**Tips To Enhance Your Company’s Online Reputation – And Get More Business**

Your brand image is incredibly important. You certainly do not want people to type your business’ name into a search engine and for the first results to be something negative about your company. Reputation management is a way to ensure that this does not happen, while you make other potential customers aware of your company and what you are doing.

There are a lot of ways to ensure that you are bringing awareness to the public about what your business is. Following these tips will help you get to a point where you can outrank any negative attention that your business may have gotten and your online reputation will be restored. Doing the following steps involves a lot of hard work, but keep in mind that nine out of ten people find out about your business online. If you have not been managing your online reputation, you may have lost a lot of business without even being aware of it.

Managing your online reputation means that negative search results and comments about your company are not as visible as all the good things that are being said about you online.

**A Quick Overview of Reputation Management**

Reputation management involves three distinct steps. You need to build your reputation, maintain your reputation and sometimes repair your reputation. You already know that building your reputation involves associating yourself with your products, your customers and other companies. This is something that you also need to do online. It is just as important that you build links with associates and clients online as you have personally, perhaps even more, simply because of the huge reach that the internet has.

The following steps are ones that you need to take when it comes to building your reputation in the online world. Not doing so means that the way that your company image, brand and reputation may be taken out of your hands.

**Building Your Reputation: The First Steps**

The majority of online traffic comes from search engines. You are going to have to do a little bit of research to see where your company is at. Search for your name and see if there are some negative comments or reviews about your company.

Don’t worry too much if there are, since there are things you can do about this. Take a deep breath, read ahead and see how you can restore your company’s reputation.

Monitoring your company’s online reputation is something that you will have to do constantly. There are tools which allow you to keep track of what is being said about you online, in other blogs and in reviews. Using these tools can allow you to address anything particularly negative in a prompt manner and keep your reputation going strong.

It is also important that you establish your tone. The right tone could mean all the difference when it comes to connecting with potential customers. Your tone should fit with your company and what you are trying to do, so if you have a toy store, for instance, you may need to be family friendly, level headed and speak in clear and understandable terms. If your company sells scientific supplies, then you may need to be more specialized in your speech and your tone may be more academic. Whatever you decide on, the important thing is that this tone is consistent in all your online presence.

**Social Networking Sites**

It is extremely convenient for your customers and your associates to get in touch with you through social networking sites, so it is really important that you make yourself available. If you are not ready to create your social networking profiles yet, you may at least want to reserve your company’s name on the ones that you do plan to create.

You should do extensive research on which social networking sites you want to join. Many people opt for using only the popular ones, but you need to see which ones are good for you and work for your company. For instance, if you have a photography business you will definitely want a Flickr account. That might not be so appealing if you have a copywriting one. It is also important that you focus on those who you are trying to attract to your business. If you want to attract local customers, you may want to stick to the more traditional and popular social networking sites. If you want to attract people from different countries, you may need to do some research about which social networking websites are popular there.

The following is a list of some of the most popular social networks. It is not a comprehensive list, but it should be enough to give you a clear picture of how social networking sites are different and how you can take advantage of them.

LinkedIn is a professional social networking site. Companies need to have a Linkedin so that they can get in touch with contacts that they already have on a professional level. There are also Groups within Linkedin that allow for further networking and connections.

Facebook is the most obvious choice with over fifty million users in the world. It is widely used by companies and individuals around the world. You can make a personal Facebook and have a different page for your business. The two profiles are easily linked together, and you can use plenty of apps to enhance the users’ experience. Incentivize people to join by giving them exclusive discounts or announcing services. Your fans are more likely to share your website with their friends if there is something that they can directly gain from it. This obviously benefits your company.

Twitter is a huge micro-blogging site in which you can update your followers with a maximum of 140 characters. This website is a great platform for conversation and tweets are a great way to get in touch with your customer base. You can look up mentions of your business here and retweet them or try to start a conversation.

