

What is Online Reputation Management?

Everything you do or say these days has the potential to end up on the internet. The world of George Orwell's book 1984 is far more of a reality than any of us care to admit. However, it is possible to control the way we are seen on the internet, at least to some extent, through online reputation management (ORM). This involves monitoring what is said or seen about a person, brand or company on the web, encouraging the visibility of positive information, and suppressing any negatives.

Monitoring Your Online Reputation

Basic internet reputation management begins with careful monitoring of all mentions on the internet. This means keeping careful track of search engine results for key terms like your name, address, company name or brand name. Anywhere that your name could show up is a place that needs to be monitored, not just Google. Remember that there are all the social networks and other search engines that can turn up different results.

The Basics of Building a Good Reputation Online

As you go about building your reputation online, there are three basic keys to remember:

- **Regularly post positive content.** You need to make sure that the information you want the world to see is the content most visible on the internet. Regularly publishing your own content in a variety of places increases your visibility online and lets people know who you are and what values or messages you represent.
- **Keep your private information private.** The best defense against any future problems online is to keep private information hidden from public eyes. Either don't post that type of information online in the first place, or check your privacy settings everywhere to make sure you are limiting who can see your details.
- **Deal quickly with any negative information.** If you do find that there is something inappropriate, nasty or unflattering about you out on the web, you'll have to counteract it quickly. Don't let a piece of negative content get entrenched in people's minds or, even worse, go viral on the 'net.

Basics of Dealing with Negative Information

It is probably inevitable that something about you will show up somewhere at some time that you don't want anyone to see. Even if it is nothing particularly earth shattering, you may want to get rid of it or hide it from the world. Your main options will be to try to delete it or to push it down in the search engine results. By dominating the results with positive content, people are far less likely to see that one item that might embarrass you or cause the wrong impression.

It doesn't matter if you are an individual, a small business, or a large corporation. You still need to be concerned about your reputation on the web since everyone uses the internet to search for information. One negative review, comment or photo can affect you for years to come. Monitor your online reputation carefully and take control of how the world sees you.

5 Easy Steps to Create and Manage Your Online Reputation

Controlling the way the world sees you is far easier than you might expect. By taking specific actions, you can manage your online reputation and create a consistent brand and image that bridges both the online and offline world. Crafting your message and delivering it to the world online is just another component of marketing. Some would argue that it is one of the most important business strategies you can use.

Use these 5 easy steps to start building your online reputation:

Step 1: Assess Your Current Reputation

Start by doing a thorough assessment of your current online reputation. Conduct searches for your full name, company name, brand or other key phrase in Google and other search engines. Focus primarily on the first 2 to 3 pages in Google's results. Put this information into a spreadsheet, listing the urls, position in results and your comments on what's in that url.

Step 2: Identify Changes Needed

Look through each of the results on your spreadsheet and identify things you want to change. If there is anything negative, mark that as a priority to either delete or push down farther in the results. For results that contain key information you want to promote, mark those as items you want to move up in the rankings.

Step 3: Determine Your Best Arenas

Now look at what is showing up most in your results. Are your highest ranking urls from Twitter and Facebook? Maybe you show up more on a personal blog or in YouTube videos? If so, these are the types of places where you can publish more information about yourself and influence your reputation. At the same time, be sure to identify places where your target audience hangs out. You want to be seen and heard in the places that are most important for the type of reputation you want.

Step 4: Create a Reputation Strategy

With information about your current reputation in hand, you can now craft a strategy for building the image you want. Focus on both the what and the where of your content and message. What type of content will serve you best? This might include blog posts, press releases, articles for directories, tweets, Facebook pages, or interviews. Then decide where this content will be published and how. This might include which social networks to focus on, high traffic blogs, news sites, your own blogs and video sites.

Step 5: Start Building

The last step in building your online reputation is to follow through on your strategy and start creating your content and promoting it in the search engines and elsewhere with SEO techniques. Be sure to have your name, brand or company listed as the author on each item published, so that you get credit for it. As you create the content that will influence your reputation, continue to monitor search results online. Track your progress and keep tabs on all mentions of your name and key phrases so that you can quickly respond to anything negative.

