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## The Success Principles: How to Get From Where You Are to Where You Want to Be

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### REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

By Janet Switzer, coauthor of *The Success Principles*

**Online content about you or your business can be inspiring, informative or downright embarrassing. Before you hire a reputation management firm, here's what you can do on your own to improve your reputation online.**

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The hottest trend in small business marketing these days is "reputation management"—the monitoring, correcting and enhancing of online information about your business. And whether this information takes the form of reviews on consumer sites... or third-party blogs featuring your business name... or even someone infringing on your trademarked product name, online content about you or your business can be inspiring, informative or downright embarrassing.

Not surprisingly, a whole new crop of service providers has emerged to help you manage your online reputation. But before you hire any of them, here's what you can do on your own:

#### **Step 1: Monitor What's Being Said About You or Your Business**

At the very least, you should program Google Alerts ([www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts)) to email you a message anytime your business name, product name or owner's name appears in news stories worldwide. You may not receive an email alert every day, but you'll find out each time something new appears anywhere on the Internet. Be sure to put your name or product in quotation marks so Google correctly searches and delivers results (for example, "Janet Switzer" or "Instant Income").

You can also monitor your online reputation using:

- Addictomatic.com -- Type your name or product name into the search window and Addictomatic will return dozens of links showing where you appear online...Twitter, YouTube, Bing, Truveo video search, WordPress, Ask.com and even the Flickr photo site are scanned for your presence. While you'll find individual listings (including some you didn't even know about), Addictomatic is superb for giving you an idea of the pulse you have created online on any given day.

- Trackur Free -- This social media monitoring software (they also have a free plan) let's you search for one term at a time such as your name or your company's name. Trackur's all-in-one-place dashboard finds what's being said about you on in the social media universe and compiles it for easy review. It also ranks the reach and impact of the places you appear. In other words, are comments about you being read by millions of consumers or just a few? Click: <http://www.trackur.com/free-brand-monitoring-tools>

## **Step 2: Correct Any False or Negative Information, If You Can**

Of course, the best defense against negative comments is to pro-actively solve disputes or media attacks before they escalate into full-blown trashing of your reputation on the Internet. Once information is out there, it's difficult, if not impossible, to remove.

That said, however, you'll often be successful by simply contacting the website where the negative information appears and asking the owner or webmaster to remove it. This may require some sort of resolution such as refunding the unhappy customer's purchase price or otherwise making things right. Be sure to have them sign a document stating they will remove their post and not post any future comments about your business.

If the website where the negative comment appears has a rebuttal feature, you can also respond with your version of the story and reiterate the positive benefits of doing business with your company. Perhaps the best example of this is TripAdvisor.com, a website containing 45 million reviews of hotels, restaurants and other travel options by real-world travelers. Click on any hotel listing and you'll see proactive hoteliers who've responded to negative comments about their property.

If the negative listing is slanderous, one option is to speak with your attorney about your legal options, particularly if the comment is unsupported by fact. A "cease and desist" letter sent on your attorney's letterhead will often compel the poster to remove the slanderous comment.

And if you have a registered trademark, it's handy to have a cease-and-desist letter ready to send to anyone who illegally uses your brand. Simply informing the infringer that your brand name is trademarked often prevents an extended legal hassle—if they respond, that is—and stops the infringer's product from gaining traction on the Internet. (You'd be surprised how many start-ups bring out new products, never checking to see if a brand name is already taken.)

If neither of the above strategies works, your only other option may be to "push down" the negative comment in the search engines so it doesn't appear on page one of the results. Since many people never look at search results past page one (and usually not past page 4 or 5), you can flood the Internet with new positive posts about yourself that will appear higher in the rankings and "push down" the older, negative post to a later page.

How can you do that? This brings me to Step 3 in our Monitor-Correct-Enhance formula.

## **Step 3: Enhance Your Reputation Online**

If you have a bricks-and-mortar business, the easiest place to start is by enhancing your own Google Places page—uploading information about your business, correcting specifics, and even adding videos if you like. (I wrote a newsletter about it, complete with a checklist of steps to follow. Click [here](#).) This enhances your reputation whenever a local consumer searches for your kind of business—for example, "dry cleaning Houston."

Knowing that consumers will often check into your company further—typing your name or company name directly into the search window—you can also:

- *Buy pay-per-click using your company name as the keyword phrase.* This strategy will pop your name right to the top of Page One on Google and you'll pay only when a prospective customer actually clicks on your website. You'll probably pay a very modest amount, too (around 15¢ per click), since you'll likely be the only Google account buying pay-per-click for your exact name (unless your competitors are smart enough to do so and create a website to lure prospective customers). Pay-per-click keeps your search marketing costs down, but helps manage your online reputation by putting you at the top of Page One whenever anyone is checking out your company online. It's a tremendous credibility builder, since consumers expect a business they're considering buying from to appear prominently. You can also buy pay-per-click for misspellings of your company name and for your own personal name (if you're the owner or a solo consultant).
- *Use LinkedIn and Facebook if you're a consultant or otherwise want your own name to become recognized.* These two services are now ranking regularly in Google search results and are actually better for getting your name higher up in the search results. Remember that in Facebook, you can also create a Fan Page for your business brand or product which allows many more friends beyond the 5,000 limit for a simple Facebook profile page.
- *Distribute press releases over the Internet.* Articles that feature your company name, product names, and comments that posture you as an authority (if you are a consultant or the business owner), rank almost instantly in Google and other search engines. If you punctuate the article with likely keywords and phrases your customers might be searching online, your article will be more likely to appear at the top of page one. Be sure to offer a free downloadable giveaway and mention your website address in the article so searchers can find you (and see a reason to click over to your site). If you don't want to spend money on online press-release distribution, try one of the many free PR sites such as PRLog.org (my favorite because free articles here get ranked by search engines just like paid articles do from other PR sites).

These are just some of the ways to enhance your online reputation with potential customers who may be checking you out on the Internet before doing business with you.

The bottom line is, of course, that consumers have the ability to make or break your brand. In fact, more and more, consumers are trusting their peers' comments over the product reviews of critics and experts, so it pays to monitor, correct and enhance your reputation online.

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**To get even more helpful information for building your reputation or growing your business, subscribe to Janet Switzer's *Cash-Flow Culture* newsletter at [www.JanetSwitzer.com](http://www.JanetSwitzer.com).**

Janet Switzer is a 25-year veteran of generating revenue for small businesses, including many of the world's top celebrity entrepreneurs. She's the #1 bestselling author of *Instant Income: Strategies That Bring in the Cash for Small Businesses, Innovative Employees and Occasional Entrepreneurs* from McGraw-Hill Publishers. As well, she's the *New York Times* bestselling coauthor of *The Success Principles: How to Get From Where You Are to Where You Want to Be* with Jack Canfield, published in 30 languages. Her books, newsletters and training courses are used by businesspeople in more than 80 countries—spanning dozens of diverse industries and virtually every business category.