

Three Simple Steps to Thwarting Negative Online Reviews

By Andy Holtmann -- 31 May 2016



Take two minutes and go Google yourself right now. You might be surprised. It's ok, this blog post will still be here when you return.

Ok, those of you still with me, I'll assume you didn't find anything online that required immediate attention, and that's a good thing. However, in modern society today, negative press, bad reviews, even out and out lies can travel at the speed of a brush fire—and significantly affect your life before you even realize it's happening.

Case in point: I decided recently to dine at a restaurant that I hadn't been to before. Online reviews had really dinged the place for the quality of its food and service, but I decided to give it a try anyway. My experience there was lovely—great food, really personable service from my waiter, who just happened to be the owner. When I had finished, I remarked that my experience was certainly different from the reviews and the owner seemed taken aback. “There were bad reviews?” she asked. “What were they saying?”

So, I showed her just some of the ones out there. Her face went ashen and she wondered out loud if that's why her business was hurting. I noted that reviews can have a huge impact. She even pointed out that several of the reviews surrounded the service from a bad employee that had been fired months ago. Yet since she was unaware of the negative comments online, she wasn't able to step in and do any damage control. The unwanted reputation overtook the brand.

Now, most of us know that what goes online typically tends to stay online, and most of us do a decent job personally of preventing anything potentially negative from leaking into cyberspace (or we should be anyway). But what about your company? Construction companies may not be a local restaurant, commercial product or retail store that can sink or swim by the reviews it gets, but bad reviews and negative comments can still hurt business. And if you're ignoring what's being said—from word of mouth to social media—you're probably having your reputation dictated by outside forces.

Here are three simple steps to take to stave off external negativity and protect your company's reputation:

1. Stay connected and routinely check on what's being said—vigilance is necessary to thwarting bad reviews and press. Learn where your company is being talked about online—from social media to industry forums to newsletters to review sites—your brand exists beyond your website in today's wide-open Internet channels. If your company does not have a presence where people are talking about the way you run your business, then you have no way to defend your company or explain your side of the story—or take advantage of good reviews and testimonials. Sure, it can be time consuming, but dedicating even an hour or two a month to monitoring the online areas where your company might be mentioned can cue you in to when you have a problem as well as give you a vehicle to correct the message.
2. Reaffirm your company's best practices with clients and the community at large—Of course one of the best defenses is a good offense, and having a winning client/customer service plan of action will stave off a lot of negative reviews. Train (and retrain) your employees to be friendly and easy to work with. Make sure your company is following up with clients in a timely manner and getting the right information to them they need the first time. Make sure that your products/services are always delivered with quality in mind so that the end user is happy. And when a problem does arise, jump into action and use it as an opportunity to show you can go above and beyond rather than brushing it off.
3. Respond and consider engaging with social media specialists and/or companies that aid in removing negative or troll reviews. Now, there may be times where your company has done nothing wrong, but the abuses and insults are hurled anyway. Unfortunately, as the Internet has become THE medium of communication today, so too has it given rise to the troll.

Many trolls are teenagers or bored adults with little to do and they will just make up bad reviews or spread negative comments online because it is fun. Sometimes, competing companies might hire “professional trolls” to either boost their own positive reviews or try and take down a rival company. In other cases, they may not be trolls, but legitimately ticked off folks who refuse to forgive, even if steps have been taken to try and appease them. In these cases, there isn’t a whole lot you can do to avoid these situations. However, there are companies trained in dealing with online reviews and feedback that can help. If the negativity online is starting to affect business, consider contracting with a proven, professional company to fight on your behalf. Many of these companies are surprisingly good at removing the bad.

You can’t make everyone happy 100 percent of the time, but dismiss the naysayers and you might be digging your own grave. A little attention can make all the difference. How well does your company address its online presence?