Once you have assessed your current online reputation and have a firm strategy in place, you can easily take control and manage the way you are seen on the internet. Keep your message consistent across all your content and you will be building a solid base that will help you both in your business and personal life.

Protect Your Online Reputation with These 5 Simple Tips

While you can certainly use different strategies to repair your image online, the best way to protect your online reputation is to be proactive. There are a number of measures you can take immediately that act as a defense against any negative information that could show up on the internet and harm your reputation.

Tip 1: Create Profiles Everywhere

Make sure that you have profiles in your own name, brand and company name in all the major social networks and bookmarking sites. These include Twitter, Facebook and Facebook Pages, LinkedIn, Google+, Yahoo and YouTube in particular. You should also consider creating profiles at MySpace, Naymz, and any new or rising social networks.

Don't forget about the major bookmarking services and Q&A sites also, such as StumbleUpon and Yahoo Answers.

Tip 2: Create Email Addresses

Make sure you have an email address in your name at gmail, at the minimum. Since this is such a widely used email service, you don't want to end up with someone creating a gmail account in your name and sending information that looks like it came from you personally. You should also consider creating free accounts at widely used services like Hotmail and Yahoo among others.

Tips 3: Register Your Personal Domains

Even if you're not planning to have your own blog, register your name as a domain so that someone else can't claim it. You can use a domain registry like GoDaddy.com or Namecheap.com to claim your domain. Set it up so that it automatically renews each year.

You could also set up personal blogs at Wordpress.com, Blogger.com, and Tumblr.com. Even if you only put up a single page with some public information about yourself, it's worth claiming blogs in your name at these major sites. Look around to see if there are other places or sites in your market where people are active. Then set up profiles under your name there as well.

Tip 4: Check Your Privacy Settings

In any profiles or accounts that have privacy settings, check them carefully to make sure you are only allowing appropriate information to be seen publicly. For example, you can set your Facebook profile privacy to hide your personal details from anyone other than people you have added as friends. The same goes for sites like Picasa, where people might be able to find embarrassing photos that you'll regret later.

Tip 5: Actively Engage and Publish

While you may have set up profiles and accounts in a variety of places online, that doesn't mean you have to be actively participating everywhere. Unless you have an army of helpers, that would be impossible. You need to be in the places where you want to be seen.

Pick the sites where your market is hanging out or where they go for information. Make sure you are engaging with people on a regular basis in those places, answering and asking questions. If there are specific types of sites where people in your market go for information, make sure you are regularly creating valuable content and publishing it there for everyone to read.

If you protect your online reputation from the start, you can control at least some of the information that appears on the web. By making it more difficult for people to hijack your name and by keeping up a steady flow of content, you give yourself a significant edge against the type of people who might want to harm your image.

How to Repair Your Online Reputation When the Worst Happens

No matter how many steps you take to build up and protect your image on the internet, there may come a time that it gets attacked. When your online reputation has been damaged by negative information, you'll need to act immediately to repair it and prevent it from becoming a long-lasting problem. You have a couple of options for damage control.

Identify the Source

Before you can do any reputation repair, you need to figure out where the negative information or attacks are coming from. Use the major search engines and social networks to see what is coming up in search results for your name. The sources will probably show up on the first 2 pages in Google, but you should also use a Twitter search or a tool like Social Mention to see where you are showing up in the social networks.

Option 1: Repair it Yourself

If you need to go the route of repairing your online reputation yourself, the first step is to delete anything negative. If it is something under your own control, such as on a personal blog in a comment, then just go and delete it. Rather than waiting for Google to crawl your site and find the change, you can also use Google's Webmaster Tools to remove the url from search results. Check in their support sections if you need help with that.

If there is something negative on someone else's site, you can go to that site's webmaster and request that it be removed. You can also respond directly if there are comments or complaints about you on a site. Addressing the complaints in a polite and helpful way will actually serve to build up your image further.

Another important step to take is to counter any negative information with positive content. Start regularly posting articles, comments, blog posts, social updates and other information that can push the damaging content way down in the search results. Use whatever SEO tactics you know to promote your positive content to the first pages of Google.

As an extra note, watch carefully for other private data of yours showing up online. If something like your social security number or credit card number is posted, contact Google to have it removed. Search their help functions for the correct url for submitting your request.

