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IN THE NEWS

Business Focus

The Wild Wild Web: How to Monitor Your Online Persona



Author: Matthew M. Villmer, Esq.

With the emergence of websites allowing users to post reviews about local businesses, it's always wise to regularly check your "online persona." Many business and individuals don't realize the adage of the new technological age: **you are who Google says you are.**



For example, in San Francisco an unhappy patient aired grievances with his chiropractor on a popular review website and faced a backlash of monumental proportions. Christopher Norberg visited Dr. Steven Biegel after experiencing neck pain due to an auto accident. When Norberg later received a \$550 bill for his two chiropractic visits, he wanted to let the local community know about the good doctor's creative billing practices. Norberg recounted his experience with Dr. Biegel on the website [yelp.com](#) for all the world to see. Not only did the world see the posting, Dr. Biegel himself got wind of the review, which happened to have Norberg's name displayed prominently. In response, the doctor didn't contact Norberg and ask him to remove the posting, he didn't post his perspective of the misunderstanding on the website—no, Dr. Biegel filed a multi-count lawsuit seeking punitive damages for loss of his business reputation and libel.

I recount this story not as an attorney clambering to represent the next chiropractor that cracks a back for a bit too much money and receives an online tongue lashing. I'm simply advocating that individuals and business owners must take control of their online personas. Googling you or your business' name feels like an exercise in self-indulgency at

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first. However, it's a necessity in this technological era to view your "digital self" as others view you. I'm sure it would pain any local business to discover a website dedicated to their downfall—prime examples include: walmartsucks.com, verizonispathetic.com, microsofteradication.com, and the list continues. Don't allow others to define you or your business based upon a single poor experience.

So, how do you manage your online persona? First, click the following link to visit www.dogpile.com, an online search engine that displays results from all popular search websites (google.com, yahoo.com, ask.com, bing.com, etc.). Next, type you or your businesses name into the search box, but make sure to put quotation marks around the phrase you type so the website focuses its search. Review the results: are you mentioned? If so, is it a positive or negative view? If it's positive, congratulations! Check back in a month or so to make sure this trend continues. If you find a negative reference, make sure to post a respectful counter-reply, explaining your perspective in the matter. If someone searching the web stumbles upon the negative review about your business, then notices a positive and courteous reply, they will certainly not make a damaging snap judgment.

So, one evening when you're sitting back, relaxing, and enjoying the change in Florida weather, take a moment to scour the world wide web in search of your online persona. What you find might surprise you.

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