

MR. SEO's Quick guide to: ORM – Online Reputation Management

ORM – Online Reputation Management

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Chapter 1) what is ORM?

Overview:

Online Reputation Management sprung out of the Public Relations world – prior to the internet when it was simply called Reputation Management. Ever since the early to mid-2000's companies have begun to realize that their reputation in the real world may not always align with their reputation online. As more and more people search for information on products and services online rather than off – this has become an area of intense interest.

Astro-turfing – the practice of essentially disseminating fake, positive reviews in exchange for money or gain is a practice that grew throughout the early 2000's. It became so rampant that in 2009 the FTC expanded its guidelines of endorsements and testimonials to include fake reviews online. Along with that inclusion came the threat of \$16,000 fine anytime someone uses astroturfing or other deceptive methods to induce fake endorsements.

Bottom line – don't do it. ([According to Wikipedia](#))

Statistics

Here are some statistics about online reputation – many of them not surprising ([found from Wikipedia](#))

- 86% of adults online have used a search to find out more about a person they know.
- 75% of online U.S. adults have searched their own name online
- Of those that searched their own name, almost half (48%) said most of the search results about them are not positive;
- Nearly a third (30%) who search their name found nothing shows up about them at all.
- Almost a third of those searching online that have searched another person online have looked up a politician.
- Of those that did search for a politician, over half said the search influenced their voting decision.
- 42% of people in the U.S. have researched someone before doing business with them.
- 45% of those who done research online about someone before making a business deal have found something that made them decide not to do business.
- 43% of adults that have researched someone online when they were looking for a potential date, significant other, or ex-boyfriend/girlfriend, this makes romantic searches one of the most common types of searches there are. [\[24\]\[25\]\[26\]\[27\]](#)

We share this with you to warn you of both how important reputation management is and how approaching your reputation management the wrong way can lead to problems

Chapter 2) Review Sites

Overview:

Online reviews used to be anomaly. Some business owners we speak to still are amazed and sometimes appalled by what is said about them online. The truth is online reviews have been around for over a decade and a half. According to Review Concierge – there were 3 review sites that began an online trend – Rateitall.com, Deja.com & Epinions.com. Although Rateitall.com and Epinions.com still exist – the following sites are (at the moment) better known.



Yelp – Yelp is a website founded by Jeremy Stoppelman, Russel Simmons back in 2004. Stoppelman got the idea for the site after he got the flu and struggled to find a Dr. in the San Francisco bay area. The site started as an email referral system amongst Stoppelman, Russel and the people in their extended network. Then in 2005 the site was redesigned and the site began to take off.

Today the site gets an estimated 135,000,000 unique visitors a month. The site reviews everything from Doctors to Restaurants to Auto repair shops. The site is by far the most popular review site – it is rated 138 by Alexa Globally and 35 specifically in the U.S.

Yelp's primary focus is on businesses that have a brick & Mortar store-front but occasionally online businesses and freelancers are grouped in for reviews as well.



Google reviews – Google reviews is Google's answer to Yelp and other review sites. Since depending on who you ask – Google owns 70% of the search niche they are becoming more and more powerful in the online review industry as well.

Both Google and Yelp use review algorithm's to filter out reviews that seem to be inflated, false or incorrect.

The logo for dexknows features the word "dex" in a bold, blue, lowercase sans-serif font, followed by "knows" in a bold, green, lowercase sans-serif font. A registered trademark symbol (®) is located at the end of the word "knows".

Dexknows – In 2010 the company formerly known as the Yellow pages rebranded to be known as Dexknows. They have online listings in just about every major city and reviews for some of their listings as well, but as time goes on they appear to be less and less relevant to those who are searching for products or services online.



Citysearch – During the mid-2000's city search was one of the top sites for finding a local business through search. They had 1,000's of listings across the country and also have several reviews. Over the last several years though other sites like Yelp and more niched sites like Angie's list have replaced them as far as prominence. That being said they are still ranked as one of the top 20,000 sites globally and within the top 7,000 websites within the U.S.

Food reviews sites– Many people use review sites to find all kinds of things but, if you're just hungry or looking for a good meal, there are sites for that specific niche as well. The following sites niched down to focusing on reviews and information of only food related companies only:



EAT 24 – EAT is site was recently purchased by Yelp and offers discounts to the hungry for ordering their takeout food through them.