Option 2: Bring in the Hired Guns

There are specialist Online Reputation Management services that you can pay to repair your reputation. Depending on the extent of damage, this can turn out to be a very expensive option. However, if you have the funds, it can be the most effective. You can also hire these types of firms to monitor your reputation on an ongoing basis.

Be careful about who you hire to repair and manage your reputation. There are plenty of dishonest or inexperienced consultants who can do more harm than good. Get a recommendation if possible.

Regardless of whether you do it yourself or through the help of a specialist, you need to act fast to repair your online reputation when it has been damaged. A single negative statement about you can go viral quickly and spread throughout the internet. By monitoring your reputation diligently, you can spot the damage before it becomes uncontrollable.

The Most Effective SEO for Reputation Management

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) techniques are a key part of anyone's arsenal when managing online reputations. While traditional SEO focuses primarily on how to get your site to page 1, SEO for reputation management is focused on pushing negative information further back in search results and promoting positive information to the top. The actual tactics, however, are very similar.

Content Marketing

The most widespread SEO technique for building and managing your image is straight content. You can use both new and existing content to market yourself, just as you would use it to push a site up in a search result. If you can get your content onto high authority sites, then it is more likely to show up higher in the search engine results. The more eyes that see your content and your name in a positive light, the better.

While content marketing for traditional SEO is meant for driving traffic to a specific site, when it comes to reputation management it's a bit different. Your goal should be to have content that reflects your message dominating the first two pages or more of Google's search results. That's what people will see. So it doesn't matter whether it's showing up on your own site or someone else's.

Using SEO to Promote Existing Content

The content that you already have online can be used to help build your reputation, but you'll need to use SEO to push it as high as possible in the search engines for visibility. The most effective way to do that? Pick the content that best represents you and your message. Then build backlinks and promote it on social networks to achieve better rankings.

When you start building more backlinks to your content, start by looking at where the nearest competitor's links are coming from. For each site above you in the search engine, use a tool like Majestic SEO to examine where they are getting inbound links. Then you can try to build links from the same places.

Other SEO techniques that you can use include building links from high authority sites. These include posting to places like the big social networks - Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google+, and LinkedIn. However, you should also look at the high traffic blogs in your market. Offer articles to these sites that related to both their audience and the content you want to rank.

Using SEO to Promote New Content

Whenever you develop new content for building your reputation, you'll need to use both traditional SEO tactics and specific, targeted approaches.

For content that you are creating to widen the visibility of your brand, use the standard SEO that you would use for any marketing. Optimize each page for a specific keyword in the url, title, headers, image tags, and a couple times in the written content. Once it is published, promote it through bookmarking, social media, articles on directories, press releases, videos, and guest blogging. You shouldn't have to do anything particularly fancy.

However, you can also publish content that is specifically designed to counter anything negative that is already in the top search results. One way to do this is to identify the negative keywords that those sites have used that relate to you, such as the word "scam". Then create your own content that is optimized for that negative keyword, but which contains a message you want people to hear.

For example, say your product has been reported as a scam because someone didn't understand it. You can then publish an article discussing the common misconceptions about your product that might lead people to think it's a scam.

Push that up in the search engines and you've both countered the negative and prevented some misunderstandings in the future.

You should also be sure to build links between not only the pages you have authored, but also ones that contain your name in a positive light. This will lend more authority to each link that you want to promote. Keep track of all your major sites to see their rankings and adjust your tactics accordingly.

While you may have thought of SEO in the past as a way to rank your money-making sites, it's clearly an invaluable tool for managing your internet reputation. It helps you to selectively promote content that represents your brand while countering anything negative.

