

Online Reputation Management

How to look better online

**Online Reputation Management
for CEOs, Rising Stars, VIPs
and Their Organizations**

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Why This Guide?

As an influencer, you have control over much of your world. But once you or your company has a presence on the Internet, you lose control over how you are perceived.

Unless you have an online reputation management (ORM) strategy.

The more you understand how information is acquired and republished on the Internet, the more effectively you can manage your own content.

Knowledge is power.

To illustrate why choosing to be invisible online may no longer be an option.

Using the Internet to your advantage may be a better strategy.

To help CEOs and other industry leaders understand how and why their actions and comments can provoke online backlash.

Realizing why these crises are happening so often and what they share in common will help you avoid them.

To encourage you to avoid the most common reason people and brands make a poor impression online.

Benign neglect.

“ Identity will be the most valuable commodity for citizens in the future, and it will exist primarily online. ”

The New Digital Age: Reshaping the Future of People, Nations and Business,
by Eric Schmidt & Jared Cohen, Knopf, 2013

Introduction



If you live in the U.S., being invisible online is not an option.



Online reputation management (ORM) lessens the prominence of and counterbalances old, inaccurate, negative and false content. It ensures an accurate and powerful image of you is presented online.

Done most effectively, it is a proactive tool that reinforces your credibility and influence in supporting the issues important to you. It adds value to your brand, contributes longevity and visibility to your career, and helps prevent your identity from being appropriated and misused by others.

In the United States we have few regulations regarding Internet publishing. Our culture, which embraces freedom of speech and transparency, lacks the equivalent of the “Right to Be Forgotten” law that Europe recently instituted to give citizens the ability to force Google and other search engines to remove links to old or irrelevant information. But there are steps that individuals and organizations can take to establish, expand, protect and, when necessary, repair their reputations online.

Everyone faces online reputation challenges

Everyone faces online reputation challenges and opportunities. The main difference for influencers, industry leaders and VIPs is that there is a greater volume of information about them online. They are more often the subject of online research. They experience a greater loss of privacy. The heightened visibility of CEOs, high net worth individuals and other influencers can also attract detractors who want to disparage their legitimacy. Never is this more true than when they are influential in politics, social issues or if their actions impact the global economy.

Take an active role in how others perceive you

It is almost impossible to be invisible on the Internet, as some readers might prefer to be. And you can’t control everything that is published about you there. But you can manage your image as it is perceived and discussed online. If you want to take an active role in determining how others perceive you – rather than leaving it up to others – online reputation management is essential. When you have a clearer view of what is possible, you will be in the best position to determine the benefits of assuming more control over your online image.

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What Online Reputation Management Is... and Isn't

Online reputation management (ORM) entails establishing, maintaining, repairing and monitoring the publicly available online information about an individual or organization.

ORM makes you look better online. But it is not a magic wand that removes unwanted information from the Internet – at least, not in the United States. There is no code anyone can write to move unwanted content from page 1 to page 1001 on a Google search of your name or organization.

Instead, ORM uses content to expand, reorder or create information about topics online. Put simply, it raises and lowers existing content by adding new content and using a range of processes that is proprietary to each provider. It is easier said than done. First, not all content published online rises to the top of a Google search. It often lands on page 3 or 5 and stays there. To strategically arrange for new content (or content on a lower page) to appear there – especially on page 1 – is the goal of most ORM campaigns. Keeping it there is the next challenge.

The creation of new content and its strategic placement online are the heart of ORM. The result is a restructured order of online content. Once successfully arranged, the results must be maintained. Otherwise, the original material may resurface high on search results. When that occurs, it usually happens within months.

Originally ORM focused just on anonymous, malicious content

In its early days – the mid-1990s – online reputation management (ORM) focused on repairing malicious content: anonymous, negative online commentary posted on Internet forums and in the comments sections accompanying blogs and social media platforms. (In the online world, it is close to impossible to remove such information unless its source takes it offline. However, it can be displaced from the first pages of search results using a combination of strategies. As a result, ORM is often described as “pushing down” or “suppressing” negative content.)

Now, because of the vast amount of personal and organizational data flooding the Internet and the lightening-fast speed at which it can be duplicated, shared, discussed and republished, ORM is more encompassing in scope.

As a result, ORM has exploded as an industry. Today there are reputation advisers, reputation monitors, branding companies and crisis management firms announcing reputation management services, as well as global brand and reputation managers at mainstream and public companies and SEO companies rolling out new reputation management tools. Advertising firms are getting into the act. So are attorneys and law firms. Even video professionals are adding the word “reputation” to their marketing: this morning I received an email promoting “reputation marketing videos.”

All are angling for your business. But not all are ORM experts. This guide will help you evaluate which option is best for you.

