

“In today’s world your business can either be a victim of its online reputation, or proactively manage it.”

Greg Jordan

Everything You Must Know About Managing Your Online Reputation

B2B Resource Team



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Recommended Resources

We've put together a web page with a free assessment of your online reputation. If you'd like to know what others are saying about your business, just click on this link or copy it into your browser: <http://onlinescorecard.repgrader.com/reputationscore>

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Why is Your Online Reputation Important?

The world is so different today than it was even just 20 years ago. Back then, a business' reputation relied mainly on word of mouth and what people were saying about you. Eventually, those statements would reach their way back to the owner of the company and they would be dealt with accordingly. That was pretty much how business owners managed their reputation.

In today's online world, it's not much different. People are out there right now, talking about your company, posting reviews, creating hashtags and in some cases, maybe even websites - all to state their opinion on your company and/or your product or service. You can find out what those people are saying, and if you want to manage your online reputation, you'll need to. The difference between then and now is that the world is now so vast. You don't only need to concern yourself with what people are saying about you around the neighborhood, but possibly around the world. There are so many more places to look, and so many statements about your company to find.

Consider that today saying "online" reputation is actually quite redundant. It's really just about your reputation, and once you understand that idea, it's easy to see why it's so important. This is what people think about your company! This is what people are telling other people about your company! Of course that's important. And it's important that you properly manage that reputation, as well. But there are other reasons why your online reputation is so important.

Even if your business isn't online, you can bet that your reputation is. Before making just about any purchase today, consumers will go online to find reviews and what people are saying about that product before they actually make the purchase. And the larger the purchase, the more research customers will do before actually buying it. When they do that research, they'll be looking for companies and/or products that have the best reviews, as one would assume that these are the best on the market.

When products or companies have bad reviews, customers will likely steer clear from them for fear that they'll have the same negative experience. Likewise, customers will also stay away from companies or products that don't have an online reputation at all. When people aren't saying anything about you, customers then don't know what to



expect, don't know if people have already tried you out, and are cautious about being the first ones to do so.

The good news is that it's easy to manage your online reputation and once you know how to do it, it can be whatever you want it to be.

Assessing Your Online Reputation

Before you can start fixing or building your reputation, you need to know what you're dealing with. You need to assess your online reputation. And before you do *that*, you need to first understand what influences your online reputation. When talking about the online world, there are two main influences: organic searches and social media.

Organic searches are the thousands of searches that are made every single minute in search engines – you've probably made several of them yourself. Organic searches are those searches that are made when the user doesn't even really know what they're looking for. It could be in the form of a question such as, "How do I get rid of bathroom scum?" or just a few words for what they're searching for, such as "bathroom scum cleaner." Organic searches bring traffic to your site through the use of search engines, and they can be very beneficial to businesses that have great online content. However, that good content might never be seen by visitors if unflattering reviews and negative content outranks it on the SERPs (search engine results pages).

There's one factor that influences online reputation more than organic searches, and that's social media. Social media has become massive today, and any business that doesn't recognize that is going to quickly get left behind. However, managing your online reputation through social media is more than just creating a Twitter profile or making a Facebook page. The search engines treat social media websites like normal webpages. Because of this, every tweet, every status update, and any mention of your company can show up in the search engine results, and can mean just as much to your online reputation as the actual pages on your website.

Once you understand this concept, you can then start to assess your online reputation using search engines and social media websites. And you can do it in just a few simple steps.

Make yourself unknown

Search engines have done a lot in recent years to identify the people that are using them. When you hop onto Google, or any search engine for that matter, it's going to use the history of past searches to give you results they think you'll be most interested in. They'll not only remember your search history, but they'll also know your location, your business' name, and the industry you're in or most interested in. While this works well

for the users that are out there every day looking for general information, it can actually be harmful to business owners looking to assess their online reputation.

