



Internet Brand Management White Paper

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You run an excellent company, treating your employees well and providing superb customer service. So, it isn't surprising that you were shocked to read malicious comments in the search engine results pages (SERPs) about your company's greed and indifference.

You know that you need to react – that you can't just sit passively by and let these anonymous posters (who could be your jealous competitors, for all you know!) damage what you and your employees have worked so hard to create.

But . . . what do you do?

Internet Brand Management & Customer Generated Media

(also known as Consumer Generated Media and User Generated Content)

The reality is that the Internet now has thousands of sites where an unhappy customer can file a complaint that will be made public – and will remain on the Internet for others to read, years from now. In fact, many of these sites actually *encourage* people to post negative reviews.

Altogether, these sites are part of a rapidly growing number of customer generated media (CGM) sites where people can anonymously generate uncensored content. Although our focus in this white paper will be on CGM, it's also possible to find negative comments in blog posts – and even in comments found in response to traditional media stories that have been posted online. The techniques and strategies in this white paper can apply to Internet brand management campaigns that are fighting against those types of negative comments, as well.

A key component of Internet brand management, no matter where a negative comment is found, is to proactively respond to these online complaints. The faster that you become aware of an online criticism – and the faster that you react to it – the more likely it is that you can prevent this complaint from becoming a significant issue for your company.

You may have heard the term "Internet brand management," as it's a big buzz word, right now. Or, you may have heard about "online reputation management" or "Internet reputation management" – or even "search engine reputation management."

No matter what you call your reputation management strategy, it's extremely important that you create a solid and effective campaign to fight back against vicious posts online. To do so, you'll need to follow these five steps:

- 1. Research and Record**
- 2. Categorize, Analyze and Prioritize**
- 3. Review Potential Strategies**
- 4. Choose Strategies**
- 5. Modify and Tweak**



If you do all of those, then you are well on your way to restoring your company's excellent name and hard-earned great reputation!

Research and Record

First, you need to systematically discover what people are saying about your company, both good and bad, and where these comments can be found.

Step 1: Make a comprehensive list of your company's name (and any variations that people might use) along with a comprehensive list of your brands. For example, list your company's full name; shortened versions that people might use; common misspellings of your company name; how your name appears in your URL; and any other versions that are relevant.

Step 2: Type each of these branded keyphrases into a Google search box, putting quotation marks around each one to get exact matches.

Step 3: Scroll through at least the first ten search engine results pages (SERPs) for each term and further if you would like more in-depth information. If you are finding a significant amount of comments about a particular branded keyphrase, then definitely do more in-depth research on that term, going perhaps through the first twenty SERPs.

Step 4: Record the following:

- The URL where a review/comment/post about your company was found
- Whether the comment was positive or negative and what it had to say
- Where the review/comment/post appeared in the SERPs; for example, if you find something in the seventh position on the second SERP, that review was found in position #17 in the SERPs

Step 5: Set up a Google alert for each of your branded keyphrases, including the variations of your company name:

First, [set up a Google account if you haven't already](#). Then, here are the steps:

- Head to the [Google alerts page](#).
- List your first branded search term.
- Choose "comprehensive" for the type.
- Select between "as it happens" or "once a day." We don't recommend choosing "once a week" as you want to be aware of negative comments as quickly as possible.



- List the email address where you want the alerts to be sent.
- Click on “create alert.”

You will receive a verification email from Google. After you have responded to that email, you will begin receiving your Google alerts.

If, later on, you want to manage your alerts, just click on this text on the [Google alerts page](#): “You can also [sign in to manage your alerts](#).”

Repeat this process for each of your branded keyphrases.

Step 6: Continue to monitor your Google alert results on an ongoing basis. More about that later!

Categorize, Analyze and Prioritize

Now it's time to categorize your findings and analyze what they mean for your company. Then, you'll want to prioritize your findings so that you can create the most effective strategies to fight back against the negative comments made about your company, tackling the most potentially damaging first.

Here's what to do next:

Step 1: Put your findings into categories. For example, what web sites contain the largest number of negative comments? Which contain the most harmful comments? You might find that certain sites that are set up for consumer reviews – such as <http://www.my3cents.com/> or <http://www.complaints.com/> or <http://www.measuredup.com/> or <http://www.yelp.com/> – are causing you the most trouble. Or, you may discover that no one particular site is the source of your difficulties.

Also sort the negative comments by type. Do you see multiple comments about your customer service? Your pricing? Your advertising?

Next, sort your complaints by branded keyphrase. You may discover that a particular brand of product is receiving the lion's share of the complaints.

Finally, sort by location in the SERPs. How many of the complaints are on the first page of the SERPs? The second? The tenth?

Step 2: Analyze your findings. Do you have a particular brand that seems to be getting slammed? Are you concerned because one of your brands has a negative review on the first page of the SERPs – or, even worse, in position #1 in the SERPs?



