



It is not easy getting a “5 star” rating for your service 100% of the time. We all drop the ball now and then.

Our customers have the right to demand what they paid for or to ask for their money back if they are not happy.

THAT is the game we as entrepreneurs signed up for and the game we play. When you play *dirty*, your reputation and brand will suffer.

This little report is to help the local business owner understand the importance of Reputation Management and how to deal with bad online reviews.

Do you KNOW what is being said about YOUR business online?

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 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 because consumers are choosing their competitors with solid online reputations.

What's stopping some companies from managing their online reputations?

There are several reasons:

One of the main reasons is that they have some misconceptions about managing their online image – some think it's not a big deal, some think no one is talking about them, and some just don't realize how damaging a bad online reputation can be to their bottom line.

Here are 10 common misconceptions about online reputation management that many small businesses have, along with clarifications to help you get a better understanding:

Misconception #1: People are not talking about Your Company online

Whether it is chatting with a friend via Facebook, or posting an official review on local business listing site, chances are that someone somewhere has talked about your company online at some point.

Many companies do not take the time to figure out what is being said about them simply because they don't think anyone is talking about them.

Contrary to popular belief, potential customers can easily find this information just by doing a search for your company name.

If they come across a lot of negativity surrounding your company, chances are that they will choose a competitor over you.

To find out if people are talking about your company, you can perform random searches for your company name on the different search engines, such as Google, Yahoo, and Bing. This will give you some insights as to what is being said about your business and who is saying it.

Misconception #2: It's OK to ignore what is being said about you online

Some companies are aware that negative things are being said about them online, but they choose to ignore it. This will not make them simply go away.

Things on the Internet have a way of going viral when we least expect it. That's why it is important to keep on top of what is being said about your company online and delicately, but immediately, manage any negative comments that may appear.

One bad comment can wipe out years of having a strong reputation. Even worse, it can take quite a bit of time to overcome once the damage is done.

So to be safe, periodically figure out what is being said about your business and take measures to soften the blow.

Misconception #3: You don't need to respond to customer reviews

Responding to customer reviews shows your customers that you are listening to what they have to say and care about their satisfaction; not only the customers who wrote the negative review, but also potential customers who are silently watching.

Ignoring negative comments about your company can come off as "uncaring," which is the last thing you want potential customers to think about your business.

As a matter of fact, it is best to respond to both positive and negative comments for the best results. Although negative comments deserve immediate attention, don't forget to let your happy customers know that you are paying attention to them as well.

Misconception #4: It's OK to respond angrily when a customer bad-mouths Your Company

As with any other type of customer service interaction, it is never okay to respond to a customer in an angry fashion. Some companies believe that this will help them redeem themselves in the public eye, but it's actually even more damaging.

It is important that all of your online customer interactions are handled in a friendly and professional manner. The internet is not a "one on one" type of interaction; there is an unlimited audience, so people are watching.

Anyone searching out your company on the Internet will have access to your response and an angry retort will only inflame the situation and add credence to any "bad-mouthing" that may have been said about your company.

Instead of responding emotionally, objectively listen to what is being said, identify the facts of the problem and come up with a solution. Then, respond in an understanding and professional manner with what you have discovered and your plan for solution.

Misconception #5: You don't need to worry about your reputation until it is tarnished

This is a serious mistake.

As stated above, it is much more difficult to repair a damaged reputation than to maintain a positive image. It is actually easier to build a reputation out of nothing at all than it is to repair your reputation once it has been tarnished.

Online reputation management involves so much more than just responding to negative comments. It involves being proactive and monitoring what your customers are saying and responding accordingly.

It also involves producing positive content related to your company and industry and distributing it in various places online.

This way, if something negative does happen to come up, it can be buffered by all of the positive information surrounding your company on the internet.

To avoid having the huge task of re-building a positive image for your company down the road, it is important to take steps right now to build a strong, positive reputation for your brand.

Misconception #6: You can control what others are saying about Your Business online

No, you cannot control what others choose to post about your business online.

However, just because you can't control what is being said does not mean you should ignore it all together.

Stay on top of things, respond to those comments in a positive manner, and appropriately handle the situation at hand.

Misconception #7: Search engine optimization is not important when it comes to your reputation

Not only is SEO key to your marketing efforts, it is also key in controlling the type of information that shows up about your company on the first page of Google and other search engines.

If your company is not performing any SEO, you run the risk of having any negative comments and remarks about your company show up high in the search results.

Therefore, every business should implement SEO strategies that keep the "positive" content ranking high while pushing any "negative" content to the bottom of the search results.

Misconception #8: It's easy to cover up a negative online reputation

No, it is actually impossible to cover up a negative reputation online. Once things are out there, they are out there. Beyond that, trying to cover up anything only intensifies the negative response and makes it grow exponentially.

If you find that your company's reputation is under attack online, dig deeper to find out what the underlying cause of this attack is and correct the behavior that has provoked these negative comments.

This will not only stop the attack, but will show goodwill that your company is able to make corrections and respond to your customers' wants and needs.

Misconception #9: You need to have all 5-star reviews

As the saying goes, "If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is," fits here. Having all glowing reviews could make your company sound too good to be true, since all organizations have their downfalls.

Some companies make the mistake of paying people to write rave reviews about their products and services. But the fact is that most consumers can usually tell the difference between an authentic review and a fake one.

So avoid this practice at all costs. Not only is it unethical, but it's also against most review sites' policies.

Instead, encourage your customers to post their honest reviews, which will likely have both positive and negative. But if your products and services are great, most of the feedback provided should be great as well.

Misconception #10: Your employees can't hurt your company's online reputation

Actually, employees can cause a great deal of harm to your company's reputation. When employees post negative rants about customers, policies, managers or co-workers they reflect badly on your organization.

Additionally, posting inappropriate photos of things that happen within the workplace not only damages your reputation, but it also sets your company up for potential lawsuits.

This is why it is crucial to all businesses, large and small, to have a social media policy in place. Make sure your employees are vividly aware of the consequences associated with unprofessional social media practices in regards to your company.

It is easy to overlook the impact that your online reputation can have on your ability to generate new leads, sales, and profits until it is too late. However, it's not too late to get started with reputation initiatives that can ultimately save your business.

Good Luck,

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