

SMALL-BUSINESS MARKETING

Continually develop your online reputation



BY ERIC CAWLEY

What's your online reputation like?

Today, Google your name and the name of your business. Look at the first five pages and note any adverse search results.

Are there some smudges in your reputation? OK, that's a problem.

Do you have no online reputation? That's a problem, too, because others (especially competitors) can easily tarnish it for a variety of reasons.

Do you have a good reputation? Congratulations! Unfortunately, many have discovered the hard way that you can have a terrific reputation one month, and a

totally destroyed one the next.

For example: Online reviews written by medical patients (who may or may not have justifiable criticisms) can severely affect a medical practitioner's profitability. No one — including doctors — can “manage” their online reputation by merely hoping for more good online reviews than poor ones, or by publishing, then neglecting, a website.

Instead, implement proactive strategies. Take actions before problems potentially occur. Many people and businesses are increasingly doing so to improve their reputations, and their efforts are literally paying off.

To take command of your reputation, develop original, fresh content, then post it to a blog on your website. Next, publicize the blog posts to your targeted audience via social

media and online advertising, with content so enticing that people will want to click an included hyperlink (to your website) for more details.

As your website increases in traffic, it will gradually push down and obscure the negative websites.

Also, pave a path for your company's favorite customers to leave you a positive review. A year ago this month, an area businessman acquired a competitor's company, which had an average rating of 2 out of 5 stars. The businessman implemented a fantastic customer-care strategy. Today, the company's online rating is 3.7 out of 5

stars. It has also ascended in search-engine rankings from the bottom of page 3 to No. 2 on page 1.

Achieving such results isn't easy. It takes time and requires considerable expertise in website development, marketing and writing. There are also many complex, moving parts which must all work in synchronicity. Want details? Go to bit.ly/reputationchecklist for more information on how to control and improve your online reputation.

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