

Akili Apps



REPUTATION MATTERS: THE 5 THINGS YOU NEED TO DO TO PROTECT YOUR REPUTATION ONLINE

Introduction

If you're a local business, the chances are that most of your customers live in your city, or even your own Zip code. You could have tens of thousands of consumers, and the odds are you've served them face to face. So why should you care about something as nebulous as your online reputation? After all, you're not a tech start-up wooing a worldwide client base. You know that the internet is important for your business, but it's certainly not directly linked to your bottom line, right? Wrong. On every count.



The internet is where people turn for answers, including the answer to the question: 'Should I trust this company?' It's where people go to talk to each other - about their lives, but also about where to get what they need in their area, or where you get really great service. If people don't trust you and view you positively it doesn't matter how great your product is - and increasingly, that decision is made on review sites, social channels and forums.

Your online reputation is your reputation, and your reputation is your bottom line.

01: Why Is Reputation Such a Big Deal for Businesses?

We know that reputation is a huge deal for businesses everywhere. Every business gets judged on how people perceive it, usually way before potential customers have any actual contact with the business. Branding efforts will have some effect - nearly 70% of consumers globally trust brand advertising - but if your customers get the wrong impression about your business, that could be your last chance to communicate with them. That's why businesses that sell online are so eager to deal with issues like bad reviews!

For a local business reputation is an even bigger deal. Because local businesses often deal with clients face to face, they rely on a pool of satisfied customers to spread the word. Local businesses live and die by word of mouth recommendation. The other side of that coin is that people can get the wrong idea about your business before you ever communicate with them at all, and all too often the chance build a

relationship is gone forever. Managing your online reputation is about protecting revenue and driving sales. A bad online reputation leaks dollars.

Your online presence is the most accessible form of your reputation. Often, what people are saying online about you is what prospective customers will find first, sometimes because they're actively looking for it. And prospects will believe your reputation before they'll believe you. Direct advertising is one of the least trusted forms of communication - but word of mouth is the most trusted.

Customers don't have to wait for their friends to sing your praises any more. They can Google you (OK, or Bing you, I guess) and see what people are saying about you on forums, review sites, and social media. In fact, since customers trust online recommendations as much as they trust word of mouth, you just can't afford not to manage your reputation.

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02: Statistics and Trends in the Use of Online Reputation in Consumer Decision Making

The number of people who regularly use online reviews to make a purchase decision is now higher than ever before. In 2012, it was 27%; in 2013 it was 32%; in 2014, 39% of respondents used this method.¹ The trend is clear. Not only is usage of review sites increasing, but the rate of that increase is itself rising.

The number of people who read reviews to determine the quality of a local business stands at **88% in 2014**, as against **85% in 2013** and **76% in 2012**. The number of people who trust a company more if it has positive online reviews was **55% in 2010**, **58% in 2012**, **73% in 2013** and **72% in 2014**. This suggests that the trend has peaked - positive online reviews will make about three quarters of prospects more likely to perceive you as trustworthy.

Break down consumer behavior and the trend becomes clearer.

In 2011: 22% of consumers regularly checked online reviews; 49% used them occasionally; 29% didn't use them at all.

In 2012: 27% of consumers used reviews regularly; 49% used them occasionally; 24% never used them.

In 2013: 32% of consumers used reviews regularly; 53% used them occasionally; 15% said they never read them.

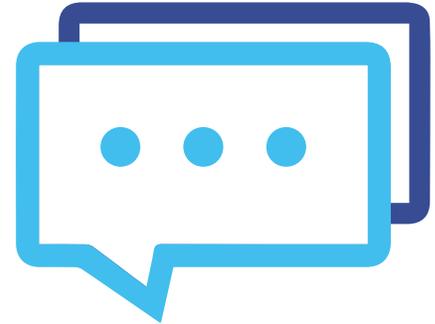
In 2014: 39% of consumers use reviews regularly; 49% use them occasionally; and the number who say they never use reviews has shrunk to just 12%.

Over those four years, regular use has risen and the number of non-review readers has fallen to less than half its original figure.

Perhaps the most telling pair of statistics of all come from Shoutly.com: 4 out of 5 respondents to their 2014 survey disliked traditional web ads, but would buy something based on a friend's recommendation on social media.

03: How Customers Use Online Reputation Results to Find Businesses, Research Products and Buy Things

The three main ways prospects will discover your online reputation are through social media channels like Facebook, via review sites like Yelp or local equivalents, or through direct search. Obviously there will be some connection between all these - searches for your main keywords will turn up social posts about your business or reviews as well as your



website. Direct search is how most people initially find a local business, but recommendations will be behind the majority of purchase decisions.

