

Myth Busters: Taking the Mystery Out of Online Directories

If you aren't managing your directory listings, someone else is. Learn how to take control of your information or online presence.

BY HEATHER PEFFLEY AND AMY KLINK

Online directories are today's version of the Yellow Pages, meaning that prospective patients are using these sites to gather information about your practice, which includes your address, phone number, and website URL. Make sure they are getting the right information by taking ownership of your online directory listings. If you aren't managing your directory listings, someone else is. Don't let someone else take control of your information or online presence.

MYTH V. TRUTH

Unfortunately, the world of online directories is a mysterious place to many practices. With so much confusion and noise out there about "owning" online directories, how are practices supposed to accurately assess what is fact and what is fiction? Here's a rundown of the facts necessary to debunk some of the most common myths surrounding online directories.

Myth: Online directory listings are the same as social media accounts. While easily mistaken, the two are different. Social media is the online equivalent of a cocktail party filled with all kinds of people with varied interests. Social media sites provide an opportunity for your practice to slowly introduce its way into your existing and potential patients' homes with interesting content. The hope with social media is that, like a cocktail party, if you are engaging and interesting enough, you will earn the right to invite other cocktail party attendees, aka patients, into your practice for a procedure. Directory listings are a guide of sorts, providing key information about your practice. Items

"If incorrect or inconsistent information is circulating online, you may unknowingly be losing potential customers."

commonly included in an online directory include practice name, provider(s), address(es), phone number(es), website URL, and reviews. While you should proactively claim and update your online listing profile, you are limited to the content that is featured on each directory.

Myth: Online directories only list the name and location(s) of the practice. While listings do provide that information, they regularly provide much more. The most common—and most important—information located in all directories is what is referred to as the NAP (name, address, phone number). Directories can also include website address, live maps to your practice, reviews, provider biographies, photos of the practice and/or provider(s), and much more. Keep in mind patients and search engines alike typically search for the most thorough and accurate information.

Myth: Consistency among directory listings doesn't matter. With more and more people turning to the internet to conduct research, having consistent and accurate

information online for potential clients (and search engines) to find you is vital. Your NAP, as well as other overlapping content (i.e., website URL), must be consistent across sites. Not only is this important for new and existing patients to find you, but it is also important to Google, Bing, and other search engines. For instance, Google, one of the most popular search engines, places high importance on accuracy and consistency of information when placing your practice website at the top of search results. It makes sense that this is important to Google, as it ensures those using Google to search for a product and/or service will get the right information. So, how can you identify what the internet has listed as your NAP? Simply go to [google.com/maps](https://www.google.com/maps) and search for your practice. This is the official NAP for your practice. If it looks accurate, simply match this information when claiming and updating other directory listings. If it needs to be updated, reach out to Google and request a change. To do this, open Google Maps, sign into your Google account, click the menu item in the top left corner and select “Send feedback,” and edit the map. Further instructions will follow.

Myth: There are too many directory listings to manage. While there are many online directories out there—more than 250 in the aesthetic space alone—simple online searches and patient input will tell you which ones to target. Remember, directory listings are typically used by patients who are searching the web for a specific product or service. In your case, they are searching for aesthetic and dermatological procedures. If, for instance, they searched for “Dermatologist in Newport Beach, CA,” the directories found on the first two or three results pages are the ones that are most important to claim and update, if you are a dermatologist practicing in Newport Beach. These are the directories that a patient will find and most likely choose from when deciding on a dermatologist. In addition to claiming and updating your information, it is important to look at the reviews that are on the sites, as prospective patients likely will check to see what others are saying about you.

Myth: Directory listings don’t impact business. If incorrect or inconsistent information is circulating online, you may unknowingly be losing potential customers. NAP issues tend to arise when you open an additional location, move to a new location, add a provider, or make changes that impact the practice NAP and/or supporting directory information. An entire schedule can be thrown off by one late arrival to the practice. This is a possibility if the address that pops up when a patient searches for the practice location is not up to date, taking him or her to the wrong address. This can be frustrating to you and your patients. Another way that directory listings commonly affect business is through

MANAGE THESE POPULAR DIRECTORIES

Here is a look at the top directory listings impacting aesthetic practices. These are some of the major sites you need to be actively managing.

Most popular general search engine pages. Below are the top two general search pages, applicable to all types of business. Patients are looking for you through these popular search engines and your practice information must be present and accurate on both.

- *Google:* [google.com](https://www.google.com)
- *Bing:* [bing.com](https://www.bing.com)

Most popular medical directory listings: Apart from RealSelf, the directories below apply to both aesthetic and general medicine. In addition, RealSelf allows physicians to proactively answer aesthetic medicine questions raised by current and potential patients. Ensure your practice information is up to date on each of these directories.