This is because in order to properly assess your reputation, you need to see things as *others* will see you, as the anonymous user will see you. Not as the way you already see you. In order to do that, you'll need to log out of any search engine accounts and disable personalized search. After doing that, the search engines won't know who you are and will start to deliver results just as they would to any other user.

Start looking

Once you're an unknown, you can then go looking for your company, product, or service just as anyone else would. You're not going to find everything everyone's saying about you online with just one search however, so be prepared to spend some time on this task. As you go through your search, you'll probably come across several things to search for, but here are some ideas to get you started:

- Your company name
- Brand name
- Product name(s)
- Names of key personnel or staff members
- Company name, with both positive and negative tones "Best Bathroom Cleaner, Wilmington Cleaning Supply Company" and "Worst Bathroom Cleaner, Wilmington Cleaning Supply Company"

Remember that in order to find *everything* there is to know about you online, you can't limit yourself to just one search engine. In addition to searching for the above terms on Google, also remember to search in the other search engines and the metasearch engines. Some of these are:

- Google Images
- Google Video
- Google
- Bing
- Yahoo
- Ask
- Dogpile
- Clutzy
- ZapMeta

Of course, during your search you can also search for “search engines” and “metasearch engines” to find out even more search engines to help assess your online reputation.

Look at social media mentions

As stated earlier, social media plays one of the biggest roles in any individual’s or business’ online reputation and this makes monitoring social media extremely important. But there are tons of social media websites out there, and more are starting up every day. Checking each of them individually might seem near impossible. Luckily, there are tools available that eliminate the need to do that. These tools are actually platforms that will help you track what people are saying you across all social media websites, and some will even compile statistics for you so you can compare negative and positive reviews at a glance. Of course, you can do a quick search for the many monitoring platforms that are available, but here are a few to check out to get you started:

- HootSuite
- Reviewpush
- Social Mention
- Keyhole
- Addict-o-Matic
- Brandwatch
- Buzzsumo
- Google Alerts
- HowSociable

Analyze and evaluate your findings

So you’ve done all the searching needed, and have compiled stats, reviews, and mentions. Now what do you do with all of them? Well, this is when you start assessing your online reputation and whether it’s good, bad or indifferent. All you’re really looking for here is good, as bad or indifferent will only hurt your business. While there’s no hard and fast rule for determining whether your online reputation is good or bad, there is a general rule of thumb you can follow. That is, if the top ten search results for your brand don’t say something positive about your brand or company, your online reputation could probably use some help.



But if people aren't saying positive things about your company, what are they saying? And if, after searching, you get the feeling that your company's online reputation isn't positive, how can you fix it? First you need to identify the problems.

10 Most Common Online Reputation Problems

While it's not something most business owners want to hear, there can be hundreds of things out there harming your business' online reputation. However, when it comes to the most common problems with online reputations, there are ten to look out for.

1.) **Mistrust within the industry**

The chances are good that whatever industry you're in, there are respected associations and organizations within that industry. If professionals within those organizations don't trust or respect you, and have stated that vocally online, it could be very damaging to your reputation. When customers are searching for your company, they may come across those statements and because they come from a trusted source, they could believe them.

2.) **Scandals within the company**

If the company has ever been involved in a scandal that went public, it can be very damaging to business. Imagine for instance that the company is a large warehouse who had a labor dispute with their workers before the workers went on strike. Things like that can cause much contention within the community, and feelings of resentment can linger even years after the scandal was resolved.

3.) **Personal scandals**

Personal scandals are more common than most business owners would like to think. Often, because owners might not even know about scandals going on within their company, they think there's no "dirt" there to be dug up. But, if an employee has ever been charged with impaired driving, that could be seen as a scandal, as could anything else potentially going on in their own lives. And if the scandal involves the business owner directly, it could be even more damaging to the brand's online reputation.

4.) **Hate sites**

Hate sites pop up only in the most extreme cases. If a company has angered someone, or a group of people, to the point that they want to go very public with it, they may go to the trouble of creating a website with the sole purpose of damaging the company's online reputation. These hate sites can be filled with

negative reviews about your brand, service, or product, negative testimonials, and more harmful material that can do extreme harm to your brand. Luckily, hate sites can be taken down, you just have to find them first.