As many as 85% of consumers say they research a brand or business online before they decide to take their business there. And they're not looking at advertising, or brand ambassadors. The strongest effector of behavior is a recommendation from someone they know, followed by several positive reviews. Advertising professionals are used to the assertion that people need to hear something three times before they believe it², but for reviews and other earned advertising that number is higher and it's also rising.

On average, your prospects will want to read about ten reviews. However, 7% of 2014's consumers read over 20 reviews. And the number of reviews is a two-edged sword: consumers trust you more if you have plenty of reviews, provided that the reviews come across as authentic.

Flip the picture: as important as detail, quantity and quality can be, there's a direct correlation between simply having more stars on review sites and doing better business. An extra star on Yelp was found to be worth a 5% to 9% jump in business; a bad review on Yelp can cost you up to a 13% drop in sales.³ Star ratings or points on local chamber of commerce sites, review sites and forums can make a disproportionate difference to revenue, sales and reputation.

Finally, the trend in consumer behavior is toward the digitization of personal recommendation. Facebook and Twitter are growing in popularity as channels for advocacy, and offline recommendation numbers are falling.

04: What Does All This Mean For Businesses?

Online reputation is now more important than advertising. That's actually great for local businesses. You might not have a gigantic ad budget, but you can still access some of the most effective tools for increasing revenue and sales.

However, it does mean you're being scrutinized and reported on constantly. And the boundary between online and offline recommendations can get so thin that it disappears: a whopping 78% of angry tweets about eating out occur while the diner is still inside the restaurant.



65% of people use online search as their main source of information, and rely on it to validate information from other sources.

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Although in general, people trust search slightly more than other sources - and social media slightly less - when it comes to finding which local business to trust people believe social media more.

Reviews, social media and search are great tools for the local business, allowing you to beat out the competition and position yourself more successfully, but the key is reputation management. You'll find there's more pressure to deal with customers quickly and be more engaged, and there's way more pressure to be transparent.

05: The 5 Biggest Mistakes That Could Be Losing You Business

Not Assessing and Monitoring Your Online Reputation.

This is where it all starts. If you don't know what your online reputation is, it's like you're holding a lottery ticket, so it's time to check the numbers. If your reputation is glowing, that's great - reinforce it. If it's toxic, there are things you can do, but only if you know where you stand. Monitoring your online reputation should be a part of your general housekeeping.

Not Having a Reputation Management Plan.

If you get a bad review, what do you do? Do your employees know? If your online reputation takes a sudden turn for the worse, are you ready? And do you know how to reinforce your successes? Without this knowledge, you're checking your numbers - but still playing a lottery. Take control.

Being Inconsistent.

Your online reputation management is a continuation of branding by other means. Consumers need to know who you are as a brand. Don't be monotonous, but don't make the mistake of trying to be all things to all people. Give a clear, consistent message.

Not Engaging Across Social Media.

Between 80% and 90% of people who communicate with a brand on social media want a response - but many aren't getting it. Don't be a 'silent' brand, whose social channels are just billboards in disguise. Talk back!

Dealing with your Negative Comments on Public Forums.

If someone leaves a bad review, you absolutely should talk to them to try to rectify the situation. But not on a public forum, where they will repeat their grievances and your attempts to placate them might make you look bad. Offline, you might ask an irate customer to speak to you in private. Online it's just the same. Email the customer, control the conversation.

06: The 5 Most Important Things Businesses Can Do To Make Sure They're Capitalizing On Their Online Reputation



1. ENGAGE!

Start by monitoring and responding to what your customers are saying about you on review sites and to you on social media. Right now, 65% of the people who tweet brands expect a response within 2 hours or less -- and 20% want one within 20 minutes!⁴ Meanwhile, about 56% of customers who tweet brands aren't hearing anything back... at all. So get engaged. If you give your customers timely responses, they're 34% more likely to buy from you and 43% more likely to encourage family and friends to buy from you; 38% are more receptive to your advertisements and 42% are willing to praise or recommend your brand through social media.⁵

2. GET SOCIAL.

It's not just a matter of waiting by the phones. Build customer engagement from your end, don't wait for them to come to you. When you do this, you have the opportunity to increase the total amount of positive signal that talks about your company. Google will index that and boost it up search rankings, and any negative material will be less likely to be seen (see below). Customers who research you on social media will find your content and hear your message. A good content marketing strategy and a good reputation management strategy should be utilizing social media for very similar goals.





