

# What You Should Know Before You Hire a Reputation Management Company

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## Introduction

In order to maintain a successful business in the Age of Information, you must keep up with a techno-centric market. Ninety percent of today's consumers use the Internet to find and research businesses before they proceed with a purchase – and you might be amazed at what the average web surfer can dig up on your business with just a few keystrokes. Do you know what people see when they search for YOUR business? If not, then you need to stop for a moment to consider your online reputation.

Just as businesses are becoming increasingly aware of their need to focus their marketing efforts on the world-wide web, they are also beginning to recognise a need for cultivating and protecting their online reputations. As this awareness increases and as consumers grow more and more savvy, when it comes to learning as much as they can about where they choose to spend their money, an industry is springing up to meet the needs of business owners who want to stay on top. Reputation management companies are your answer to the overseeing of your online business persona.

If you are not currently proactively managing your business' online reputation, then you need to start – and as soon as possible. If you don't have the time, energy, or know-how to manage your online reputation effectively, then you need to consider hiring a reputation management company. Fortunately for you, there is a lot of information available to you to help make that all-important decision, and this is the perfect place to start.

To your success !  
Vince Squires

## What shapes your online reputation?

There are a number of avenues that allow for the perpetuation of ideas and information that affect your business' online reputation. Consider the following:

- **Social media.** Websites like Facebook and Twitter allow for a rapid flow of information between groups of like-minded people. That means that if anything controversial happens surrounding your business, it is very easy for people to spread the news very quickly using these social networking sites.
- **Blogs.** Blogs can work in your favour, or against it. These days, popular bloggers are able to reach celebrity status. That means that if a blogger with a large following posts anything about your business – either good or bad – that information could potentially be in the hands of hundreds of thousands of people within a matter of minutes.
- **Hate sites.** Believe it or not, it is not unusual for a particularly enraged customer to go on a rampage of destruction – with your business as the target. Hate sites centered on your business, product, or service can cause serious damage to your business' reputation.
- **Industry forums.** These are websites centred on your particular industry, where people congregate to swap information and advice about things related to your business. You can bet that if your business is doing something right and enough people know about you, people

will participate in threads about your business on these industry forums.

- **Press releases.** Any time a news entity releases a breaking story, the Internet is all over it, from personal blogs to social media influencers. On top of that, all the major news producers maintain their own websites. That means that if there is anything damaging about your business in the news, it will show up in numerous places on the Internet.

## Why is Reputation Management Important?

Perhaps the most important thing you can take from this is the fact that your online reputation will exist, whether or not you choose to participate in creating it. Why is that? Because people talk. You can expect that both your satisfied and your disgruntled customers will want to spread the word about your business. You can also expect that there is no possible way you will ever be able to make 100 percent of your customers happy, 100 percent of the time. What does that mean for you? That means it is inevitable that there will be some negative information floating around about your business, and that it WILL find its home on the Internet.

Where does reputation management come in? You can look at it this way: if you choose not to get involved in managing your online reputation, then you can rest assured that your online reputation will be formed by other people. Can you really afford to put such a huge determining factor of your business' success into the hands of other people – people who may not want the best for your business? The answer is a resounding, “no.” Therefore, it is

quite simple: reputation management is important because, as a business, YOU want to control your reputation, rather than handing that responsibility over to the ill-informed masses.

## Steps You Can Take to Protect Your Online Reputation

There are a number of things you can do yourself to protect your online reputation. Just keep in mind that managing your online reputation takes a lot of time, thought, and action. Here are some steps you can take to keep your online reputation clean:

- **Monitor.** You could make use of the many online tools available to you, which can help to monitor your online reputation in order to stay on top of what people are saying about you in the world-wide web. It's impossible for just one tool to monitor every outlet, so you should vary your approach to include social media monitoring tools like Hootsuite and Socialmention, blog monitoring tools like BlogPulse, and web monitoring tools like Google Alerts. Just remember however, that many of these tools rely on the name of the business name being mentioned in the review, which is often not the case as the reviewer is already on your page at the review site.
- **Participate.** Keep in mind that if you don't create your online reputation, someone else will; therefore, you need to make a concerted effort to participate in shaping your online reputation. How do you do this? Participation is key. Actively post useful, informative and

interesting information from your social media accounts, respond to customer reviews (see below), answer questions and provide insights on industry forums, publish articles, and write a blog if you want to proactively protect your business' online reputation.

