cPrax Internet Marketing
800-937-2059

Introduction

As a business owner, you already know that managing a business is a LOT of work. From keeping the books to hiring staff to perfecting your marketing… running your own business takes an extreme amount of time, effort, and commitment if you want to profit and be successful.

It is no secret that business owners are plagued by hundreds of different things to do and decisions to make on a daily basis, but one vital thing that is often over-looked is "managing its reputation online."

The reputation of a business will not only determine how quickly it grows, but it also determines the profit lines at the end of the fiscal year. So it is definitely something that cannot be ignored.

Years ago, it was a lot easier for businesses to manage their reputations. They could simply keep their current customers happy, who would then spread the word to their family and friends and everything was good.

But things are totally different today…

While reputation management for businesses may not have been a big issue in the past, a new form of technology has taken the small business world by storm – the Internet.

Just about EVERYONE uses the Internet to research local businesses these days, but it doesn't stop there. They are also using the Internet to voice their opinions about your products and services.

Did you know that approximately 80% of the U.S. population researches a product or service online before purchasing? Even more staggering is the fact that 72% of those that research will not buy if there is a negative comment about a business.

The emergence of certain online avenues – such as forums, blogs, and social networking – has created an easy way for consumers to voice their opinions about the businesses they patron. While some people do provide "positive" feedback online, more and more people are using the Internet to voice "negative" feedback as well.

Not only that, but many businesses are becoming victims of false information and slander online and some of them don't even know it.

Negative online feedback could mean really bad news for business owners and could cost them a fortune.

Let's say someone is searching for your type of product or service online and several businesses come up in the search results for them to choose from.

Imagine one of your major competitors having 89 GLOWING reviews show up on their listing next to yours, which has 2 reviews and one of them is from one of your unsatisfied customers.

Who do you think the searcher is going to choose – you or your competitor?

The fact is that people care a LOT about what other people think when it comes to looking for local products, services, and businesses. It's natural for people to navigate towards what other people LIKE.

On the flip side, it's natural for people to back away from what other people DON'T LIKE.

Therefore, as a local business owner it's in your best interest to start monitoring what is being said about you online. It's one thing to KNOW and do something about it… but it's another thing to not even know what's being said.

Online reputation management is simply a process of monitoring and addressing anything that is written about your business online. The actual "managing" of your reputation involves using strategic online techniques to promote positive and neutral content about your business.

Let's take a closer look at Online Reputation Management and how it can seriously impact your business…

Importance of Managing Your Online Reputation

A reputation, good or bad, is something that will follow your company for years to come. One customer with a bad experience can be the difference between a great year and an painful year for your business in terms of profits.

Once the reputation of your business is tarnished, it takes a while before the momentum is picked up again. Slow business due to a bad reputation can cost you thousands of dollars in losses.

Building a positive reputation online takes work, but it is well worth it. Don't think that because something has worked for you it always will. When it comes to the use of the Internet, things are always changing.

So as a business owner, you have to keep changing with it if you want to stand up and stomp out your competition.

For instance, the Internet has become the main tool that many local consumers turn to before purchasing local products and services. While this may seem like a great opportunity to expose your business to local consumers, it can also have a negative impact if proper reputation management procedures are not put in place.

An important point to note is that it's better for you to be "proactive" than "reactive" when it comes to managing your reputation online.

Repairing your reputation once the damage has already been done is much more time consuming and costly than starting BEFORE things get out of hand.

Unfortunately, many businesses are plagued by false information and slander and don't even realize it. But if you don't know about it, you can't fix it.

So it's best to actively search for your business name online to see what people are saying. Not only that, but you should implement strategies to generate more positive information about your business online – such as positive customer reviews and ratings.

This could be as simple as asking your satisfied customers to go online and leave reviews for you. Although there are a lot of people who like to post negative information online, there are also a lot of people who like to post good information about businesses they enjoy.

Then, there's "reactive" approach – which means you wait until you find out that there is negative information about your business online to do something about it. At that time, you try to rush and get it "fixed" while you're losing profits the whole time.

It's About More Than Just Your Website

Unfortunately, many business owners think as long as they have a beautiful, optimized website that their "Online Reputation" is golden. But it is about much more than that.

The Internet contains thousands of different ways for consumers and businesses to interact.

