantitative online research of specialist's name, it's advisable to make priority notes on troubling websites and negative reviews that come up on the first 3 pages of search engines. The theory strongly suggests performing a search for up to 3 pages, as less than 10% of people online go beyond 3rd page of Google [1]. By creating notes on troubling websites first, a doctor creates a visual picture where he/she needs to do some work. As a rule of thumb, most of the troubling websites where most of the physicians find surprising ratings are on physician rating websites such as Google Business, Yelp, RateMDs, Vitals, HealthGrades, Facebook, ZocDoc, CareDash, Angie's List and more. When we surveyed surgeon specialists whether they were aware of their online reputation score on the rating websites, most of them didn't even know that their name was associated or mentioned there. That's why this very first step of identifying your online weakness, is a crucial step in your journey on better branding in general.

The next step after identifying your brand vulnerabilities online is to make notes on the websites that provide accurate and positive information about doctor's name. There will be information that is most likely associated with your residency ties, medical school or current/past employment webpages. If these pages still show up on the first three pages of search engine, it's a good indicator of brand awareness online.

Name/brand ownership

Once the troubled as well as properly informative websites were noted, it's time to visit those website and understand who owns these websites, what comments prevails there and how you can get a full ownership of the given information. It was interestingly noted, that some websites incorrectly identify physician's specialty and association with the hospital. Those misinforming websites should be contacted directly for correction or reported for misleading information. What every physician needs to understand is, that if his or her information is found online and they do not own it, then somebody else does. If this situation persists and it's not corrected right the way, it can potentially ruin physician's reputation, as random negative content could be fed directly to the search engines on daily basis. That's why it's very crucial to own your personal information online.

Dealing with incorrect information and negative reviews

Once the list of good and bad websites is established, a physician should proactively engage with the bad ones first. Generally, every legitimate website should have a "contact us" page where any technical errors could be addressed. This is where you need to email or sometimes-even call to get your information corrected. Once it's done, the next step will be addressing negative reviews.

To address negative reviews, a physician should clearly understand why a negative review occurred. On some review websites such as Yelp, a doctor can message a reviewer directly about given feedback online, in order to smooth the situation and potentially turn a negative review into a positive. However, there are some situations, where you get no response from the user at all. In this case, it's advisable to leave a public reply/feedback with thorough explanation why the misunderstanding has occurred. This way a professionalism and constructive criticism should be taken into consideration before leaving a public comment. Being professional in person and online is an essential tool for any respected physician of the modern world, this is where a parallel between virtual and real world crosses the path.

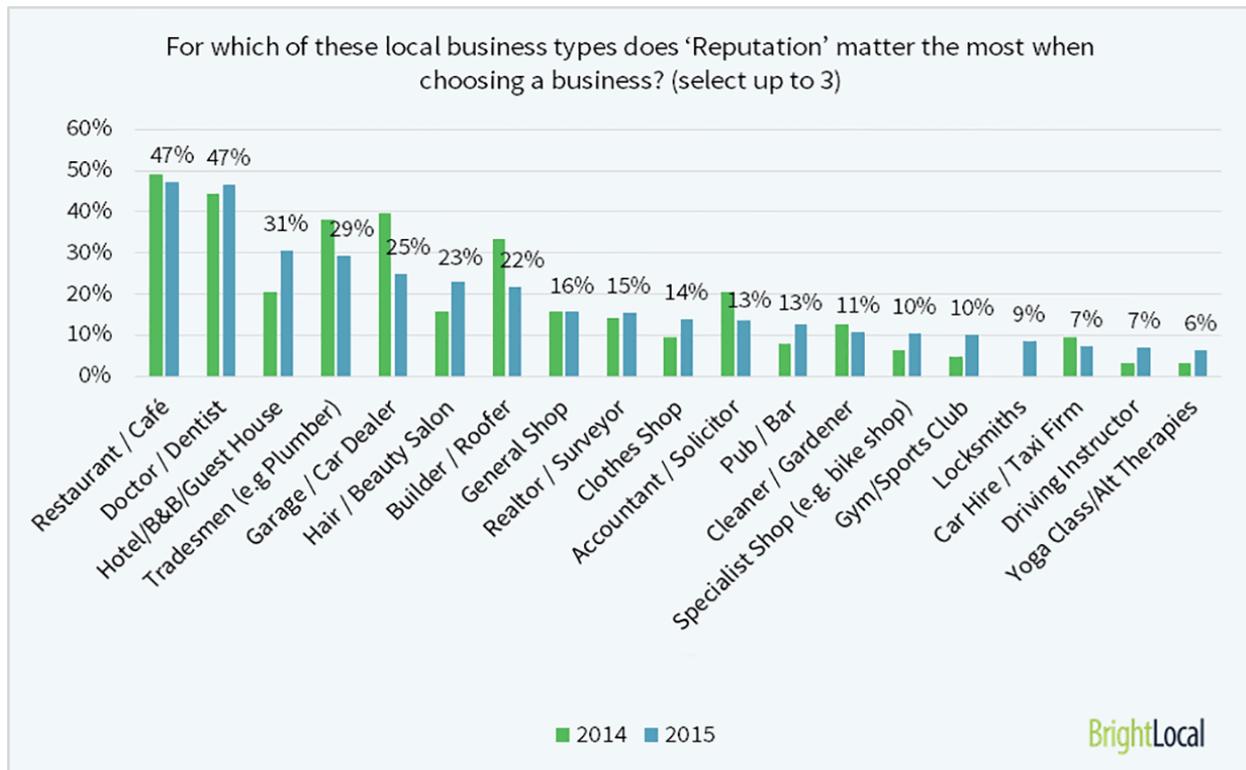
If physician struggles with the negative reviews online, it's advisable to fully optimize social media networks. A logical reason to optimize or sometimes

