The Importance of Managing Your Online Reputation

By Phil Banker

Word of mouth was once thought of as one of the most effective methods of promotion available to a business, especially a small business. By providing a quality service to your customers and encouraging them to tell their friends, businesses have taken advantage of social networking long before Mark Zuckerberg turned it into a multi-million dollar industry.

Thanks to the internet, however, word of mouth can now reach the world in seconds – for good or ill. One bad review, once confined to one disgruntled customer’s circle of friends, can go viral and spread across the planet, turning a company into a laughing stock in days. However, enough positive reviews can build a solid foundation of online goodwill for your company, and drive in new customers you might not have been able to reach before.

In the electronic security and life safety industry, trust is everything. Negative online reviews can wreck that trust, and eventually your bottom line. However, companies can take charge of their online reputation and manage it for their benefit.

Companies must be proactive is monitoring and managing their online reputation not only on sites like Yelp, Bing and Google Plus local pages, but on Facebook, Twitter and blog posts about the company. The entirety of your company’s digital footprint should be examined. Searching for your business’s name on review sites as well as simply on Google can reveal a lot about how your customers view you, and from there you can decide how to react to those views and form a comprehensive plan moving forward.

There is a subtle difference between online reputation management, and online reputation marketing. The latter is putting out the information and marketing material needed to build your company’s brand. The former can be much more difficult: comprehending and shaping the already-existing reputation out there in the wild. All the marketing materials in the world can’t make bad reviews go away, and enough bad reviews can sink your business.

Once you’ve found the local review sites featuring your company, take claim of them. The listings on most popular review sites are either free or low cost, and provide a new way of interacting with your customers. The more details you add to your profile and the more you engage with it, the more satisfying it becomes for customers to engage with it as well. More details also allow your business to appear higher in search results, driving in more customers.

Above all, the most important thing to keep in mind when managing online reviews is to maintain a level head when reacting to negative reviews. Reacting out of anger or hurt can cause far more damage than the negative review itself, so be sure to take a moment and let cooler heads prevail. A calm, polite private message to the reviewer addressing their concerns and offering redress for their grievances will help far more than angry invective.

At the end of the day, quality service performed with a smile will always lead to positive reviews both online and off. Your company, its brand, and your image online, is entirely in your hands.