Small Business Guide to Monitoring your Online Reputation

Small Business Guide to Monitoring your Online Reputation

Your customers are talking to each other, and to you. They are doing it in person, on social media, through texting, and passively online. Do you know what they are saying? Or, better yet, are you responding to the chatter? If you aren't part of the conversation, how are you meeting customer needs and earning their trust to solve their pain points?

Customers are more than transactions. They are real people with real problems. As a business, you know that fixing the problems is as important as making money - because if you don't give your customers the attention they want, someone else will. In this ebook, we'll discuss how to monitor the web and your social media presence, as well as offer tips and tools for better reputation management and "Internet listening."

Monitoring Social Media and Your Online Reputation

Reputation management is the process of building, maintaining, and recovering the public's perception of your business. Previously, this was something outsourced to public relations firms or something that only big businesses had to worry about because they were so heavily scrutinized by the media and the public.

Nowadays, businesses both big and small are scrutinized by anyone and everyone, with more people sharing their 2 cents in more ways than ever before.

Before the Internet, a small or medium-sized business could build and maintain a reputation quite easily. By simply pushing brand messaging and doing what you say you're going to do, you could build and maintain the reputation you wanted, with little worry about the recovery aspect. That's not the case anymore. Like it or not, whether you believe it or not, your customers and potential customers are talking about you on social media. It's no longer an optional marketing tactic, and it never was a fad that would eventually go away. Social media marketing is here to stay, and if you're only using social media to advertise and to push brand messaging, then you're missing a huge piece.

## Ignoring Social Media is One Way to Do It Wrong

In a recent analysis of online retailers and their Facebook presences, 25 percent of companies studied failed to respond to customer service questions on their walls, and even fewer replied to questions that came up in comments to posts. A few companies even deleted questions from their Facebook pages, whether or not they had been answered.

Granted, social media monitoring is much more than answering customer questions and leaving them there, but think of what these people will say if you don't answer their question or if you take too long to respond! When businesses fail to address these issues on social media, they risk alienating the person who left the complaint, the friends/family of that person, the business' fans who see the unaddressed complaint, as well as customers who aren't fans but still see the unaddressed complaint. 88% of consumers are less likely to buy from companies that ignore questions or complaints on social media -

so double check that you aren't ignoring any users voicing their comments or concerns. If you don't pay attention to your customers, someone else will.

Social media is about being social, and is more than another platform for a marketing message. Sometimes, being social means listening to someone's drama or helping someone with a sticky situation. Monitor your social media with this perspective, and you'll solidify your brand's reputation as one that is trustworthy and one that understands its customers' pain points.
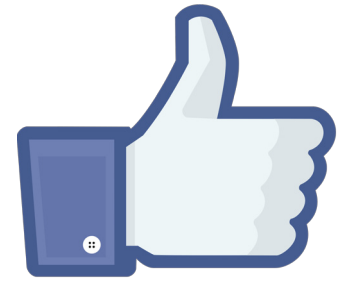
Tip: If the problem can be addressed via social media, (i.e., Tweeting a link, answering a question on your Facebook page) then do it. Only use email or the social media platform's direct messaging system if personal information is needed or it would take several tweets/a long status to explain. Otherwise, you delay helping an already aggravated customer and make the situation much more complicated than it needs to be. Furthermore, when you quickly address a concern via a public social media platform, other users will see your excellent customer service skills, which will undoubtedly increase your brand's positive online reputation.

Monitoring the Rest of the Web

Social media may be the primary arena where customers are talking about you, but it's not the only place online. Often, the other most discussed online hubs are review websites such as Angie's List, Yelp, Google Places, Yahoo Local, as well as blogs and even news outlets. Remember, online reviews are the second-most trusted form of advertising among consumers, so it's vital to a business' reputation to monitor these sites - making sure your business is well represented online.

Properly Responding to Negative Comments

Internet listening and social media monitoring isn't just looking for positive mentions, but is also quickly and properly responding to negative comments and anything else that could damage your reputation. Customers who have a bad experience are more likely to write a review than those who have a good experience; so, while pushing down these comments may help to some extent, it's much better reputation management to respond to negative comments appropriately. Here are a few ways to do that:

- **Respond to Those Who Leave a Negative Review** - Whether it's by replying to the comment on the site, or sending a person a private message, giving the person a chance to either elaborate on the complaint or to work with your business to find a solution is a necessary first step. It shows that you care about these complaints and aren't writing them off as a one-time problem. Responding also gives the person an opportunity to give your business a second chance.

- **Encourage Customers to Write Positive Reviews** - Not everyone is going to work with you to resolve a complaint, and some complaints like "the food sucks" aren't easy to solve. To prevent these complaints from sticking around and becoming the pervasive opinion, encourage current customers to leave a positive review. This could be as simple as putting up a sign or two in your establishment about your presence on this site or that site, or even asking customers to leave a positive review when they receive a bill. Make sure that you don't pay for those positive reviews, though. Paying for a review isn't seen as getting an honest review.

