



Web Sites for Small Business
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Online Reputation Management:
Defining Your Brand's Reputation
for the Internet Masses





News Travels Fast...

With the rise in popularity of **blogs, online social networks, podcasts, and video sharing**, anyone and everyone has a voice these days. And that voice, however insignificant it may have been a decade ago, now has the power to reach **millions** with just a few taps at the keyboard and clicks on a mouse. Opinions about brands, products, even entire organizations, can spread like wildfire, causing a wave of negativity, or on the contrary, a flourish of positivity about a brand.

What Can Happen...

Poor online brand management is best defined by the “Dell Hell” and Kryptonite Locks fiascos. In both situations, an individual that had very real and very disappointing interactions with a product created a **snowball of negative mentions** across the Internet.

For Dell, a blogger simply documented his experiences concerning his own Dell Computer, which included not only all sorts of hardware malfunctions, but a tirade over Dell’s customer service as well. In Kryptonite’s case, a customer was able to pick his own lock with the tip of a pen and posted a complaint on a popular forum. In each instance, web-based commentary spread quickly, overloading Google searches with **negative search results**.

The spiral of each brand’s buzz into the trenches was not just the will of the people—it was each company’s lack of an **immediate response** that kept them plummeting. Of course each company responded, eventually. But the rapid nature of the web requires immediate responses for a proper recovery.

The Good News

Every enterprise, from small businesses to educational organizations, can manage their **online reputation**. They can have power over their brand’s standing on the web by implementing a dedicated, persistent monitoring of the Internet at large. Untruths and slanderous mentions of a brand can be smothered, and likewise, positive and praiseful mentions can be boosted.



How Could It Impact Your Brand?

The impact of online research...

Allowing online mentions of your brand to go unmanaged poses many threats to its livelihood, whether it represents a small company or an institution of higher education. We live in a time when it is easy (and smart) to hop online to research a product or service before purchasing it, and likewise, it's just as easy for an opinion about your brand to be voiced. If there are **negative mentions** of your brand in the search results, it means little to the common searcher just how true the statements are; the reader is unlikely to try to prove their legitimacy.

The impact of loose brand management...

Negative mentions that appear as search results on Google can detract from **brand perception** and sales, eventually leading to an all around loss of consumer loyalty. When coming upon a combination of negative mentions in the search results, job candidates or prospective students will inevitably lean away from a product or school, negatively impacting recruitment efforts. Even top investors will take into account the frank discussions of your brand on blogs and forums, and if your enterprise **lacks a positive buzz**, they may be inclined to take their investment elsewhere.

The impact of diligent online reputation management...

Ultimately, it is your job to stay abreast of every claim surrounding your brand. Online reputation management ensures that your audience receives a true and **balanced perception** of your business.



What is Involved in ORM?

1. Plan & Identify

Choose Your Battles Wisely

Before embarking on an ORM mission, a business must decide who its main influencers are. What websites/blogs/forums mention your brand the most, **negatively** and **positively**? These are the most important online audiences to monitor. Keep in mind audiences that are more engaged have the most influence over your reputation. For example, social media sites that invite reader commentary; online shopping centers that offer customer reviews; or educational directories that provide in-depth descriptions of student satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Sites with audiences that are engaged very little in creation of site content, or sites that have very low readerships, are less likely to pose much of a threat to your brand. Online reputation management is a great undertaking that **demands efficiency**, and so requires you to concentrate your efforts around your biggest influencers.

2. Monitor Your Brand Buzz

Locate Brand Mentions and Define Their Tone

Monitoring is not just about Googling your brand and scanning the results. There are a handful of online tools that scan the web for mentions of your brand

across a spectrum of sites and can also provide measurements of the type of mention (positive, negative, neutral). No matter what tools you use, your online brand mention monitoring relies most on humans. After all, the audience (influencers) you care about is made up by human activities, voices, compliments and complaints. A computer may be able to detect mentions, but it can never truly gauge the nature of its tone.

3. Connect & Engage

Brand Promotion and Negative Mention Suppression

Successful monitoring will help you determine which negative mentions require a response, and likewise, which positive mentions deserve a boost. A report should be compiled of all mentions, the findings analyzed, and proper responses implemented. Positive responses to negative commentary should be generated in a timely manner to avoid an all-out **snowball effect**. If you can catch negative mentions sooner rather than later, you run the chance of turning the negative commentary on its back and reversing its harmful impact on your brand.

Brand Promotion

Increase website accessibility...