Healthgrades: [healthgrades.com](https://www.healthgrades.com)

- *Vitals:* [vitals.com](https://www.vitals.com)
- *RealSelf:* [realself.com](https://www.realself.com)
- *RateMDs:* [ratemds.com](https://www.ratemds.com)

Most popular business directory listings: These are the top three general business directory sites, applicable to all types of business. Patients are looking for you on these sites, and again, your information must be present and accurate.

- *YP (Yellow Pages):* [yellowpages.com](https://www.yellowpages.com)
- *Yelp:* [yelp.com](https://www.yelp.com)
- *Citysearch:* [citysearch.com](https://www.citysearch.com)

negative reviews and/or star rankings. It only takes one or two patients to voice a less than perfect experience online to negatively impact your online reputation, which can slow practice growth by deterring new patients from visiting and turning off existing patients.

Myth: It’s difficult to make changes to directory listings. Most directory listing sites make it easy for practices to claim, update, and maintain their listings. After you identify the top listings impacting your online reputation, simply go to each one by clicking on the site link and look/select one of the following options: “Is this your business?” “Claim your profile,” or a similar message. To simplify the process even further, have the information needed to update the site (NAP, preferred photos, website address, etc.) ready when updating your directory listing.

Myth: It's too expensive to update directory listings.

While there are numerous listings out there, many can be updated for free. As mentioned, the most important directories to your practice are those that appear in the first two to three pages of online search results for your practice. Others matter, but are less important. Of course, one must consider the cost of employee time to update directories. In many cases, this task can be assigned to an hourly employee and/or college intern for a nominal spend.

Myth: No one needs to own this project. To ensure this important task gets done, you need someone on staff who will take responsibility for managing the practice's directory listings, ensuring that they are regularly monitored and updated consistently. Like any practice project, someone needs to own the process. Otherwise, you run the risk that it won't get done in a timely manner or won't get done at all. Identifying a staff champion is a great way to motivate an employee who may be looking for additional responsibility. Reward project participants with a big public thank you or a free lunch.

Myth: Managing listings takes too much time. Tackling your directory listings may take significant time initially, but once you own them, they will require less frequent and time-consuming management by your staff champion. After you have claimed and updated your key sites, it is only necessary to check in on a monthly or bimonthly basis to ensure that reviews are trending in the right direction, and the NAP and other practice information listed is still accurate and positive. A quick (and free) trick to stay ahead of online reviews is to register for Google Alerts. Google Alerts will send a notification when something is said, positive or negative, regarding the practice and/or providers. To register for Google Alerts, go to google.com/alerts.

Myth: It's too late to get started. The internet is here to stay, so it's never too late to strengthen and improve your practice's online presence. You're only too late if you never start. Simply identify, and if necessary, update your NAP and the top listings impacting your practice. If the project becomes too labor intensive, there are vendors (i.e., yext.com and moz.com) who will manage the process for you for a small fee. The critical part for you is to confirm that your practice NAP is accurate and provide content to the hired vendor that can be used uniformly when claiming and updating your directory listings.

STAY IN CONTROL

When you're in control of your listings, you can manage the perception of your practice and reap the rewards. Based

“Tackling your directory listings may take significant time initially, but once you own them, they will require less frequent and time-consuming management by your staff champion.”

on positive, informative online content, new and existing patients will not only be able to find and learn about you, but they will do so before discovering and reaching out to your competitors. That scenario is a win-win for you and your patients.

Heather Peffley is a senior management consultant with the Allergan Practice Consulting Group of Allergan, PLC. Ms. Peffley consults with medical aesthetic practices in the areas of financial analysis and procedure values, human resource issues, internal and external marketing, leadership training and team building, sales training, compensation, and aesthetic practice development.



Ms. Peffley has more than 22 years of successful health care sales, sales management, and marketing experience. Prior to joining the Allergan Practice Consulting Group, she served in a number of sales, sales management, and marketing positions in the pharmaceutical and medical device industry, including sales representative, hospital and military sales representative, national field sales training manager, and sales manager. Most recently, she served as product manager for Allergan's facial aesthetics division. She has participated in several corporate marketing initiatives that included planning and strategizing the launch of new products and indications into the field of aesthetic and reconstructive medicine.

Amy Klink is a senior specialist in financial services and Allergan Practice Consulting (APC) operations for BSM Consulting based in its Incline Village, NV headquarters. In this position, Ms. Klink supports the APC team and other BSM external customers.



In her role, Ms. Klink works closely with the APC team to help the consultants meet various practice management needs in the medical aesthetic field, including managing various practice enhancement programs. These programs include telephone mystery shopping, patient satisfaction surveys, and social media and website assessments.

Prior to joining BSM, Ms. Klink obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from San Francisco State University. She has been a dedicated BSM team member since 2014.