



Ten Easy Steps to a Positive Internet Reputation

Discovering that your reputation or the reputation of your company is being compromised on the Internet is always upsetting. It's upsetting if the negative online publicity is valid, and it is extremely upsetting if the bad search results that tarnish your image are not true, dated, or out of context.

The natural response to discovering that your reputation is being hurt on the Internet is to take immediate action. But in our experience, immediate rash action can often make things worse. Even though learning that your online reputation is being compromised is highly emotional, it is important that you deal with the problem with a cool head.

Just know that there are solutions and that you can regain, rebuild and even improve your reputation.

In the past four years, we have spoken to hundreds of companies and individuals and we have distilled the advice that we gave them into ten easy to follow steps.

1. Evaluate the damage. Remember that the very nature of the Internet makes it easy for one person to damage the reputation of another. Anybody can start a blog, or contribute to a website that invites reviews and criticisms. Most people don't misuse the great communications potential of the Internet. But some do and there is nothing you can do about it. So if you are on a special interest website and you have a difference of opinion with another individual, there is a small chance that this individual will "get back" at you by posting a strong negative opinion or even an outright lie. Is the damaging statement on Google or Yahoo? Or is it confined to another website with a limited audience? Is the negative statement easy to find or is it only available to serious researchers? Will the damaging statements hurt your business or career or merely your ego? Before taking any action, take the time to fully evaluate the damage to your reputation.

2. Be analytical. Take the time to find all the search terms – and all the search engines—that are turning up negative results. Make a list of each negative search result. Go over your list and evaluate and list each entry. Ask yourself whether the bad publicity is based on something that you did or whether it is a completely false accusation. Do the search results qualify as defamation? Libel? Can you prove they aren't true?

3. Consider legal help. If you absolutely certain that you are being slandered or defamed and can prove your case, you may want to consult a lawyer. If you choose this option do so carefully. Make sure that the attorney you choose is experienced in the field of Internet reputation management. We have seen first hand proof how legal action taken by an attorney who does not fully understand the online world can actually make a bad situation worse.

4. Get Professional Help. The field of Internet reputation management is very new and the skills involved can be complex. Unless you plan to become an expert in public relations, search engine marketing, search engine optimization and pay per click

advertising, you will be well advised to seek the services of an experienced reputation management consultant.

5. Understand what is possible. Internet Reputation Management is labor intensive and involves the application of many specialized skills. There are companies on the Internet that want you to believe that if you pay them a modest monthly fee, your problem will be solved. The truth is that if your problem can be solved easily, you can probably solve it yourself. For example, if you are the victim of obvious slander, the offending information can often be removed with a simple call or email. We have seen this happen many times. But, usually, if you have a real problem, it is going to take a commitment of money and time to make it go away. Some company's say that they can "remove" or "destroy" your bad publicity. The truth is that on the Internet, only the owner of content can remove it. (Sometimes it takes a court order to make that happen.)

6. Understand the process: For the most part, the services that you buy from a reputation management consultant involve "moving" a negative search result down the rankings where it will be less seen and replacing it with content that is positive and beneficial to your business, persona, or career

7. Do a cost analysis. This is an important point. In our four years of experience we have made a startling observation: Victims of Internet defamation who are truly innocent don't want to pay to regain their reputation! The more outrageous the allegations, the less they are willing to pay. Emotionally, we understand this feeling. It makes perfect sense that if you are damaged you want to be made whole. The problem is this attitude does not make business sense. If you are unjustly defamed and it is costing you money your concern should be correcting the problem first. If you know your attacker, and they have assets, you may be able to sue later on, but refusing to pay because you think it is unfair is just cutting off your nose to spite your face. Reputation management is a business expense and within a few years more and more businesses will be including these services in their marketing budgets.

8. Don't be impatient. Depending on the nature of the negative results you are attempting to move, it can take a long time to get the results pushed down to an acceptable level. It is not unusual for reputation management projects to last 6 months to a year and even longer. An important point for larger enterprises: Make sure that once you begin a reputation management campaign that you advise your public relations, marketing, advertising and investor relations departments to make sure that different parts of your company are not working at cross purposes.

9. Leverage the Benefits: Negative publicity is most likely the reason to begin using reputation management services. But there is also a silver lining. As negative results are pushed down, you have the power to create and promote content that will help your business or career. Truth to tell, even if your company does not have a problem with negative publicity, using reputation management techniques to build an online image can do wonders to improve your image and your rate of conversions.

10. Be persistent. Having a great online reputation is a moving target. If your Internet reputation is important, you should have it on radar screen and you should be budgeting regularly to continue promoting a positive reputation. At the very least, you should be Googling your name or your company name at least quarterly to assure that you are making an overall positive impression online.

Remember, your Internet Reputation is a valuable asset, and it is up to you to manage it carefully.

For more specific information on reputation management, please visit our sponsor at www.IreputationManagement.com.