

BRAND YOUR BUSINESS

PART 5

Managing Your Company's Online Reputation.

In today's module we are going to ask the question; what do people say about your new BRAND online?

But before we get there, let's just quickly re-cap the previous modules of this 6-part mini series to get you up to speed.

Part 1 - What is a BRAND and why does it matter? We look at companies with no identity, those WITH an identity and how their brand helps them build a "Tribe".

Part 2 - Your mission statement, your name, and how to get one. We also shared the "Jack Daniels" Tribe story with you.

Part 3 - Creating your Look & Logo and how to promote your business brand. We also shared with you how you can buy a logo kit to make your own logos for *pennies to the pound* or even to make professional logos for local business owners and selling them for profit.

Part 4 - Delivering on your promise and your company's core values. We also showed you a "trick" to get great reviews by "under promising and over delivering".

TODAY: Part 5 - Managing Your Company's Online Reputation.

Reputation Management

If you get it right by delivering on your promises, over-deliver where you can and deliver in such a way that it will increase your BRAND, you should start to work on the next step to build your brand.



It is called "Reputation Management" and for some reason many companies, big and small, just don't get it.

In the days before the Internet "Reputation Management" may not have been as important as it is today because information was not as easily available.

But in the age of social media and technology, it is sometimes easy to forget this fact:

Just as the Internet can have a positive effect on your business, it can also have some extremely damaging effects.

As you probably know, before choosing a local company to do business with, many consumers go online to find out what other people are saying about them.

While this can work in your favor if your BRAND has an overall positive online image, it can stop you dead in your tracks if there is more negative than positive things posted about you online.

Unfortunately, many small business owners fail to keep up with what consumers are saying about their products and services. As a result, they experience a slump in sales.

A recent survey in the USA showed that up to 60% of buyer's look for reviews online before they buy and 80% change their mind if they see bad reviews.

Here is an example of how United Airlines in the US failed to understand the power of online "Reputation Management".

A relatively unknown singer and songwriter in the US (Dave Carroll) traveled with United Airlines and they broke his guitar. He lodged a complaint with the Airline and they told him to get "stuffed".



For 9 months he tried to get them to admit guilt and compensate him. He failed...

Our songwriter then wrote a song called “United Breaks Guitars” and he recorded it, made a video of the song, and uploaded it to YouTube.

The song went viral – to date about 20 million people have seen it.

What do you think this did to the airline’s reputation?

United Airlines’ share price dropped by 10% within a month, decreasing its value with \$180 million.

You can watch the video on YouTube. Just search, ***Song: United Breaks Guitars.*** It is a nice song – you will like it!

United contacted Mr. Carroll and offered payment to make the video go away but he changed his mind.

His song and newfound fame made him millions, he even wrote a book about it and 2 other songs in an effort to increase his own brand and make more money.

He suggested to United to donate the money they wanted to pay him to a charity.

So the question is – What can or what should United Airlines have done about this?

It is a very difficult question and something you need to try and figure it out yourself – what would you do if it were your business?

Let’s play the “what if” game...

Fact 1: Everyone (millions at least) knows about United’s mistake. It is done and it is out there and people are talking about it.

Fact 2: Until it gets boring enough or until Mr. Carrol doesn’t make money (capitalize) from it anymore, it is not going away.

What if: United also starts “capitalizing” on their own mistake and build on the “United Breaks Guitars” theme or brand?

What if: United admits its mistakes and as a way to say they are sorry give special “broken guitar” keyrings to every customer? [They can even stamp

each keyring with a unique serial number to make them limited edition collectable items.]



What if: United Airlines makes donations to charity by building a children's home, in the shape of a broken guitar, or a care center, or rehabilitation center to help people who made mistakes in their lives to get back on track to the path of victory?

What if: United Airlines does nothing?

What will YOU do to save YOUR business?

Dealing With Bad Reviews And Bad People.

The truth is that you cannot control what others say about your business or your products online. However, just because you can't control what is being said does not mean you should ignore them about what they say.

There are basically 4 *reasons* why bad things are being said about your business.

- You made a mistake, you didn't listen to your customer when they complained, you did fix the problem and the bad online reviews you receive is your "punishment". The United Airlines example above falls in this category.
- You had a bad day - things just went horribly wrong - you made promises you couldn't keep because of situations out of your control. Yet you tried your nut to keep the client calm and happy, but to not avail. To "*get you back*" they post a bad review. You will see these reviews on travel blogs

where a client had a bad experience. It could be something small or big. One bad review I saw was about a dam that broke 10 miles away from a small town and there was no running water in the town or in the hotel. The client couldn't have a shower. He was very upset!