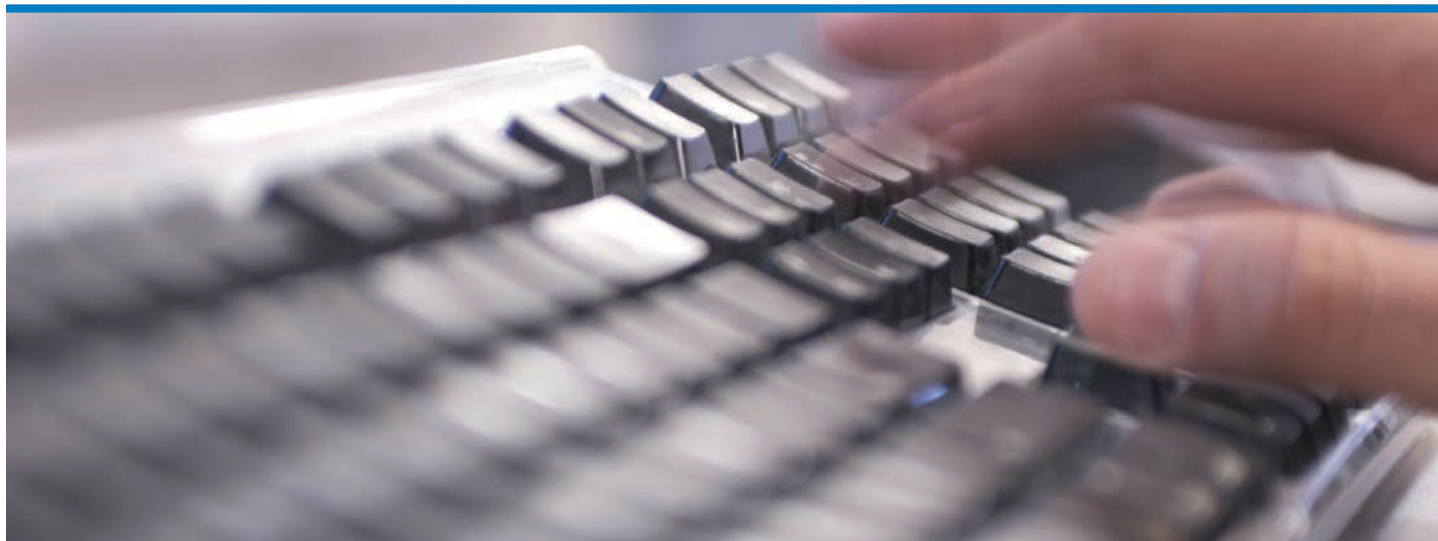
Online Reputation Management vs. Reputation Management

People often confuse online reputation management (ORM) with reputation management.

Reputation management is a component of corporate operations. It encompasses corporate culture, leadership, workplace environment and other operational aspects. The PR industry now also refers to its services as “reputation management.”

Online reputation management is the management of the publicly available information about an individual, an organization or a brand on the Internet.

The online reputation management (ORM) industry first appeared in the mid-1990s. From that point, it has grown in step with the Internet. Some ORM firms claim to improve reviews of businesses online (on sites such as Yelp). Others promise to push unwanted Internet content onto lower pages of search results. But the field is much broader, and the best firms use a range of techniques to protect and build a client’s brand. A range of companies can be viewed by Googling “online reputation management” and scanning the first five pages of results.



Can ORM Make Internet Content Disappear?

Rarely. Content can be removed when it does not meet the “user terms” of a website. Defamatory anonymous comments are one example of such content. In that case the site’s administrators can be contacted and the content will be removed, often within minutes or a couple of days. Sometimes a website will remove content on request when it is clearly inappropriate or contains inaccuracies.

When that is not the situation, or the content has been widely republished, ORM is used as a tool to minimize its prominence and impact (for instance, moving content that appears on the first page of a Google search to page 3, 7 or lower). As mentioned earlier, unless consistent maintenance is done, that content tends to resurface in or close to its original location about three months after it is lowered. If it is on a highly ranked platform, it is next to impossible to push it down past the first few pages of search results.

Examples of highly ranked platforms include the websites of *The Wall Street Journal* and other major newspapers, as well as Wikipedia and YouTube (both among the world’s top 10 ranked sites).

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Ways Online Reputation Management Is Used

- 1 To remove unwanted or inappropriate information, photographs or other content from the first few pages of Google search results.
- 2 To create a strong online presence about a topic. That presence acts as a barrier against third-party content, including anonymous and defamatory material. Without it, such items can go straight to the top of searches – and stay there.
- 3 To remove home addresses, ages and related personal information from online databases. Such “people search” sites continuously scour the Internet to find and publish such information. Once published, anyone can access it.
- 4 To replace old or unflattering photographs with new ones. (When the old images are cached or can’t be removed for some other reason, their prominence in searches can be minimized.)
- 5 To ensure that factual, credible reference material is readily available online. That reduces the chance that fraudulent information will impact a brand.
- 6 To ensure that your story is told by you and not by former partners or other biased parties.
- 7 To establish a reputation within your area of expertise on multiple online platforms.
- 8 To create an online legacy for a VIP who is preparing for retirement or to exit an organization.
- 9 To monitor social media and online forums for red flags signaling potential on- and offline threats against high-profile individuals and their organizations.
- 10 To ensure up-to-date and accurate information dominates search results for an organization or individual’s name.



Why Is Online Reputation Management Necessary?

ORM is necessary because information about you and your organization is published online, perhaps regularly, whether you realize it or not. The information may not be negative. It just might not be contributing anything to your brand. That is something you can change, if you want to. ORM is a tool to help you do that.

The proliferation of once-private personal information and professional documents contributes to the sea of old, outdated and unwanted information flooding the Internet. Also, anyone can say anything online. They can say it anonymously, posing as an expert or as someone with inside information, and remain reasonably safe from prosecution. With the popularity of review sites and online forums, almost every organization can expect to have some negative information about it online.

Few laws are in place to regulate the information available online. It can be very difficult – or impossible – to even find out who is responsible for that information. Website operators have legal immunity over what is said and posted on their sites (except, generally, in cases that constitute defamation) and will rarely respond to requests for a poster's identity or to remove inaccurate information unless it is in the form of a subpoena.

According to Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, "No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider." That section was passed in 1996 and has not been updated. It does not adequately protect individuals from defamation, from the widespread publication of their age and home addresses or from the harm that can result from both.



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