5.) Competition attacks

It used to be unheard of for companies to mention their competitors by name but today it's becoming more and more common, especially in the online world. And businesses that aren't afraid to cross those ethical boundaries might use their own websites to say negative things about their own competitors, which might be your business. These attacks can also be taken down in some cases, but again, you have to find them first.

6.) Complaint sites

Complaint sites are websites that are started by third parties, and aren't necessarily created to destroy companies or say bad things about them. These can be websites such as the Better Business Bureau that works for consumers and encourage them to leave reviews and testimonials on the products they've tried and the companies they've used. It's important to check these websites for negative reviews and mentions, and work to address and/or remove them.

7.) Bad press

Bad press can happen more easily than many business owners think and if it does, it can ruin a company. Negative news stories can follow a company online for years after the initial situation even occurs, meaning that customers might be able to see it years down the road when they're searching for your company or product.

8.) False information

In the search for your company, you'll most likely come across some things that simply aren't true. This happens for two reasons. The first is that sometimes, one person will say something about your company to someone else, but that person will lose just a little something in translation. They'll tell someone else and again, the original message will get boggled just a little more. It's like the telephone game played by children, but instead of laughs and giggles, the end result can be very harmful to your brand.

The other type of false information you might come across is information that's been posted maliciously by someone who thinks they've been wronged by your company. These individuals might post information that's a blatant lie just to harm

your reputation, or they might exaggerate a situation. When you find this information, you can get it taken down.

9.) Squatters

Squatters, also known as doppelgangers, are individuals that pretend to be you online and set up social media profiles or websites under the name of you or your company. This presents a number of problems, the first being that when it's time for you to start creating those social media profiles you won't be able to, and you might not be able to start a website for your business or brand either, because someone has already purchased the domain name for it. Once they have that kind of control over your brand's name, they can use it to say things that are just completely untrue, or that completely misrepresent the company.

10.) Trademark infringement

Trademark infringement happens quite often online, especially on social media. Sometimes those infringing on the trademark are well aware of it, while other times they're not.

Take the example of when Donald Trump Jr. sent out a tweet during his father's presidential campaign of 2016 comparing Syrian refugees to a bowl of Skittles. The tweet was seen as extremely racist, insensitive, and inaccurate by the masses, and the public outcry was enormous. It could have been disastrous for the sale of Skittles, and for the Mars company, but instead they handled it properly and in the end, garnered praise for their reaction. Clearly stating that they had nothing to do with the analogy, and that they in no way condoned it, they also stated they'd say nothing else about it, as they didn't want it to be misconstrued as marketing. In the end, they made the public aware that this was a clear case of trademark infringement, clearing their name, and they scored bonus points for not using the situation as a promotion opportunity.

Already ten problems associated with online reputations, and there are actually many more out there. While that's enough to strike fear into the heart of any business owner, there might be things that can be done to help fix any negative reviews or pages that are hurting your online reputation.

Remember as you go through the many different steps, social networks, search engines, and review sites, to write down any negative results you find. This will make it easier to go back to them in the future when you need to fix them.

Fixing a Negative Online Reputation

So you know the biggest problems you're likely to encounter when trying to assess your online reputation. Once you've seen them and are aware of them, you can then go about fixing them. This is something else that will take some time, but that will be extremely beneficial to your company, and its online brand, in the end.

Build credibility

If you have a negative review on the site of a trusted association or organization within your industry, do everything you can to have it taken down. Show that you've corrected the problem and that it will not present itself again in the future. Then go one step further and ask if you can place the association's logo on your website and other publication materials. You might have to become a member to be able to do so – and this is something you should have already done, anyway.