- Your competition wants to "kill" your business. This is becoming an increasing problem for small business owners. You did nothing wrong and yet these nasty reviews suddenly pop's up, regularly enough to harm your business in a big way. This can happen to any small business; For example, your competition, the new pizza place down the street could post, under a false name, a bad online review saying you make ugly tasteless pizzas.
- Professional reputation destroyers. They are called the "**Hyenas**". They prey on the satisfaction of destroying other people's success and reputation; for them it is like a drug, it gives them a mental "high". They are not unhappy customers, in fact, chances are they don't know who you are and have never bought anything from you.



So how do you deal with these types of reviews?

Bad Reviews

As hard as it is to get negative (legitimate) online reviews, it is your responsibility to keep calm, think carefully before you act, and put a plan in action to get the client back on your side.

Try to understand the client's point of view, be cool about it and decide what measures you are going to put in place to avoid a similar mistake in the future.

Write him/her a personal private letter of apology, sent him a free gift, tell him what your company is going to do to prevent a similar incident in the future, phone him, invite him for coffee.

When you are "friends" again, do what you can to get the client to remove the bad review or to post a follow-up review accepting your apology.

Never argue with the client and never shift the blame. Apologize publicly with no reservations and no “buts”. When you contact the client with the aim to win him back, do it privately, not on the public forum.

Customers do not always realize what huge negative effects their online comments or reviews can have on a small business. Try to understand this.

LOOK: One of the BEST strategies to avoid bad reviews is to always provide the best service or products possible. When you do this, the experience customers have with your business will be positive.

On top of that though, it’s also a good idea to request your happy customers to leave a positive review. Give them something nice if they do; why not send them a key ring.

Simply asking; *“If you enjoyed our service, please leave a positive review on our website or on Trip Advisor”* is a great way to get someone to write about you if they otherwise wouldn’t.

There is also a bit of good news: In a survey, done by a business newspaper group, where customers were contacted after they left bad reviews, they were asked if they would do it again now that they understand their responsibility and implications of a bad review.

Many said NO.

They said they will spend a little more time thinking about what to “put out there” in the online world. Many said they would stop speaking their mind in moment of rage.

We all know that it is human nature; it is easier to say something negative and nasty than to say something positive about someone else or someone else’s business.

Once you understand human behavior a little better, your reputation management will become a little easier. Spend time to study human behavior and you will see a different side to men.

You can also manage your online brand’s reputation with SEO techniques and we will share a few ideas on this little later below.

Bad People

Now that you know how to deal with bad (legitimate or *gray area*) reviews, what do you do if you are dealing with bad people that want to destroy your brand & reputation for their own satisfaction or gain.

Competitors that leave bad reviews do it to harm you – it has nothing to do with your products or services or your brand. Understand that. It is not about you it is about their jealousy!

Example 1:

There was a legal case about a year ago where a new up-market restaurant was about to open its doors in New York. Its opening date was all over the news and everyone was excited and couldn't wait to book a seat.

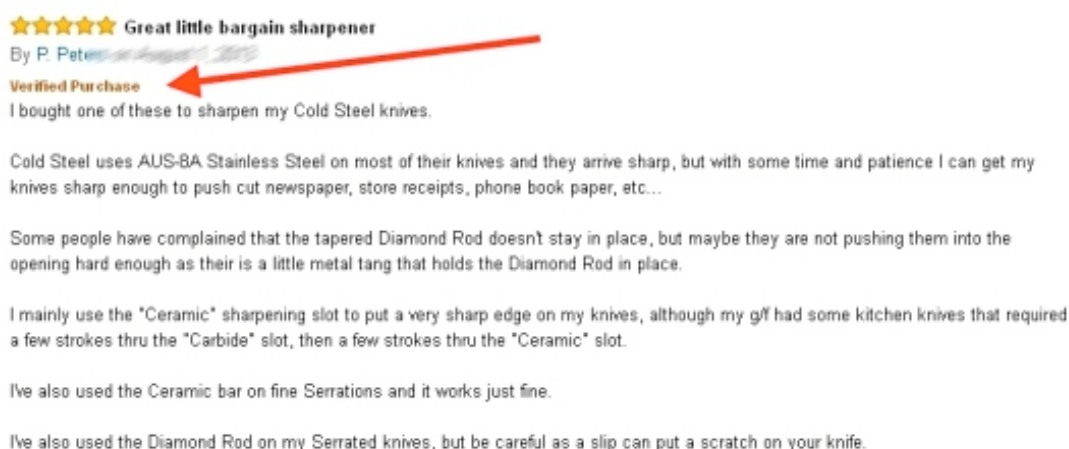
But a few hours before they opened their doors for the first time someone posted a negative customer review about their bad service and terrible food. The restaurant started a legal case against the person and the authorities hunted the person down and took him to court. He was sued for millions.

Example 2:

Amazon's entire e-commerce system relies heavily on customer reviews about the products they list on their platforms.

I'm not sure if it is still the case, but for a while, people were not allowed to post a comment or review on a product unless they bought it directly from Amazon.