Google+ is a social networking site that is Google’s own creation. It is a feature rich website that is tied in with the quality of your business’ website; at least as far as Google’s search algorithm goes. It is also an easy way to connect with customers and associates.

YouTube is a website where you can share, store and view videos. There are many others, too. Vimeo and Ustream are nice alternatives to this. Videos are a great way to send traffic to your site and to give customers a little taste of the people that are behind the scenes. These videos can make all the difference in how the public perceives you and your company.

Flickr is a photo sharing website that allows integration on your blogs and other social networking sites.

There are many other social networking sites available and they all perform different functions. This is why it is important that you pick the right one that suits your company’s needs. You also need to ensure that you have enough time to manage all social networking profiles, so don’t just start opening accounts left and right. If you need to open more, you can do so in the future.

Once you have opened your social networking profiles, complete all of them. Pay attention to detail and include all the information you think is necessary, but do not go overboard. People can only take in a certain amount of information and you do not want to bore them so that they move on to something else.

Pick the best photograph you can for your profiles. It should be professional but it should not be stiff. It is important that you look smiling and welcoming, but not fake or goofy. You can change your photo later on, but attempt to keep it consistent through all the different social networks that you are on.

You should dedicate at least a few minutes a day to checking your company’s social networking page. Your social networking profiles will not serve their purpose unless you are interacting with your customers throughout the day.

**Why Blogging Is Important**

It seems like it was only a few years ago that everyone had a blog and they used it to vent frustrations and talk about their day. Corporate blogging has become more and more popular over the last few years and it seems to have overtaken this fad. This is because blogging is a great way to keep in touch with your audience and it is a great tool to counteract any negative publicity about your company.

Having a quality blog that you update often with relevant and interesting content can help push the content you have created to the top of the results in several search engines. The more positive content that you have, the less likely it is that your company will be affected by negative publicity.

Knowing how to blog is important. You can’t just put up all your thoughts whenever you want to. The content needs to be original, high quality and relevant to your client base. Remember that you are branding yourself when you blog so think of the image that you want to be associated with your company as you are writing your posts.

Blogging is a commitment and is not something you can just do a couple of times. You need to update your blog regularly so that you can strengthen your following.

It is important to choose the right platform to work on. There are many platforms and they all require a different level of technical expertise. Try to go for whatever seems simple and manageable to you, otherwise you may find that you have a difficult time blogging in general.

When you do blog, choose your topics wisely. They should all be related to what your company does and what you can do for your customers. If you know of something that your customers want you to address, then that might be a good idea. Watch for feedback from the community on social networking sites and take that into account before making your posts. You do not want it to feel artificial and this is a good way to start a conversation.

Find the right tone to blog in. Too formal and you run the risk of being boring, too informal and you may not get taken seriously. Be warm and friendly, but try and be as professional as you can. Remember that you are representing your brand so always think it through before you press that publish button.

You should take full advantage of your social networking profiles and promote any blog posts you make in them. You may be able to link your blog so that it updates your profiles automatically with a link.

**Keeping Track of What Is Being Said About Your Company**

There are many available tools to monitor what people are saying about you online. All of these tools have their advantages and disadvantages. Some overlap with each other, and some may be good for what you are trying to do, whereas others may not be a great choice. Some of these tools are free and others are professional grade, which means you will have to pay for them. Some people prefer to use many different free tools, whereas some prefer to use just one pro tool that does everything for them.

It is really important that you know what is being said about you online. It allows you to see how many people recognize your brand and how they are speaking about it. What they are saying, how often they are saying it and who they are saying it to are all important parameters that you need to take into account. You need to know how people talk about your brand so that you are able to manage your reputation.

The internet is a big place and everyone gets to participate in it. It is no longer about being able to advertise or publish something about your company, but rather about what other people say. You need these tools to see whether you are succeeding or failing in the eyes of the public. This can be done by monitoring everything that is said about you – you need to check social networking sites, blogs you may have never heard of, forums, IRC rooms, Youtube comments and many others.