even create more social media profiles is to push negative websites further down to the 3rd, 4th pages of search engine. Social media has one of the highest online traffics out of the entire Internet; therefore, social media websites are the ones that usually show up on the top pages of any search engine.

By optimizing those social media profiles, physician can create more positive brand awareness,

regardless of the prior negative reviews. To support statement on importance of online reviews; a study that was conducted by BrightLocal - demonstrated that out of all businesses online, 47% of general populations look at the reputation of doctor before making a decision on primary visit (FIGURE 1).

FIGURE 1



The anatomy of a good medical brand

Any reputable healthcare brand online has five main points, these points are:

1. Professionally done website optimized for mobile devices.
2. A unified (consistent) high definition profile and cover picture throughout all websites, including social media.
3. Academic CV or biography.
4. A website or information website link on how to contact physician.
5. Shared relative information associated with physician's specialty and accepted insurance.

Ideally, these top 5 points must be present throughout all the active websites where physician's information is found online.

Outside of those points, it's advisable to establish an online physician's niche, just like a specialty that

physician specializes in. Whether a physician would like to be found a thought-provoking leader or just share the latest news from the industry or his/her own practice – but it has to be consistent [2]. Any physician who is actively engaged with his/her own brand sees a phenomenal potential for growth not only academically but also in the professional world of medicine [3]. An understanding the physician's strength and capability will certainly create a great brand awareness and recognition for physician's career on a long run.

Personal vs. professional use of social media network

Some physicians who experienced social media probably understand there are 2 main differences between personal and professional use of social media networks. For example, a Personal profile on Facebook is completely different from Business

profile. This is where many physicians fail to separate two. A business Facebook page allows physician to see engagement with audience, advertise a promoted content, see statistics etc [4]. While personal profile is mostly used to connect with friends and family. So, it's very important to separate these two and the same rule applies to the widely used physician networks such as LinkedIn and Instagram.

RESULTS

Optimization and ownership of surgeon specialist's identity online can make or break the outlook on physician's long-term career. It's important to own and correct misleading information online right the way, in order to prevent further damage. A simple research and advocating for your own brand name online, as it was shown here, can tremendously increase surgeon specialist's reputation in the eyes of the patients and the entire world.

DISCUSSION

In the competitive world of modern healthcare, where physicians take an active role of advocating for their patients or simply would like to be connected with potential patients or colleagues, brand image plays a huge role in the era of Internet. A shift from the old-school word of mouth to the new way of searching for information about particular doctor, forced many physicians to pay closer attention to the marketing techniques in order to be properly recognized online for their identity and work. [5,6]

With open and free accessibility of the Internet [7], any person can now build his or her own brand, however, the same way this brand can be misrepresented or misleading to the general public. Any practicing physician should take this particular issue seriously, as it can trigger a multitude of unwanted results in terms of personal branding. A modern surgical specialist should be an active advocate of his or her own brand online as well as in-person. In this research paper we showcased how any surgical specialists can own their brand identity and what steps they should take in order to be successful. There are some limitations to this study, as evolving marketing techniques are constantly changing, however the basic principles of marketing strategy on branding and brand awareness remained the same for the last 5 years.

CONCLUSION

As Internet plays a huge role in everyday life, owning and protecting your brand identity is becoming a crucial step for any well-respected physician specialist.

A full optimization and ownership of physician's brand name showcases a better correlation to a positive image online and drives better return on investment on the long run. Surgeon specialists who are actively sought online by patients [8] and professional medical colleagues will have an ability to correctly represent who they are and what they stand for in the most professional and positive way.

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