3. PROMOTE POSITIVE CONTENT.

If you get a good review or a happy Facebook fan, promote it. Tweet it. Feature it on your website. One ace that local businesses have up their sleeve is that they can ask regular customers or customers who are pleased with their performance to go online and recommend them. Be sure that positive comments get lots of attention. Weave them into longer form content like blog posts. You can solicit positive reviews online, but there are other ways of acquiring positive user-generated content, such as quizzes and surveys on Facebook.

4. NEGATE THE IMPACT OF NEGATIVE CONTENT.

Every business will get some negative feedback. It's inevitable. But how you deal with it can make a world of difference. The three main tactics for dealing with negative content about you online are:

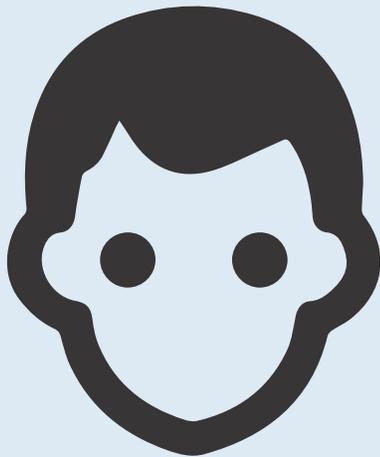
Negotiation. If the source of the negative content is an unhappy customer, contact them - by email or phone, not on a public forum - and try to put things right. Take responsibility, apologize and offer to make it right. Maybe an employee stopped short of the extra mile. Maybe the job was a nightmare and the customer doesn't understand because they lack the professional knowledge to grasp the difficult nature of that specific task. Whatever the reason, make it your business to make the customer feel better. This is an investment in your reputation that could quiet a customer who would otherwise be all too willing to take their grievance onto social media. In some cases you can even make that customer actually want to recommend you based on the level of customer service and care you offered.

Ask website owners to no-follow content or even remove it. You can contact websites that host negative content about your business and ask them to remove it. That's a long shot, though it does work sometimes. What you're more likely to get is an agreement to add no-follow tags to the content itself. It will still be hosted by the website but Google won't index it and it won't show up in search. Active links that lead to it won't stop working but if your content and reputation management plans are working there should be a lot of positive content about your business to background the occasional negative piece. Think of it like having an uncomplimentary story about your business in the newspaper - way back on page 35, with no picture or headline on the cover. Some readers will find it, but most will never see it.

Require that the content be taken down. When can you do this? Just about never. If the content in question displays very specific personal or financial information, if it's libellous or slanderous, or if it infringes copyright, you can insist. This is a two-edged sword, though. There have been some high-profile cases like this that went the plaintiff's way, so some people will do what you ask if you tell them you're willing to sue. If you do wind up with a lawsuit on your hands it can be expensive - and the site might publicise the fact that you're suing them, damaging your reputation still further.

5. CREATE A POSITIVE WEB PRESENCE.

Use social media, blogging, your website, review forums and other forms of content to create a positive web presence that you have a hand in controlling and that's singing your song. Don't forget to use video! It's 50 times more likely than other forms of content to rank highly in Google's search results. When prospects find your web reputation is overwhelmingly positive and made up of genuine user-generated content that praises your business to the skies, you'll have no problems getting the customers you deserve - your online reputation will be working for you.



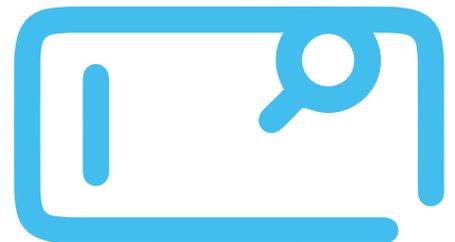
07: ABOUT THE AUTHOR

"About the author" is exactly what it sounds like. What do you want your readers to know about you? What facts do you want to make public?

Most authors keep this fairly broad.

08: WHAT TO DO NEXT

Start by Googling your business. Use the search terms you think people will use to look for you, and use your business' name too. Check the first page of each set of search results and figure out whether your online reputation is positive or negative. From there, begin trying to create and direct your online reputation to improve your business outcomes, based on what you've just read.

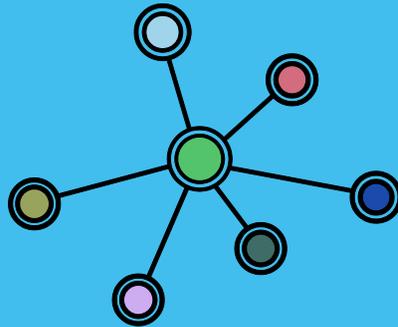


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