In fact, most of your online reputation is being established outside of your website – such as:

- Social Media Networks such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube
- Forums
- Customer Review Sites
- Blogs
- Articles

… just to name a few.

You're probably starting to see the many different ways your business' online reputation can be impacted in ways that have nothing to do with your website.

But while we're on the topic of your website, let's discuss a few things regarding your website that enforce good reputation management practices.

These same practices go for any other web properties you may have as well such as Facebook Fanpage, Twitter page, or blog.

- Do not treat your website like a personal webpage – keep all content professional and business-related.
- Be courteous in your public posts and responses. Never argue with a customer or reply with rude comments.
- ALWAYS reply to responses made by consumers – never ignore them. In fact, try to remain as engaging with your audience as you can on a professional level.

Remember your goal is to win over customers, not to make friends or enemies. Keep it professional at all times and maintain your composure even when it seems impossible.

It will pay off in the long-run. Lose your cool, and you could set your business up to miss out on massive new business and potential growth.

Negative Effects of a Bad Online Reputation

This section could go without explanation, but just to make it clear, a bad online reputation can be detrimental do your business.

- You could lose existing customers because they are also watching and reading what others are saying about your business. Just because they didn't have a negative experience with you does not mean that they won't consider what others are saying about you.

- Getting new customers becomes extremely difficult if your reputation is tarnished online. Again, many consumers today go online before purchasing

a product or service. If anything negative comes up about your business, you can almost guarantee that most viewers will pass on your business and go with one of your competitors.

- Your business could experience extreme financial loss due to the lack of new and repeat business. A negative reputation can eat away at your profits leaving you wondering what went wrong.

Therefore, your first mission as you start to manage your online reputation is to:

Find out what people are saying about your business online.

The easiest way to do so is to do a search in Google for your business name. Then, pay close attention to the results that come up.

Is there any negative feedback associated with your business? If so, it's time for a serious reputation management mission.

Also, do you have any POSITIVE reviews that come up about your business? If so, you're not so bad off after all. But how many positive reviews do you have? Is it one or two? Or do you have SEVERAL? The more the better…

Think about yourself when you perform online searches? When you see a business with glowing 5 star reviews, what do you think about them as a business?

When you see a business with negative reviews, what do you think about them as a business?

Your potential and existing customers think the SAME WAY.

Positive Effects of a Good Online Reputation

As difficult as it may seem sometimes, you should never let your reputation be left to chance. Having a good reputation is crucial to the growth of your business.

Therefore, it's critical that you focus on building a strong, positive online reputation that will make doing business with you a NO-BRAINER for your target market.

We've talked a lot about how a negative online reputation can hurt your business.

Let's take a look at the benefits of building and maintaining a positive online reputation:

- You will retain your existing customers, which is priceless. As a business owner, you already know that generating a NEW customer is much harder and expensive than getting REPEAT customers. Why risk the chance of losing the easiest income your business can bring in?

- You will be able to get new customers easily. Again, people are checking online to see what others are saying about products and services before they move forward with purchasing. If your company has a glowing reputation online, you will attract more new business and long-term customers.

- As the reputation of your business becomes noticeable, you may be offered great deals by other companies willing to work with you, or even investors looking to hand you some money.

Building a positive reputation for your business online is not easy - and not everyone is willing to put in the hard work that is required. However, if you want to sustain in these tough economic times, it is in the best interest of your business to build a strong, solid, positive reputation on the Internet.

How to Market Your Business Reputation

1. Actively seek reviews from your satisfied customers. There are several online review sites that are great resources for local businesses. For instance, if you have a Google Places business listing, you should ask your customers to leave reviews on your page.

There are also other review sites you can utilize such as Yelp!, CitySearch, and InsiderPages, and others.

Choose the ones you want to build up and ask your customers to leave reviews on all of them. One way to get them to do it is by offering incentives such as discounts. Everyone loves a good deal and many people will sacrifice

a couple of minutes to write a review in exchange for a few dollars off of their next meal.

2. Flood the first page of the Internet search engines with "positive" content about your business. Get as much positive information about your business on the first page of Google as possible. This is achieved with search engine optimization (SEO) and will help dilute any negative information floating around online about your business.