Proper **search engine optimization** makes your website more likely to be indexed and ranked by Google and Yahoo. First off, make sure your website makes an impact with the search engines by having it optimized by a professional SEOer. This will ensure that your website is a relevant part of **search engine results pages** (SERPs)—it's important to be a part of SERPs for searches containing your organization/brand name. Increasing the accessibility of your website not only drives traffic to it; it also allows for users to bookmark your pages, send your URLs to other people, and, by including direct links to your social networking sites, allows users to vote for content they think is worthy of attention. All of this works to create a more positive brand image and keep the buzz going.

Engage in existing and upcoming web trends...

Is your brand associated with its own **blog, Facebook, or Twitter**? The popularity of those sites and others like them is undeniable, and consequently, they contain a hefty amount of influencers. By keeping abreast of the most current web trends and becoming a relevant and active member of those sites which are your brand's biggest influencers, you ensure that your brand has a voice and a face on the sites that reach the most people.

Promote user involvement...

Another method of connecting your brand to your online audience is starting a **Viral Marketing Campaign** through social networking sites like Facebook. On Facebook, the creation of Polls, Groups, & Quizzes promotes user involvement and increases visibility. As of September 2009, Facebook is now serving **300 million users**. A network with a diverse, captive audience is prime territory to market your brand/organization/product. In addition to this campaign, it is important to consistently post notes and articles based on your Facebook fans' activities. This can be achieved using the Insights application and through monitoring of the most popular keywords related to your brand.

Get to know what all the Twitter's about...

Another hot social network right now is **Twitter**. You can boost positive tweets related to your brand by re-tweeting them on your own Twitter account. Applicable re-tweets include your organization name, brand name, URLs, etc. Establishing tweets that link to your blog and Facebook content strengthens brand interest and link traffic.





Negative Mention Suppression

Engage positively, suppress negativity...

Engaging in popular web trends builds SERP's packed with more ammo for your cause. In the battle between you and negative brand mentions, the more search engine results you are a part of in a positive sense helps fight against other less than positive mentions or attacks.

Address negative reviews/feedback...

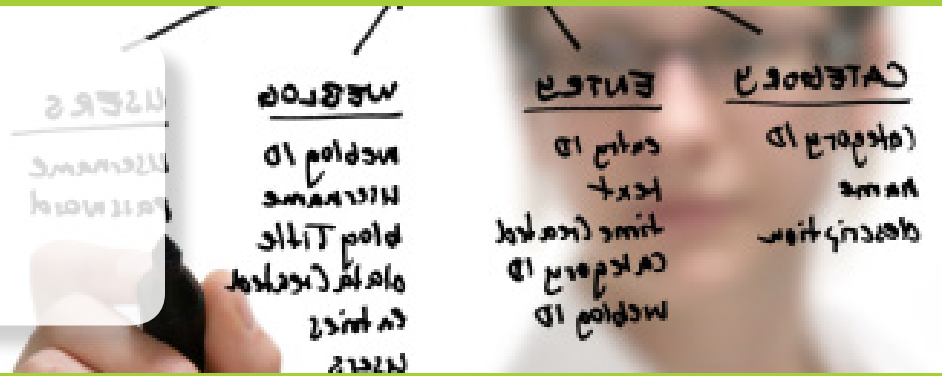
Once you have identified which negative mentions are worth spending the time, energy and money to suppress, you must address them, and quickly. If more time is needed to assess the comment and come up with a more involved response, start out by simply **acknowledging the mention**. Let readers know you're aware of the issue and that soon, you will provide them with a **response or solution**. After that, you can be more direct. For example, requesting that the negative comment or post be removed from a blog is a possibility. Especially in cases in which you are dealing directly with an individual owner of a blog or forum, this takes tact. Be sure your responses are balanced between **humility and forthrightness**.

Collect alternate domain names...

Take the initiative to collect domain names that contain your brand name, including domains with the brand misspelled, domains with negative sentiments attached to them (yourbrandsucks.com, yourbrandisstupid.com), and other top level domain variations (yourbrand.net, yourbrand.org, yourbrand.biz). These are the domain names that your customers or students will pick up in lieu of a great disappointment in your brand, and use to post negative reviews of your product or service.



Dedication & Persistence



ORM is Hard Work, But It's Worth It

Online reputation management has become a necessity for small companies, mid-sized businesses, large corporations, and educational organizations alike. No matter how big or small the enterprise, no matter the service or product, the ease with which consumers can generate web content makes everyone vulnerable to a **brand attack**. ORM involves not only recovery of your brand position after an online reputation fiasco, but also comprehensive, preemptive measures for the prevention of crippling brand attacks.

The point of ORM is to be consistently dedicated to the protection and promotion of your brand, and to be **persistent in the rooting out of negative consumer commentary**. Not only will you be protecting your business or organization; you'll be involving your enterprise in the everyday lives of your target audience. It serves to build gaps where bridges are missing, and can lead to new, more effective approaches in your sales, public relations, and product promotions tactics.