This can be extremely time-consuming and a little bit intimidating to try and wrap your mind around. The internet is huge and you probably will not have time to track your brand name manually in all corners of it, so it is important that you use the tools which are available to you for this purpose. They can help make it a little more organized and cut down the amount of work that you have to do considerably which may help bring down your anxiety levels. There are many tools out there available to you and the following is only a mention of some of the most popular ones.

Free Online Reputation Management Tools

* Technorati: This easy and free tool can help you track down any mentions of your chosen keyword on other blogs, or your blog, if you want it. All you need to do is subscribe.
* Google Alerts: Signing up to Google alerts is really simple and quick. This nifty tool lets you keep you track of web results, videos, blogs, news and groups that might be related to your keyword. You can set it so that it sends you e-mails every day.
* Yahoo Alerts: Very similar to Google alerts, you can track news about a specific keyword. You can also track stocks and feeds. These notifications can be sent to your e-mail, your Yahoo! Instant messenger or even your phone.
* Social Mention: Very similar to the above two, but focuses on social media entirely. It can keep track of anything using a particular keyword in news, videos and articles. It is possible for you to get e-mail alerts.

Premium Online Reputation Management Tools

* Radian6: Perhaps the most popular one, it looks at 150 million sources. These sources include social media, blogs, forums, news, photos and videos. It can tell you how many people are talking about you, where and whether it is positive or negative feedback. It allows you to monitor entire conversations about your brand and gives you access to one month of prior conversation. You are able to store each month’s data if you want to.
* Lithium: Like Radian6, Lithium looks in millions of sources, including social media. It also takes care of duplicate content and spam, so that you do not have to worry about it. You can also see which words are being used the most about your brand.
* Vocus: This one is similar to the top two, but it is also able to rank any top bloggers or tweeters by number of followers. This is useful for when you need to identify someone influential in a particular niche. It also filters out aggregator websites.

You can decide which tool works better for you. They should all allow you to see the impact that you are making when it comes to online conversation and the things that might need to be fine-tuned and adjusted about your reputation. They are fantastic tools to get involved in the conversation.

**Maintaining Your Reputation: The Basics**

You have managed to build a positive reputation, have created lots of great and relevant content and things seem to be going well. However, this is only the first step, and you would not like to lose all the hard work that you have done. If you do not strive to maintain your reputation, you may have a to start over and over again once you find out that something negative has been said about you. This could greatly affect your business, since nothing affects your productivity and sales like customer impression. You would not buy something, even if you really wanted it, if all you could find were bad reviews. Would you?

You have worked hard. Now it is time to start building up on the foundations that you set during the first step. Remember that you need to keep blogging and engaging with people on your social networking sites. Do so professionally and keep in mind that you are representing your brand at all times when speaking through these mediums. Never get pulled into a fight. It is normal sometimes to feel annoyed and emotional, but if you feel this way when addressing someone online, you may damage your reputation. If this seems to be the case, you should give yourself a little time before you reply to a complaint.

When you have to address a complaint, there are three things that you need to do. You need to acknowledge the customer, apologize for the mistake and assure that it will not happen again. Not addressing complaints, especially on social media, looks bad for your company. You can lose business or face a lawsuit. You also want to ensure that the image that people have about your company is one in which you care about your customers and you will not be doing that unless you take time out of your day to deal with online complaints. Even if you think the mistake that your company made is huge, an acknowledgement of an error and a genuine desire to make it better are easy ways to give your company good publicity and establish a relationship with the person who is complaining.

You do not need to have an explanation when you are addressing this person. In fact, you do not need to explain yourself at all. Get to the point and do not make people read a lengthy explanation of something that may just be chalked up to mistake. Remember, everyone makes mistakes, and people know this. Trying to correct them is an act of caring and compassion, but trying to justify them may end up putting your company in a difficult position. Even if you are not trying to justify a mistake, it make comes across that way. Skip the explanation – only you need to know the why and only you need to address it, internally, without your customers knowing.

Your reply to a complaint needs to be straight to the point and no longer than a few sentences.

