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# White Paper

# Protecting Your Brand Using Online Reputation Management Techniques

## The answer:

### **Protecting Your Brand Using Online Reputation Management Techniques**

As the owner of a website or company, are you truly aware of what is being said about you and your company? People talk to each other about nearly every company they have an experience with, and that word of mouth can have a big impact on your business. Do you know what customers, former employees, and your competition are saying about you?

Thanks to the internet, information travels more quickly than ever. To find out what your customers and potential customers know about you, you need to find out what information exists about your product. Finding out what is being said is the first step in determining how word of mouth is effecting your organization.

We know that customers are increasingly relying on the internet to help make purchasing decisions. While a large majority makes actual purchases offline, customers spend time online researching and reviewing what is being said about a product to determine whether they should buy. The boom in blogs, forums, and message boards used by online customers (called consumer generated media or CGM) means that information posted by customers appears on search engines in just hours. As a business owner, it is vital that you spend time actively tracking what is being said about your product, especially if it is negative. When you know what is being said, you can take steps to either correct internal issues or combat untrue information that your customers are reading.

As a business owner, you already know the value of having a good business reputation. A good reputation means that your customers trust you, have confidence in your products or services, and come back to you for future purchases. This translates to revenue growth and increased profitability, the goal of every business. Accordingly, a poor business reputation leads to falling customer confidence and reduced profits. The importance of information to consumers means that false information, harmful gossip, and negative reviews spread far more quickly than you may realize. By the time you hear about the negative things being said, it may be too late to fix the problem.

This is where online reputation management comes in. Before the internet boom, companies could count on the fact that news moved slowly, and that they had plenty of time to develop a plan to deal with any potential problems. However, today's growth in consumer generated media means that any member of the public can rapidly air their opinions to a large audience. Customers trust opinions from other customers, and this means that bad reviews from your clients can destroy the brand image you have attempted to build. However, it's not just customers that you need to think about. Former employees, competing businesses, and anyone with a reason to attack your company can put negative information out there for your customers to read. In some cases, this includes vicious gossip and untruths that can damage your company. For some companies, these lies end up in the hands of traditional media (like television and news papers) and can create a real public relations mess.

This is why online reputation is important for business owners. When customers use the internet to find out more about your company or product, you want them to see positive information and a high ranking on search engines. Try pulling up a search for your company or product name. Hopefully, you are listed in the top few results. Then take a few minutes to see what else comes up on the first pages of the search engine results. What are those other sites telling your potential customers? Your customers are getting the same results you are, so look at what stands out about your company as you glance at the results. Is it information that is positive, true, and up to date? What do people say about your company on forums and blogs related to your industry?

People from all age groups, economic brackets, and in every geographic area are using the internet to research their purchasing decisions. When your potential customers pull up your brand or company name, negative information can lead to a number of other problems in sales, investor relations, employee recruitment, and all other areas of image and reputation. In other words, bad information can damage your brand.

The process of using online reputation management combines traditional marketing and public relations tools with search engine marketing to improve the visibility of your company. High search engine rankings for your site and sites that contain positive information about you are the goal. As more positive information about your company is added to search engine rankings, sites that contain negative information are pushed further down the list, making them less visible to your customers. Researchers have found that most search engine users look at only the first page or two of results when they search, so increasing the number of sites that have positive information about your company can rapidly improve the chances your customers will see good information about you. The end result is an increase in your positive web presence, which will lead to better brand reputation. Using online reputation management means that you are taking an active interest in your company by providing positive search engine results for your brand or corporate name.

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