Take down hate sites

When people want to create a hate site, they usually use a free blogging platform like Blogger or WordPress to do it. After all, who wants to pay money just to get revenge? The bad news is that these sites are extremely easy and quick to make, but the good news for business owners is that these sites usually also have policies in place to take down any hate sites that should pop up. WordPress has an abuse form that can be filled out and submitted, and other blogging platforms have their own as well. However, it can be difficult to prove that a site is in fact a "hate site" and blogging platforms aren't typically in the business of taking their customers' sites down.

If the hosting platform isn't willing to help you out, there could be legal action you could take – and even just threatening it might be enough to get the host to take you a little more seriously. Remember that if you want to go to court, you'll have to prove that the site caused harm to the company's finances or to its reputation, and that it was created without the intention of stating the truth.

Combat complaint sites

Sometimes you'll be able to take down a negative review that appears on the complaint site, but it will take some time and some convincing. Like the case of hate sites, you'll need to contact the individual complaint site, whether that's the Better Business Bureau website, Yelp, or TripAdvisor. You'll need to ask them to remove the negative review,

and provide a strong argument and any evidence possible that proves the negative review is not true. For instance, if the statement is an opinion such as “their bathroom was disgustingly dirty”, it’s not likely that the review will be taken down. But if the statement is something that’s based on fact, such as “they failed their last health inspection,” you can provide certificates and documents that prove the statement to be untrue. In these cases, it is likely that the complaint will be taken down.

On some of these websites you’ll be able to reply directly to the person who made the complaint initially, but sometimes it will be strictly between you and the website owner.

Eliminate false information

If there’s false information floating around in cyberspace about your company, it needs to be taken down immediately. In order to try and get it taken down, you’ll typically need to report it directly to Google or the search engine in which the false information is appearing. These can be long and arduous processes, but it’s something that search engines take very seriously, and if you have a good case, the chances of getting the false information taken down is very good.

Reclaim a squatted domain name

Unfortunately, the options are very slim for reclaiming a squatted domain name. You have the best chance if the domain name is under trademark. So for instance, you’ve trademarked your company’s name, and that happens to be the name of the squatted domain site. In these cases, you could show that there’s been trademark infringement and get the website taken down, and given the opportunity to purchase it from a domain name seller and registrar. In order to do that you’ll need to follow the steps outlined in the Uniform Domain Name Dispute-Resolution Policy (UDRP).

If that’s not the case, sometimes the only recourse is to pay whatever the squatter is asking, which can be a bitter pill for business owners to swallow.

How to Build an Online Reputation

Once you've gotten rid of the bad (or at least started to deal with it,) you can then focus on the good. And if there's no good content about you and your company, it's up to you to start creating it. Content is really what it's all about when it comes to building an online reputation, and there are a few ways you can do it.

Rank on the first page of Google

That's the dream, isn't it? Ranking within the first page of Google? When this is your dream, it's a big one, as getting into Google's top results isn't an easy task. After all, there are millions of websites out there, and you want to be within the top ten or twelve? That's a tall order, but it can be done. Here is where you'll need to really start ramping up the content, usually in the form of a website, using keywords and including appropriate images, and then promoting, promoting, promoting to get the traffic you're looking for. That traffic will be what's going to boost your page ranking and help get you onto that first page.

Register domains

Of course you're going to want to register a domain name that will be the address for your main website. However, when you register just *one* domain name, that's the only one you own. And if someone wants to create a hate site or a squatter site, they can still create a site of the same name, just with a different extension. Because of this, you need to not only register your main domain name, but also those with .net, .org, or other applicable extensions.

Register your business with Google

Would you believe that there are thousands, and maybe even millions, of businesses that have not registered with Google? It's hard to believe, but it's true. Registering your business with Google ensures that no one else will do it for you, and that all the information that's registered will be accurate and true.

