

Use blogs to manage your healthcare brand

February 4th, 2013

by [Andrea J. Simon](#)

Physicians seem to be reluctant to manage their reputations online but get very upset when people go online and talk about them. If you aren't going to protect your brand reputation, you open yourself up to "anything goes."

For example, I recently was interviewing a successful physician about her practice and how to expand her business when we got deep into a discussion about online reputation management. She was frustrated that people were talking about her and her hospital and she didn't know what to do.



Then I interviewed another physician in a different practice who raised a similar worry about how an online meetup group and another Facebook page were talking about him and his practice. His wife actually had to use her Facebook page to counter the negative stories about him.

Social media had taken hold, enabling patients and others to manage the physicians' reputations.

[More:]

Think about the problem these two physicians raised. Was it responding to negative press or taking charge and **building** their brand story that was needed?

These physicians, and so many others, had done nothing to build their online presence, cultivate an online community or recognize that the online world is a real community of people talking--often about their doctors.

As I listened to these physicians, I realized there was a larger issue here: How to raise awareness among physicians that they must take control of their reputations and manage their "brand" because *they are a brand*.

If not, they are simply a commodity, and patients can easily change from one to another. Loyalty is more about laziness. I know they don't want to think about themselves as brands, but doctors and their patients could benefit if they added a business perspective to their practice management--and soon, before it is too late.

What did we suggest to these physicians? A brand answers the question "Why You." It took less than a minute for them to tell us about "Why Them."

So how do physicians take control of the story and tell it, have other doctors and their patients help them tell it, and in the process help their own patients do a better job of getting and staying healthy? Social media is a perfect multiplier that can repurpose stories and keep people telling others about the physicians.

Who is doing this really well? One of my favorites is Wendy Sue Swanson, M.D., whose [Seattle Momma Doc Blog](#) is fun to read and share with anyone interested in how to raise a healthy child. It is not surprising that she has more than 11,000 followers on Twitter.

Another is Mike Sevilla, M.D., whose [Family Medicine Rocks](#) is a great blog to read and pass along. He clearly has no difficulty linking his passion for family medicine with his wise use of social media. He, too, has more than 10,000 Twitter followers and is trying to help other doctors learn how to use social media to engage patients in their health and wellness.

Or read [Dr.Wes](#), the blog for Westby Fisher, M.D. In his most recent post about the EMR implementation and patient safety, he presents a very cogent discussion about the dilemmas of choice in EMR utilization.

With his large following and interactive discussions, he expands beyond the postings to engage others in a dialogue, including many practicing physicians.

So what to do about doctors worried about their reputations?

"Managing your reputation as a physician has moved well beyond the all-important relationships you establish while treating patients," said D. Charles Casto, a 20-year industry veteran and founder of NiceGuysPR.

"With the way social media--including Yelp ratings, Facebook, and Twitter--have influenced the general public, it's important to monitor what people are saying about you on the Web. In particular, you want to ensure that anything that could come up in a Google search is accurate, positive, and would help to convey a sense of comfort to current and future patients," Casto said.

Blogs and Twitter platforms are not difficult to create; postings are easy to do and instantaneously they enable conversations about things that matter.

And as the Pew Research [posted](#) in May 2012: "As broadband and mobile access spreads, more people have the ability--and increasingly, the habit--of sharing what they are doing or thinking. In health care this translates to people tracking their workout routines, posting reviews of their medical treatments, and raising awareness about certain health conditions."

Maybe it's time for doctors to join their patients online.

Andrea J. Simon, Ph.D. is president and CEO of Simon Associates Management Consultants. She is a corporate anthropologist, who for the past two years served as interim senior vice president for Marketing, Branding and Culture Change at Hurley Medical Center in Flint, Mich.