- **Customize the Response Where Possible** - The easy way out is to come up with canned or standardized response for a negative review, and this would be okay most of the time. When possible, try to customize the response, even if it's just addressing the negative reviewer by name. The point of taking the time to respond to negative reviews and comments is to show that you care about customer opinions and that you want to solve these problems. Having a canned response every single time doesn't do that, and it is almost as bad as not responding at all.

Unfortunately, negative comments and reviews don't always come from dissatisfied customers or an angry ex-employee. Sometimes, they may come from a competitor who doesn't like that you're around or has a reason to tarnish your reputation. Other times, it could be a nasty but false rumor that you can't disprove despite your every effort to do so. Keep in mind that negative comments will never ever go away, as you can't please everyone all the time. Also, a negative comment could come from someone you fired or a former employee holding a grudge. These can easily be outweighed by positive comments, or even by brand fans that come to your defense.

Internet listening is more than seriously considering what's being said and what's happening online; it's also thinking about what could be said and what could happen online if a customer has a bad experience. A perfect example is in mobile marketing, where more and more small-and-medium sized businesses are getting into the mix with mobile websites, apps, text-message marketing, etc. More than 80 percent of customers expect the app/website to work as well, if not better, than the desktop version. If it's not as good, it doesn't mean the customer is less likely to do business with you on their mobile phone. It means they're less likely to be a customer.

Monitoring the customer experience is just as important as monitoring the online communication, perhaps more so. A bad experience could easily translate into negative chatter online from folks who may have otherwise talked about their good experience, or who might have said nothing at all

Are You Doing Anything to Damage Your Reputation?

Not every effort you make to protect, or to salvage, your online reputation will work. Strategies that may have worked in the past, or that you not have connected with your reputation can, in fact, work against you. Below are a couple of tactics that ought to be stopped right away because they are giving your customers a negative impression of your brand.

1. **Fake Reviews** - Do not, under any circumstance, put up fake reviews of your product or service on your website or on sites like Yelp or Google Places. This includes paying someone for a positive review, because potential customers won't believe him or her. Fake reviews make it look as if you're covering up negative reviews instead of addressing customer complaints. Fake reviews also look as though you're pumping yourself up without doing anything to justify it. Just as fake "likes" were punished and removed from Facebook, fake reviews will receive a thumbs down, too, except they'll come from customers instead of the website. If you have previously put up fake reviews, remove them immediately.

2. **Creating Content for Search Engines** - Nothing is inherently wrong with creating content around keywords that you want to rank for, except that it's content meant for the search engines. Remember that people buy from you, not search engines. Normal people will see through the mediocre content

that's meant to please the search engine and to get your site to rank. They won't want to read that content, and they won't go to your site or business ever again. Make sure you write website content with your audience in mind, and try organically integrating relevant keywords into the content to keep both your readers and Google happy.

3. **Covering Certain Topics** – Some topics are popular with your target demographic and maybe people in general, but those same topics may be marked by search engines as spammy and unsuitable for general audiences, so they should be avoided in your branding efforts. These topics include alcohol, drugs, tobacco, firearms, pornography, designer knock-offs, and illegal hacking.

4. **Black Hat SEO Techniques** - These techniques will not only ruin your reputation with search engines, but they will also ruin your reputation with potential customers. Your potential customers don't want to read keyword-stuffed articles, or to click bait-and-switch links, or to come across web pages that aren't relevant to what they want. Those black-hat SEO techniques, as they are now called, may have once put you on the first page of Google, but they don't work with anyone anymore.

5. **Lashing Out Against Negative Reviewers** - This may seem obvious, but it's still a tempting move if the negative review is baseless or perhaps nitpicking. But, don't do it. An abusive rant or a snarky response only adds fuel to the fire. The negative reviewer has more reason to hate your business, and others will now have a reason to hate your business. Second, such a response only validates the misleading information, because a dramatic response can come across as a cover up. People will believe the negative review because the response was so poor. If there's a review that's infuriating, step away for a few minutes to come up with a civilized response.

Take Control Today

If you don't take control of your reputation, you leave it up to others to build; resulting in a reputation you may not want. The best way to take control of your reputation isn't to shut out the voices of your customers and to do everything in your power to put out the message you want. In a sense, the best way to take control is to relinquish some control, to listen to your customers and to monitor your online presence for what's being said and working with that communication. When you know what's being said and you're responding, you build a reputation that's honest and trustworthy.

[Sign up for a 21 day free trial](#) of our Big Local Buzz reputation marketing platform and learn how easy it is to gather, market and manage the reviews you need to build your business.

For more information on how your small business can build and maintain a positive online reputation, contact us for a free consultation today.

designOneweb.com

Phone: (336) 245-4805   Email: info@designoneweb.com

WAS THIS HELPFUL?
SHARE OR CONNECT WITH US ONLINE!