For instance, say you get this comment on your Facebook profile:

*XY company sucks! I bought my product ages ago, they said they would send a tracking number and it never got here. I tried to speak to someone for ages but it was like I didn’t exist. Thanks for nothing, XY company!*

You can see how angry the customer is here. You might find this insulting or unsettling. It is actually easy to address and it can make your customers happy. It is important that you work with everyone in the company when it comes to addressing these sorts of complaints. Keep in mind that you may need to coordinate with the IT department and the shipping department at the same time just to get it done. The first thing to do is to ask for the customer’s information. Once you have it, your reply should be something like this:

*Dear Annie,*

*Thank you for your prompt reply and your details. We are sorry to hear that you are not satisfied with our level of customer service.*

*We have sent you a brand new product and have refunded your money. You should see it in your account in 1-3 working days. Your new order number comes with a tracking number so that you can check where your package is at all times. Thank you so much for reaching out and giving us the opportunity to serve you better.*

You may choose to post this on your blog with a quick rundown of the issue, or you may choose to do so on social media as a reply to the customer’s original comment. Keep in mind these are different mediums from e-mails and that you need to protect your customer’s privacy, so an indication that you have sent them an e-mail with the order number is a good way to keep the customer’s privacy while giving yourself a little bit of good publicity. In the example above, you are doing everything right – you are acknowledging that you have made a mistake and that you are aware of it, you are apologizing it for it and through your actions and words, you are assuring her that it will not happen again.

The complaint above is valid, but there may be times when you feel like some complaints are hyperbolic and unfair. If your company is quite small, you may feel like they are an attack on you personally and it may be difficult to take a level-headed approach to the entire thing. It could be that you are right and the customer is wrong, but even then you need to address the complaint in a calm and level-headed manner. Do not fight with the customer – just explain your point as politely and carefully as you can.

It might seem stressful, but this is a great way to keep in touch with the rest of your customers, too. If people see that you are trying to do the right thing, they are more likely to give you another chance, even if the original comment that was posted was scathing. Remember that everyone is much more likely to forgive you and move on if it at least looks like you are trying to do something about it. In fact, you may find that the conversation becomes entirely about how thoughtful and caring your company is when you make a mistake, but this will only happen if you play your cards right and you are consistent in the way you address any issues that pop up.

**Your Website Is Your Company’s Face**

It is great that you have opened several social media profiles and are interacting with your customers. It is great that you are keeping track of everything that is being said about you so that you can address it. But why do all this work if we are sending people to our websites that work against us instead of with us?

Websites can be tricky to get right and potential customers make split second decisions about them as soon as they land on them. The internet has plenty of websites to choose from and you are likely to have competitors in your niche and you certainly do not want to lose potential clients to them simply because your website was not up to par with theirs.

It is up to you whether people stay on your website or bounce out of it. Your website needs to be easy to look at, clear when it comes to navigation and its purpose should be incredibly obvious.

If you have a small traveling eyebrow threading business, your homepage needs to announce this. You can do this through graphics and text, but it needs to be clear. You may have a picture of eyebrows on the front and your name, your service and your cost, along with your phone number and a contact form. This is perfect because it is exactly what people are looking for when they go into your website. Imagine being in the same business, but there is a big ENTER button in the home page. Once the enter button is pressed, the website is impossible to navigate, the customer needs to make it bigger just so that she can read it and there is no easy way to get in touch with you. Imagine how much more likely you are to lose that customer than the one who landed on the first example.

These are the reasons why it is important that your website is easy to read and that it has everything that your customer might need on it. People on the internet do not have patience or time to wait for your site to load, so always make sure that it does not take more than one second.

Other things that you may want to avoid are auto playing introduction videos on your website – unless it is something very visual – and music playing as soon as people open up your homepage. This can lose you a lot of customers and this may be simply because they were already listening to something else, or they do not like the music that your website is playing.