For instance, after getting all of those positive reviews from your customers, try to get your Google Places business listing optimized so it shows up at the top of Google for your local keywords. Besides, what good are those glowing reviews if no one can see them?

3. Treat your online customers with respect. Shockingly, some businesses treat their online customers terribly. Many of them are rude with their responses and some of them don't respond at all to their online audience.

Both of these are huge mistakes. Doing business online should be handled in the same manner as live business dealings.

Just because a customer is online does not mean they don't require the same respect and attention as a customer that is standing right in front of you.

Let's say you come across a negative comment about your product or service online. The worst thing you can do is ignore it. By addressing it, you are giving yourself a chance to correct whatever was wrong from the

customer's perspective. Therefore, you have a chance of regaining their business.

Not only that, but ignoring negative remarks made by a customer will be perceived as "rudeness" to other potential customers. No response from you is just as bad as "admitting that the remarks are true."

So what about those negative comments that are downright bogus? You should be able to respond and TELL THEM OFF, right? Wrong…

You still have to maintain your professionalism no matter what. Respond tactfully and honestly to get your point across.

When it comes to managing your online complaints, it all goes back to business basics: Outstanding customer service.

The better the customer service, the more sales you will have and the more recommendations happy customers will provide. This will, in turn, improve the reputation of your local business. Some people don't mind paying high cost for products once they've received stellar customer service.

4. Politely ask for negative reviews to be removed. There's nothing wrong with asking a negative reviewer to remove their comments – especially if there was some type of misunderstanding. Of course, you can't force them to remove it, so all you can do is ask. If they don't, move on.

5. Engage in Social Media and build a loyal following and solid online reputation. You've heard of Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube…

these social platforms have changed the way the world communicates as well as how we do business.

Did you know that 93% of adult Internet users are on Facebook?

However, many local businesses are being left behind because they're not utilizing the power of social media to build and manage a strong online presence.

Did you know that your business Facebook page could show up on the first page of Google when people search for your business's, type of product or service? That's IF you have one… If you don't, you should put that on your to-do list as soon as possible.

When you setup your social media accounts, be sure to:

- Steadily build a list of followers and fans
- Engage with your audience and "socialize"
- Comment frequently and generate relevant content

Speaking of "content…"

6. Content is KING – Generate positive content about your business and distribute it online. Online press releases are a great way to let the world know what your business is up to and build a strong reputation. Keep consumers updated on your special offers, corporate changes, product additions, and anything else you want them to know in these press releases.

Also, be sure to get a blog if you don't already have one. Blogging is one of the most popular forms of online communication today. Once you setup a

blog, tie it into your social media accounts to create a strong source for lead generation and customer retention.

These blog posts can also be used as articles and submitted to several different online article directories to give your business even more positive online exposure online.

The more "positive" content you have, the more your customers will love you… the more your prospects will love you… and the more Google will love you.

Whatever you do, keep the content flow consistent and steady.

7. *Ensure that all information on your webpage is accurate.* Nothing turns away a customer faster than inaccurate information. As much as you want to catch a potential customer's eye, you should not over-endorse your product or skill into something that you know you can't deliver.

What you will end up with is a disgruntled customer. The fastest news to get around is bad news, and if that customer has access to the Internet this could mean trouble for your business reputation.

Once something is placed on the Internet, it really never goes away unless specific actions are taken. So be honest about what your company is offering, therefore leaving you with satisfied customers who will be more likely to use your business in the future.

Not only that, but they will also send recommendations and glowing customer reviews your way for the whole world to see!

Conclusion

Having a business of your own may have been a dream that you thought you would never see turned into a reality. Now that you have seen for yourself what you can do, it is up to you to make sure that it continues to exceed your expectations.

Remember the Internet is the gateway to the world. If you use it wisely, you can reap its benefits. If you are not able to maintain a good online reputation, your business will feel the brunt of those consequences and cost you thousands of dollars.

I hope you've learned some key points that can help improve your business in this report. By simply implementing the strategies mentioned here, you can save yourself a lot of headaches down the road trying to clean up your online reputation.

If you're ready to get started now by taking the proactive approach of protecting your business' image, give me a call to schedule a meeting.

Thank you,

Bill Enross

cPrax Internet Marketing

800-937-2059

bill@cprax.com