Top 10 Online Reputation Management Tools

With all the places on the web where your name can appear, it can be difficult to keep track of your reputation. However, there are many tools available that can help individuals easily monitor and manage their own online reputations. Here are 10 of the top tools:

1. **Google's Me on the Web.** This is a free tool provided by Google that helps you set up alerts for monitoring mentions of your name or other information you provide. You will need a Google Profile set up in order to use it. It is then managed from your Google dashboard.
2. **Knowem.com.** This service searches social networks, domain names and trademarks for your name/brand. You can also pay to have them set up profiles for you in all these places.
3. **Social Mention.** Social Mention is similar to Google Alerts, but it searches social media for mentions of your name rather than Google search results.
4. **Trackur.** This is a full service online tool that gives you a dashboard for monitoring and analyzing your online reputation in a wide variety of accounts. It is a paid tool that starts at \$18 per month. It's great for small businesses in particular.
5. **HootSuite.** HootSuite is one of many tools available for managing multiple social accounts. While it was originally meant for Twitter, you can also manage multiple accounts on places like Facebook, Facebook Pages, Tumblr and Ping.fm. You then have the ability to post to any combination of these. There are both free and paid options.
6. **Ping.fm.** This is an online service for distributing tweets and feeds to multiple networks on the internet. It's also great for taking your RSS feeds from different sites and distributing them to many places.

7. **Disqus.** Disqus was designed to help you manage and display your comments across multiple networks, such as both blog and forum comments.
8. **Atomkeep.** Though it is currently in beta mode, Atomkeep gives you the ability to sync your profile across many networks. Every time you make a change in one profile, you can update all your other ones with the same information.
9. **Twitter search.** The search function on Twitter lets you save searches for specific terms, giving you the ability to monitor the results of these searches.
10. **RSS feeds for searches.** Many sites give you the ability to create an RSS feed for a specific search, so you can monitor it from your feed reader. These include feeds for Yahoo alerts, Technorati searches, and Yahoo Answers searches.

With the wealth helpful tools available for managing and monitoring your online reputation, you can easily get stuck deciding which ones to use. Try picking the ones that will be easiest for you, that cover the networks you need to be on, and which do not overlap with each other. Be careful when using these tools since you don't want to post the same information more than once to the same place.

What to Look for When Hiring an Online Reputation Management Service

Online reputation management services and consultants have become more and more common as the internet gets increasingly complicated and difficult to navigate. For any business needing help with managing or repairing their image on the web, hiring an expert can be your answer. However, it can be a delicate and potentially dangerous situation when you put your own reputation in the hands of another. Follow a few basic guidelines when hiring.

1. What is their experience level?

Investigate the consultants' level of experience in online reputation management by looking at how many years they have been in business. Did they just start this business last year or has it been longer? If they haven't been in reputation management long, what did they do before that? Don't write them off just for the number of years. It's possible that their prior experience is related.

You should also look at what types of jobs they have done in the past. How big were their clients? What was the nature of their assignments? How long did each job last or is it ongoing? How much work was straight SEO vs. new methods of social media management?

Another way to judge experience is through looking at how many clients they have had in the past and how many they are working with now. Do they have the staff or hours available to devote to you?

2. Get proof of results

Always ask for recommendations and referrals directly from the company's clients. Just seeing a testimonial in print or video is not enough since these can always be fabricated. Make sure you hear comments directly from current or previous customers and ask those people what they were happy and unhappy with. There is always something that a person didn't like, so push to find out what it was. That way you can avoid having it happen to you.

Look at the service's own reputation online also. If they haven't done a good job promoting themselves on the web, how can they possibly do it for you? On the other hand, if they have achieved good results for their own brand, maybe they can replicate those methods with yours.

The company you're considering should have some stats for you to look at. If they have been keeping good records from previous clients, they should be able to show you what they achieved over a specific period of time. Depending on the other customer's situation, this can give you an idea of the level of difficulty they're used to dealing with.

3. Ask for a proposal

Before hiring anyone, always get a detailed proposal. They should outline their plan of action for managing or repairing your reputation, along with how long they estimate it will take. Naturally, you'll want to know what they'll charge. It might be a flat fee for repairing the damage from one problem. It might also be an hourly rate for ongoing reputation monitoring.

It's absolutely critical to ask what happens if they don't achieve the results promised. What do they guarantee in terms of rankings and time frame? What if they don't achieve those results? Do you get your money back?

While hiring a reputation management service is similar to hiring any professional consultant, you need to be extra cautious. Your reputation is on the line, so you need to be totally confident in their abilities. An inexperienced consultant can cause more harm than good, so make sure you do your research thoroughly and know what you'll be getting for your money.



Build a 5 Star Reputation
Leverage That Reputation to Convert More Customers.