Grub Hub – Direct competitor to EAT24 again focuses on those who want to order takeout food specifically. (Are there any differences)



Urban Spoon – Urban Spoon is one of the older food niched review sites. In January of 2015 they were bought out by the Indian company Zomato which is one of the most popular review sites in India.

Service business review sites – the following sites that are primarily for the local service industry. If you're in the service business the following are great sites to be on and also to monitor once you join. Depending on the industry, some swear by the reviews generated by one particular or multiple sites.



Houzz – This is a high end website that is primarily used by homeowners looking to redecorate or even remodel their home in one aspect or another.



BBB – Short for the Better Business Bureau. People who have been familiar with and are comforted by the BBB logo on a business’s storefront can also check the business online to find out what the rating is.



Angie’s list

Angie’s list – **Angie’s list** started as a paid directory in 1995 by Angie Hicks & William Oesterle when Hicks had trouble finding a good contractor in Columbus, Oh. They’ve had that paid directory as a service for those looking for contractors and other service providers to this day.

Angie’s list keeps ratings too but, some investigation as shown that Angie’s list advertisers are sometimes shielded from poor reviews. One key difference between Angie’s list and other site is that members/reviewers are required to pay in order to be a part of Angie’s network. So the reach compared to other similar sites – like Home Advisor where signup is free is likely not as far reaching.



Home Advisor: Home Advisor is a site that focuses on contractors specifically. So if you do roofs, concrete work, landscaping or anything that improves the home or outside the home this is a great site to be on.



Thumbtack: – Thumbtack is a website that some use to find local professionals. They have a unique niche in that they are typically at the top of unique keyword searches like “Top 10 best marketing consultants in Columbus, OH” searches

are directed to their site where leads have to provide their info before they're given the full list. Currently they are ranked 3701 on Alexa.

Sites where you have more control over your reputation



Facebook: Facebook is the current leader in terms of overall social media platforms. That being said depending on what your business model is, it may not even make sense to be on Facebook. Using broad strokes, we'd advise that if your business model is B-to-C (Business to Consumer) then you want to have a Facebook page. However, if your business model is more B-to-B (Business to Business) a Facebook page is optional and possibly unnecessary.

The great thing about Facebook is that people can only "like" your page and are unable to "dislike" your page. That being said people voicing complaints can do so within the comments section of your Facebook page. Also recently Facebook instituted a Star rating system similar to Yelp but as of this writing most judge a business by the number of "likes" they have and not their Facebook star rating.



LinkedIn: As a general rule we believe that just about every business should be on LinkedIn. This is a main hub for where business is done on the internet and if you'd like to show people you are relevant in the information age you should both have a personal profile (essentially your online resume) and also a company page to allow potential clients and even employees to learn about you before you start.



Glassdoor: Glassdoor is a site where, current, former and potential employees can discuss a company either anonymously or publicly. If you are a business owner that has less than 100 employees – this would be an optional site to pay attention to. If you have more than 1,000 employees you may want to monitor the site regularly. Often disgruntled employees will share their experience with what they view as poorly run companies. Potential employees also have the ability to evaluate the interview process and give feedback on their first or last impressions based on the interview process. One key rating that may make some owners/CEO's cringe is both current and former employees are allowed to rate the effectiveness of the current CEO/Owner.

Chapter 3) Protecting Your online Reputation

Overview: As you can tell from what we've already reviewed your online reputation is as important if not more important than the one you've crafted offline over the years. Protecting that online reputation is so important if you get any significant portion of your leads or customers from the internet.

Security: Information Security is a buzzword these days and it's because it is so important these days. A website that is poorly designed or has few security features is opening up firms for loss and/or lawsuits. Make sure that you have proper precautions in place on your website and even your store if you use an Internet connected POS (point of Sale) System.

Case study: A key example of this was in late 2013 when the retailer, was hacked and had 40 million credit card numbers compromised in the process. They had not 1 but 2 situations where people's credit card information was leaked due to information security issues. This definitely affected Target's reputation both online and offline for months if not for years to come.

Responsiveness: Being responsive on the web definitely adds to your reputation. Being unresponsive on the web, we would argue can definitely detract from your online reputation. It also depends on how people are attempting to interact with you. If someone is emailing you the expected turnaround time ranges from 12 hours to a day to respond. If a potential customer tweets you – the expected response time is typically within the hour. A Tweet not responded to within the day could cause unwanted ire.