Create a profile across all social networking platforms

Again, claiming your name across all social networking platforms will eliminate the possibility of anyone else doing so. Once you have your profiles set up, start interacting! Remember that every status update, every tweet, and every profile is treated as its own

individual web page. By updating them regularly, you're also being more active within the search engine rankings, and moving yourself and your brand closer to the top of them. Of course, you'll want to make sure you're on the biggest two - Facebook and Twitter - but there are many more that you'll want to sign up for as well, if you haven't already. Some of them are:

- LinkedIn (personal page)
- LinkedIn Company page
- Google profile (personal)
- Google Maps (for businesses, if your business has an actual physical location)
- SlideShare
- YouTube
- Instagram
- Flickr

Monitor social networks for mentions

Here you need to go back and find all those tools that will help you monitor everything being said about you across all social networks. Once you start monitoring them and seeing what people are saying, it's important that you interact with your followers and people mentioning you. Remember that's one of the best things about social networking - you get to communicate directly with your customers and potential customers. So use it!

Start a blog

A blog works to help your online reputation in two ways. Firstly, it helps establish you as an expert in your field. On your own blog you can talk not only about the products and services you offer, but also about anything and everything in your industry. You can address concerns, give tips, offer advice, and do so much more to show that you are the expert in your industry and that when customers are looking for your product and/or service, they should choose you.

Blogs also help build your online reputation because they're an opportunity to create more content. And the more content you create, the better your ranking in the search engines, and there will be more of the good to outweigh the bad.

Create more than one website

Again, every time you're mentioned online, it's going to show up in a SERP somewhere. And the more of those results you own, the better it is for your online reputation. Signing up across multiple social media networks is a good way to do this, and having a second website is also a great way to do it. Not only will you own more of the results that show up, but you can also make it so that the two websites work together so that they both rank higher in the search engine pages. By creating links on one website that direct the user back to the other website, this increases both site's ranking in the eyes of the search engines. Both search engines will rank better and you'll own the top results on the search results page. It's a win-win-win!

Start the presses!

What you're looking for is good press, and who do you trust more than anyone to give you and your company good press? You of course! By sending out a press release, you're able to "get the word out" to the public and get them talking about your product and your company. This not only gives you a chance to tell people how great you are, but also gets people to your blog, your website, your forums, and on message boards. And while they're there, they'll be talking about you and your product. And the more people are talking and the more they know about you, the better your online reputation will be.

Protecting Your Online Reputation

So you've done everything you can to fix your online reputation, and you've even taken some proactive steps to improve it and make it even better. Now, you want to make sure all that hard work wasn't for naught. While you might have built up your online reputation to something that you can be proud of, the work isn't over yet. You need to protect all that hard work, by protecting your online reputation. Here are a few ways you can do it.

Use privacy settings

Social media is a great thing, but it can share much more information than you ever intended. While Facebook pages are typically public, you can change the admin settings to make your page "invitation only" and can even have it set up so that comments and such are moderated and approved before they are posted. These privacy settings are important because they'll alert you every time someone says something about your company so you won't have negative comments sitting online for days that you don't even know about.

And social networks aren't the only online tool you'll need to double check the privacy settings on. Your website will also have privacy settings, as will your web host. You need to make sure that your web host has the strictest of privacy settings set up on your website to make sure it's protected from hackers - which can destroy a company's online reputation.

Create your own negatives

This doesn't mean trashing your own company all over Twitter, or having staff post negative reviews on review sites. Creating your own negatives is simply having a specific place online where customers can go if they have a complaint or an issue with your company. This is beneficial to customers because it gives them the feeling that they're actually being listened to, and that your company does care about their concerns. It's beneficial to you because you'll have one main spot online where you can go to get customer feedback and possibly see any negative reviews that are out there. So how do you do it?

All you have to do is create another website, but it should indicate that it's a place for customer complaints. Title it something cute such as "[nameofcompany]sucks.com" and



then create a cute landing page that says something like, “Hi! Tell us why we suck!” Then leave an open forum for people to leave complaints or ideas on how you could improve your product or service.