That is why - when you look at product reviews on Amazon, they specify each review with the words: "Verified Purchase". It keeps the bad people and "hyenas" away.



Dealing with “Hyenas”

Dealing with reviews from “hyenas” is like dealing with a suicide bomber. They have nothing to lose and you will never change their minds.

But what do you do?

How do you deal with false or inappropriate comments from these kinds of people?

Do you confront them directly?

No –absolutely never! They are typically people who don’t understand that what they are doing is damaging your business. Maybe they do, but they don’t care. They are always right and ready for a fight. For them it is a game and it is about the emotional “high” they get - nothing else.

The Queensland Government in Australia (on their business and industry portal) advises local business owners to do the following:

Ask the Web-Master for false or inappropriate reviews to be removed.

If you believe that a review is false or malicious (e.g. has been posted by a competitor), or breaks the site rules (e.g. contains profanity, personal attacks or private information), contact the site and ask for it to be removed. However, be aware that the site may not agree with your assessment, or may be slow to remove a review even if they do agree with you.

You can visit the Queensland Governments website at the URL below:

www.business.qld.gov.au

Professor Pierre De Vos, a constitutional law expert, in Cape Town, has this to say about online defamation:

"There is something about Internet websites and social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter that seem to bring out the worst in people. Otherwise reasonably decent people who might well carefully weigh their words (and may be polite and generous to friends and acquaintances in private) can become raving hatemongers and irresponsible tattletales on these platforms. In theory, they expose themselves to defamation claims or even – in extreme cases – contempt of court proceedings."

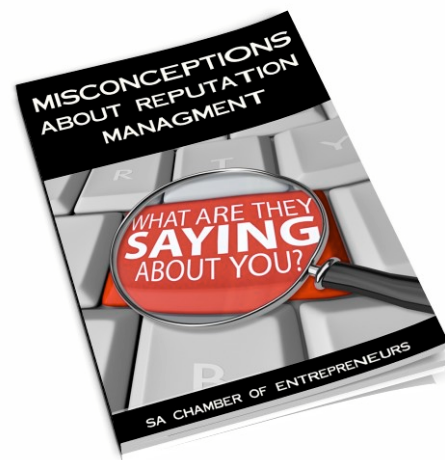
Priscilla Blackadder, an attorney who is widely regarded as a social media law specialist, offers the following advice on the issue of online defamation.

"The best thing to do is if you have been accused of defaming someone on social media is to take down the offending material and offer an apology to the person. If they accept the apology, that will be the end of it. If they do not, you should speak to a lawyer about the next steps. The Golden Rule for avoiding potential defamation claims on social media is to keep in mind that anything you post could potentially be used as evidence in a defamation proceeding. Even if you delete posts, technology has advanced to the point where deleted data is recoverable. Therefore the golden rule for posting materials online is, don't post anything that you would not want a judge to judge on. If you honestly feel that a judge would look at the materials and vindicate you then it is probably fine. But if you honestly don't think you would get that vindication and support – THEN DON'T SAY IT!"

The SA Chamber of Entrepreneurs (SACE) has a little book on their website that you can download for free.

It deals with the 10 biggest misconceptions some local business owners have about their online reputation.

You can download this little book at the URL below:



<http://www.sa-chamber.co.za/sace-reputation-management-report/>

To Re-Cap:

To deal with bad online reviews is not easy. It is in many cases a personal attack on you and your business. The downside is that you have spent all this effort to build a brand and now you get pretty much the opposite of what you were aiming for.

When this happens, you should use all possible means available to try and fix your reputation and get things back on track.

As we learned, reputation management is something that you can do in person through personal contact, interviews and statements, but these days, your reputation is more of an online issue and needs to form part of your "SEO" (Search Engine Optimization) program and business strategy.

So what now....

The simple question is; when someone searches for your brand, what do they find? Is it good?

There are three outcomes here:

- Your business doesn't show up at all (bad)
- Your business shows up but with mainly bad reviews (worse)
- Your business shows up and looks great (good!)

SEO is a technique that involves getting any given web page or website to the top of the organic search rankings.

This means that when someone looks for your brand online, you can define what comes up first.

Of course the ideal scenario here is that it's your website that comes up first. This way, you can completely control the first impression that people get about your business and determine exactly what they first read about you.

But at the same time though, you also want to ensure that positive reviews show above negative ones.

To do this, you might have to perform some SEO on the positive reviews. At the same time you also need to try and ensure that you have more positive reviews online than negative.

If you can't do the SEO work yourself, your best option will be to contact a local SEO expert or Reputation Management Consultant to help you.



This is it for Part 5: Thank you and good luck.

Next week, in the final module of this mini course we will quickly look at **Re-Branding**; this is when your reputation and brand is ruined to such an extent that it would be better to start from scratch and build a new brand.