The pillars of maintaining a good reputation are surprisingly simple and they are just as true online as they are in daily business. Customers will reward your honesty and your promptness when it comes to addressing mistakes. It is okay to admit that you do not know something as long as you can find out and give the customer and answer to his or her question. Never promise if you cannot deliver something, but always deliver what you have promised and always try to follow up.

Follow the above steps to maintain the best relationship with your customers. You can do so online through the ease of social networking sites. Let people start conversations and always reply to what they have to say. You would be surprised at how far a simple thank you can go!

**Repairing Your Reputation**

You may have taken steps to establish a good reputation and keeping it that way. The steps above should generally help you, at least when it comes to how well any positive or negative reviews of your company rank when someone uses a search engine to look for your brand name. You may be providing high quality service, engaging in the conversation and updating your blog with high quality content as often as you can. These steps are important and they can help you with a tarnished reputation, but if your company already has plenty of bad reviews or negative feedback it can be a little difficult to get everything up to scratch and you certainly may not be able to do it as quickly as you would like.

Anyone can make a difference when it comes to your company’s reputation and, unfortunately, this difference may frequently be a negative one. When you stumble upon a negative review, you should follow the steps above and see if you can solve the problem. This is frequently all that is needed. Your customer may actually recommend the brand even more after you have solved his problem than he would have if the transaction had been smooth in the first place.

If you are unable to reach the reviewer, you may need to contact the website directly. You should know that review websites usually have a system in place for taking reviews down and it is important that you look at this information before you request for the review to be taken down. Your argument for taking the review down should be airtight and should take into account the website’s rules. For instance, many websites do not allow the same user to write several reviews. If you can find something, then you may be able to latch on to it and use it as a reason. Do not be demanding when asking for this and rather refer them to which rule the original reviewer may be breaking when making his comment.

It is always better to create a conversation than to leave things up that may be damaging to your company. If someone has a blog post with a scathing review and a big following, this may lead to decreased sales for your company, less people willing to give you a chance and, in some cases, the association of your brand with poor customer service. Reaching out to them may mean the difference between this blogger’s followers buying from you and spreading the word about your services or using their blogs to spread the first post that is a negative review of your company to their followers.

In microblogging communities, like Tumblr, this is a very powerful tool that works as word-of-mouth and could lead to your company become a trusted brand that people are willing to take a chance on again.

You need to remember that reputation management is not easy, especially if you do not have the greatest track record right now. It takes quite a bit of time and effort to get it right, and you need to be willing to put in the work of monitoring, replying and creating conversation. Even if you are at a point where you feel like you have resolved your reputation issues, you cannot let your guard down. You need to be proactive about what your company can do to prevent your reputation from being tarnished again.

If it seems like your reputation is too poor and there is nothing you can do about it, consider hiring an expert PR agency that focuses on reputation management. They will help you find the best course of action for your particular scenario and guide you in how to address anything that may come up. You should do this before you take legal action, since it really might be a misunderstanding and you could clean up your name without getting to this point. Your chosen agency will advise you on the best course of action for your particular case.

**Back To Basics**

Remember that the three steps in online reputation management are to create, maintain and repair. If you start the first two steps and approach the entire process in a proactive manner, you may not have to go through the last step.

Reputation management is important because a poor perception of your company may cause you to lose income, get little respect and for potential customers to distrust you. It may also cause challenges that you may not have been prepared for initially and that could have easily been taken care of if your reputation was not damaged in the first place.

It is important that you get involved with social media since you will be able to have a conversation with customers and create the tone you want around your company. Creating content through blogging is a great way to get people to focus their attention on the positive parts of your company and the things that you can do for them.

Remember to address complaints in a prompt manner that leaves the customer satisfied. Be honest, do not make promises you cannot keep and try to keep your cool at all times. Think before you post and remember that you are representing your company in front of everyone. Always be polite and transparent, but remember that you do not have to explain yourself to anyone except when it comes to making your company better.

If you follow all the steps above carefully and thoroughly, your company’s reputation will be cleared and you will be able to focus on bringing great customer service to all your new customers while you listen to what your existing customers have to say.