

Succeed with Social Media

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Protecting Your Reputation on Social Media

In today's digital environment, it's difficult to control everything that is being said about your company. Don't let that deter you from joining social media, though. In fact, it's a compelling reason to get involved. People will talk about your company regardless of whether you have a presence online. But, if you're not online, there's no way for you to hear what is said, and you may risk even bigger reputation problems. Being active on social media allows you to contribute a positive voice on your company's behalf.

Manage Your Reputation

Instead of avoiding social media, manage your online reputation by taking proactive steps when something negative is said.

- Keep communication open. If someone is complaining publicly about your brand, company or product, respond publicly. It can be tempting to move the conversation to a private channel (or ignore it), but publicly addressing the issue will earn your company points for responsiveness and increase credibility.
- Don't delete negative posts or comments from your social media platforms (unless they violate the site's policies or are extremely inappropriate). Deleting posts will only cause more backlash. Instead, address the problem head on.
- When your customers are having an issue and voicing it online, don't wait to respond. The sooner you can address the issue—even just with an apology and a promise that you're working toward a resolution—the more trust you may be able to restore.
- Don't be afraid to admit you made a mistake. People will appreciate your honesty much more than your attempts to cover things up or shift blame.
- Work proactively to establish a good reputation and be influential in your industry through your social media channels, speaking engagements, etc.

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- Don't bring problems on yourself. The smallest joke or comment taken the wrong way can spark a firestorm of criticism. Think about everything you write—and everything you encourage your followers to share—to evaluate if it could be damaging to you or backfire.
- Don't be caught unprepared when a crisis hits. Establish a social media crisis response plan now so that you are ready to handle situations that may occur.

Your Social Media Crisis Response Plan

1. Monitor your online presence—there are a variety of free and paid tools and resources to “listen” online. Start with these suggestions:
 - a. Set up Google® Alerts for your company and product names (www.google.com/alerts). You'll get an email whenever your specified terms are found online, helping you find positive and negative mentions you may have missed.
 - b. If you are on Twitter, regularly conduct a search for your company name to find tweets that mention you, even if they don't use your @username or a hashtag.
2. Create policies and plans for the possibility of a crisis, so that you can take action immediately. Have a team assembled (which may include management, marketing, communications, IT and/or legal), and make sure everyone is trained on how to respond to a social media crisis. Have procedures mapped out in advance, including the following:
 - a. How you'll decide upon your response (who will craft it and who must approve)
 - b. How you'll communicate your response (you may have a number of options depending on the scenario)
 - c. Who will be responsible for various tasks
 - d. Which shareholders or internal departments will need information about the issue
 - e. How you'll manage any additional press
3. When a crisis occurs, you'll need to decide your response and execute quickly. Who do you need to share information with, internally and externally? Should your response target one audience or span all your social outlets? What is the message? As you rollout your message, analyze if it is reaching the appropriate people and having the desired results. Don't be afraid to tweak your strategy during your response, if necessary.
4. After a crisis, evaluate your response and the entire process. Identify any weaknesses, discuss how to improve in the future and modify your social media crisis plan as needed. You may also want to discuss a new marketing or public relations campaign to bring positive attention to your company following a negative situation.