Step 3: Prioritize your findings. What is causing the most problems by its location in the SERPs? By the degree of negativity in the review(s)? By the degree of accuracy and fairness of what's being said?

Step 4: List your top three overall areas of concern. Note that a somewhat negative review on the first SERP can cause significantly more damage to your bottom line than a malicious one that appears ten or more pages deep into the SERPs. Tackle these three problems first.

Review Potential Strategies

Now, you need to consider the potential strategies that can be employed in your Internet brand management campaign. Here they are:

Step 1 of Strategy 1: Determine who in the company is best suited to respond to the poster. Overall, it's best to stay calm and professional and be as helpful as you can possibly be. Even if this doesn't satisfy the person who initially lodged the negative comment, others who come to the site will see your professional and helpful comments and be less likely to believe what the negative poster had to say. So, who in your company would excel in this extremely important task?

Step 2 of Strategy 1: Now that you've decided who should respond, have that person apologize for frustrations experienced, writing the apology note offline so that he or she does not post before having time to ensure that he or she is using the best tone to resolve the issue and not one that could further inflame the poster. This can be especially challenging when the poster is exaggerating a situation – or even outright lying – but the point of online reputation management is to effectively manage your Internet reputation, not to defend a viewpoint or to win an argument.

Important: Do not use any branded keywords in your apology, not even your company name. If you do, then you're actually strengthening the optimization potential of this complaint, making it even more likely that the original complaint will rank more highly in the SERPs. Include your phone number in your response (not your company email address or web site address!) and ask the poster to call you.

Here is a sample response:

We Would Like To Help You, [Name]

Dear [Name]:

I noticed your posting and I would like to help you. I want to help you with your [first issue] problem, as well as the problems that you are having with your [second issue].

At our company, we want you to be satisfied with us. Unfortunately, problems do arise. When this occurs, it is even more important to go the extra mile and to satisfy you.



[Name], I stand ready to correct any problem or perceived problem that you bring to my attention. While business relationships can be 'easy' when everything goes 'fine,' you should judge a company by how they resolve issues when there are 'bumps in the road.' I am available [Monday through Saturday] between the hours of [7:00 AM and 7:00 PM]. My direct dial number is [234-1234]. Please contact me personally if there is any way that I can assist you. I can assure you 100% resolution.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

Strategy 2: Create positive content about your company, using the branded keyphrases that are receiving the most negative comments and/or are in the most potentially harmful spots in the SERPs. You can put this content on your company web site; on your company blog, if you have one (if not, start one as part of your Internet reputation management campaign!); in press releases that are distributed through online channels; and through articles and blog posts that you request be posted on relevant and influential sites not owned or managed by your company.

It's extremely important that each of these pieces of content are optimized using your branded keyphrases. Here's why. When people type a particular branded keyphrase of yours, you've already determined that negative news and comments about your company or brand show up in the SERPs. So, to combat that, you want to present the search engine spiders with multiple URLs using that same keyphrase – but that contain upbeat and positive news about your company. If you write your content without including the branded keyphrases in question, your content won't show up in the SERPs, defeating your Internet brand management strategy.

Here's another reason why optimization is a key component to your online reputation management campaign. Some of the people writing defamatory comments are SEO savvy themselves, which means that, not only are they writing negative – and sometimes even vicious – comments about your company, they are also optimizing them so that they skyrocket up the SERPs, where increasingly larger numbers of people can read them. You need to fight back!

Choose Strategies

You've been given two broad strategies to use in your online reputation management campaign. It's up to you to determine what makes the most sense in your particular situation and which combination of strategies will be most effective for you. We always recommend that you respond to the negative postings; you may or may not decide to also implement strategy #2. If your SERPs are clean enough, you may feel that isn't necessary. However, keep in mind that employing strategy #2 – whether you "need" it right now or not – is a terrific way to proactively protect your excellent reputation. No matter what you decide, keep the goals of your strategy in the forefront as you select and implement Internet reputation management campaigns.



Monitor and Tweak

Throughout your Internet brand management campaign – which, let's face it, needs to be monitored for as long as you run your company – you will need to keep monitoring what's being said about your company online. This means continuing to monitor:

- your Google alerts to see what is being said about your company; where it's being said; and where it is currently in the SERPs

AND

- the effectiveness of the online reputation management strategies that you've chosen to implement

Keep track of which branded keyphrases are showing up in the SERPs with negative reviews attached to them and tweak your copywriting and other strategies to accommodate your new realities.

Final Piece of Internet Brand Reputation Advice

Let's say that you've successfully cleaned up the SERPs, to the degree that no negative reviews are currently appearing anywhere in the top ten SERPs.

Does this mean that Internet reputation management is something you can now skip?

The answer is "no." Instead, you need to focus on proactively protecting your good name and reputation by creating and posting the kind of positive and helpful optimized content that you'd like your customers and potential customers to read about your company.

Best of luck to you!

Want to take your Internet reputation management to the next level? Don't have time to implement your strategy but get that this is critical to your business? Just want to learn more? Contact us at:

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