- **Defend.** In the event that your business faces negative publicity online (and this WILL happen), you should take steps to defend your reputation as soon as possible. Depending on the nature of the negative information you are countering, your defence may involve any of a number of strategies, from publishing articles, to posting press releases, to responding to negative reviews.

## Handling Negative Reviews

It is inevitable that at some point someone will post a negative review about your business in an online forum. Negative reviews are often a main concern when it comes to reputation management, and are the topic of much discussion, as your response to negative reviews can go a long way in either adding to or detracting from your business' online image. Whilst it is only natural to recoil in horror at the first sight of a negative review, or even to want to strike out in defence, it is important that you know that there is a definite right and wrong way to handle negative online reviews. When it comes to handling negative reviews, follow these pointers:

- **Don't ignore the review.** If the review site allows you to publicly respond, you should do so. Either way, you should definitely respond,



even if privately. Not responding only compounds the negative review by making it appear that you either are guilty, or that you simply don't care about what your customers think of you.

- **Get some perspective.** Before you respond, make sure you take a step back to assess the review objectively. You may not like what you're reading, but chances are, you can gain some insight into how to improve your business if you leave your emotions at the door and just focus in on the information in the review.
- **Respond appropriately.** In order to understand what an appropriate response is to a negative review, it may be easiest to start with an explanation of the wrong way to respond. Don't justify your business practices if you are truly in the wrong, and don't point the finger at the customer if you feel the customer is wrong. Instead, maintain a diplomatic stance and avoid placing blame altogether. Also, don't react with emotion; use a friendly, business-like tone. Acknowledge the reviewer's experience, and offer your assurances. For example, a good response in the event of a negative review might be something like, "This business prides itself on great customer service, so we are very unhappy to hear that you had such a negative experience."
- **Provide a solution.** After acknowledging the reviewer's complaint and offering your assurances, you should also suggest a solution. A great way to solve the problem and get everyone on the same page (as well as

encourage potential customers to give you a shot) is to offer the reviewer a coupon, as a request to give your business another try.

## What to Expect From a Reputation Management Company

Online reputation management is a complex undertaking, and one that takes a serious amount of time and effort. If you don't feel that you are up for (or even interested in) the job, then you should consider hiring a reputation management company. There are many reputation management companies to choose from, in response to the growing awareness of the need for reputation management. Therefore, you should know what to expect out of a reputation management, before you approach the task of hiring one:

- **Monitoring.** You already understand the importance of monitoring. Now you just need to make sure your company of choice does a thorough job of monitoring by making use of a broad range of monitoring tools.
- **Search engine optimization (SEO).** SEO is likely a term you've already heard of. It pertains to your web contents' search engine rankings – the higher the ranking, the further up your web content will appear on search results pages. Customers generally only review the first several listings on a search results page, so your web content needs to be king when it comes to SEO . . . and your reputation management company of choice should employ proven methods for SEO improvement.

- **Social media management.** The world of social media is a finicky one, and the way your business presents itself in social media forums can either make or break your online reputation. A reputable reputation management company would be able to advise on how to build a strong, positive rapport with the public via social networking venues.
- **Content development.** In order to stay relevant in the Internet, you must flood the web with relevant content surrounding your business name, brand, product, and/or service. It is likely that your reputation management company may offer additional services, everything from creating websites to publishing articles pertaining to your business.

## What About Reputation Marketing?

There is a very positive angle to all this and that is **Reputation Marketing**. The other side of the coin is that more and more people use the internet to search for reviews on businesses as a key factor in their buying decision, therefore proactively building a stellar reputation can have a huge impact on a business' success. At the moment there are few companies offering a solid system for handling the building of a first class reputation, make sure that the company you choose have the tools and resources to effectively build your 5 star reputation.

## Conclusion

As you can see, reputation management is a big deal. If you are not focused on managing your business' reputation, then you are not only missing out on a huge opportunity, but are also allowing others to determine your online fate for you. Remember that you don't have to take on the task of online reputation management yourself. You can put your online reputation in the competent hands of professionals like us.

Call or email us today so we can start helping you with your online reputation management and marketing. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Call us today...02380 016462

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## About The Author



Vince Squires is the founder of Local Web Domination which specialises in helping local businesses build a meaningful online presence.

Our mission is to help local businesses get found online, build a 5 star reputation and generate more business.