It’s important to remember when creating your own complaint site that it’s best to make sure that comments need to be moderated before being posted, and that everyone is being respectful of one another. You want customers to know that they’re being heard, but you should never allow swearing, threatening, rude behavior, or anything else offensive on the site.

Listen to constructive criticism

Setting up a complaint site of your own and making sure your active across all social networks won’t do you any good if you’re not listening to what people are saying. As a business owner, you’re proud of the business you’ve built and the products or services you’re offering your customers. It’s natural to feel defensive, frustrated, and somewhat angry when a customer says something unflattering about them. But resist the temptation to “strike back” when something negative is said. Instead, listen with an open mind, try to address the customer’s concerns in a friendly manner, and offer them something in return for their trouble, if possible. The chances are that if you can remain level-headed with the customer, you’ll win them over no matter how angry they are. And they might even become one of your most loyal customers because they’re so impressed with how you handled the situation!

Tracking Your Online Reputation

So you've assessed your online reputation, taken care of any problems that were online, and have even built your online reputation to a place where it's something you can be very proud of. You've even started using practices and tools that will help protect your online reputation in the future. So you're done, right?! Well, almost. Now you just have to continue tracking your online reputation to keep it manageable and easy to review and change. After all, you don't want to let it go untracked for a number of years and then end up right back in the same place you were before you ever cared about your online reputation.

Luckily, you don't need to be online every day searching for your keywords and trying to find comments people have left about your company. There are many great tools you can use to track your online reputation and below are just a few of them.

- **Feedreader.** Feedreader is a platform that will let you keep track of websites and will automatically update whenever something new is posted to those sites. This can be used to keep track of review sites and competitor sites that might be saying something about you. Just spend five minutes a day going through the feeds and looking for your company's name to see if there's anything negative that needs to be dealt with.
- **Technorati.** Technorati is similar to Feedreader. Just set up specific keywords or websites and you'll be notified any time there's a mention of your website.
- **Google Alerts.** Google Alerts let you set up certain keywords that you'd like alerts for. So if you enter your company's name into Google Alerts, you'll get an alert every time it's mentioned online. You should also set up Google Alerts for any comments or videos that you find, or content that you've uploaded yourself. Any time there's any activity with that content, you'll be notified immediately.
- **Yahoo Alerts.** This is very similar to Google Alerts, but you should use this as well, as it will cover one more search engine for you.
- **Yahoo Answers.** This is an interesting feed. Yahoo Answers is designed specifically to accept users' questions, and have other users answer them. For business owners, this is useful because you can set it up so that Yahoo Answers will find any questions that are being asked about your company and will send you an alert when a question has been asked. So you can promptly reply to it and keep up your online reputation!



- **Twitter Search.** The search function in Twitter is very useful. This allows you to search all of Twitter for mentions of your company and/or product and respond to them within seconds.
- **Social Mention.** To save yourself some time, you can use Social Mention which, as its name implies, will search across several different social networks and alert you every time there's a mention of your name, brand, or product.
- **Boardreader.** So your social networks are covered, and your comments are, too. You might think that's all your bases, but there are also message boards and forums out there where people are talking about your company and you might not even know about it. Boardreader will scour those forums and message boards, search for the keywords you've set up, and have an alert sent to you. You can get your results from a certain date, a certain forum, or based on relevancy.

As you search through different readers and alert systems, you'll most likely come across the best ones that work for you. The important thing is that you have one for social networks, one for websites, one for keywords, and one for comments and forums. This will cover all your bases and keep you on top of what's being said about you online.

Conclusion

Being found online by your customers and potential customers is great, but in today's digital age, it's just not enough. People are out there, and they're talking about your company! You need to know about it so that you can control the conversation and guide it in the direction you'd like. You can only do this by establishing a good online reputation, and then tracking it to ensure it remains in only the best light.



Next Steps

Ready to find out what others are saying about your business? Just click on this link or copy it into your browser: <http://onlinescorecard.repgrader.com/reputationscore>

Or, give us a call at 941 256 2468