Case study: Liz Lessner is an entrepreneur and Restaurateur based out of Columbus, OH. She owns several, uniquely branded Restaurants in the greater Columbus area but back when she only owned only one – she made a point and a name for herself by responding with lightning speed on social media when she encountered a complaint, compliment or inquiry.

Takedown requests – If you come across an abusive poster, comment or blatant copyright infringement – most sites have in place guidelines aligned with their TOS (Terms of Service) that allow you to request the takedown of a malicious comment or something that is blatant copyright infringement. One area where the issue of copyright is still a thorny issue is the new domain of mobile Live-streaming apps.

Case Study: – In early May 2015 one of the biggest boxing matches of the mid 2010's occurred. Floyd Mayweather fought Manny Pacquiao Prior to March of 2015 – this would be a big deal in the business world. People could either buy the fight from HBO or go to a local bar or friend's house and watch the big fight there. Post – March 2015, hundreds possibly thousands of people who were viewing the fight in their home or at a friend's place – decided to use the then relatively new app Periscope to broadcast the fight live for free to tens of thousands to people.

This likely lost HBO 10's of millions.

Periscope, to its credit attempted to take down as many of the broadcasts as possible but the sheer volume of people 'scoping the fight – prevented them from taking down everyone broadcasting the fight illegally. The NHL has officially banned periscoping in their stadiums. The question remains how do you ban people from bringing their smartphones to a game?

Chapter 4) Asking for Testimonials & Reviews & Referrals – Ethically

Overview: So outside of reacting to a negative review or comment the most important thing for a business online is getting testimonials, reviews and referrals. This is also very difficult to achieve because there is no good way to predict if someone will give you a positive review even if you provided a fantastic experience. Testimonials are even more difficult because they are a more in-depth review. Online, the best type of testimonials are video testimonials – however, many people are camera shy. So what are best practices to get online reviews, testimonials & referrals? We'll go over some of the basics with you now.

Reviews – Since the FTC has begun to crack down on paid reviews – we would strongly recommend that you avoid purchasing “reviews” en masse from a generic website. Instead, we would stress that every time you have a good to great customer interaction you ask them to recommend you or give you a review on one or more review sites. One thing we've noticed with sites that have an algorithm - like Yelp – is that if the reviewer is relatively new to the platform they may not show the person's reviews initially. Please be aware of this.

Testimonials – testimonials are a little bit different than reviews in that reviews can be bad or good. Testimonials are intentionally positive. Testimonials are also good in that they are typically longer than some short “it's good” type reviews. Testimonials usually work to tell a story about the business as well. We suggest that you only ask for testimonials from your very best clients.

As we mentioned above, the absolute best type of testimonials are video testimonials – for a number of reasons.

- 1) People will give it more credibility than a print or purely audio testimonial
- 2) People will be able to tell in seconds if the testimonial is real or manufactured
- 3) Most people's best salespeople are satisfied customers and seeing is believing.

Referrals – Getting business referred to you online can come from mentions in an article on your business or something as advanced as full-blown affiliate program. Typically- online especially – you want to give those who refer business some type of incentive to suggest you for your services.

Chapter 5) Monitoring your Online Reputation

Overview: Monitoring your reputation online is an essential skill you must learn. In the most basic sense your reputation begins the moment you present a product or service for sale online. Once someone buys something from you the work does not end, you must make sure that your new customer is satisfied and hopefully thrilled by the product you've offered or the service you've provided. Here are some ways to monitor that.

Google Search – the easiest way to keep track over what is being said about you is doing a google search or search engine search for your business name or things related you. See what comes up and be prepared to react if something you find is not quite right.

Google Alerts – This is the 2nd easiest way for you to monitor what is going on with your brand online. If you have a term that is linked to your name or your company's name say "xylophone" once you have signed up for Google Alerts through your gmail account – you will be notified anytime "xylophone" is mentioned on the web.

Chapter 6) Recovering from a Online Reputation Hit

Overview: while running your business and interacting online you may be lucky enough to never experience a hit to your reputation online. That being said, if you do experience a reputation hit here are some suggestions on what you should do.

Honesty & Consistency – The best way to stand out when something goes wrong online is to take a step back and be honest. Attempting to do a business cover up is virtually impossible in a very literal way when there are organizations like Anonymous (a group of vigilante hackers) and disgruntled employees who are likely to expose any cover up attempts you may try.

