

Your online reputation and why it's so important



If I asked what your company's reputation was like, I imagine most of you would say something ranging from 'great' to 'not bad'. However, if I asked how that reputation was portrayed online might the response be less rosy? If you don't know what your reputation online is like, then simply search your company name in a web browser - if you have multiple sites you might want to add the town or postcode to the search.

On a laptop you will often see a 'company pack' on the right hand side that will either be a Google My Business or Bing Places company profile. This will show any reviews you may already have and often an aggregated star rating for these reviews, possibly including selected snippets from reviews. In addition, you may even see integrated reviews taken from other sources such as Facebook, Yell, 118 etc. On a mobile this company profile will often be the first thing that presents itself to you, even before your website listing. From my own experience of non-search engine optimised sites, about three quarters of most company website traffic that is derived from online searches is for your company name or brand. This can be a pretty big deal if your reviews are poor.

In addition, as you look down the search listings you may also see other starred listings say for your Facebook page or Yell listing, where people have also left reviews. Other channels might also appear, including more sector specific ones that may also carry starred reviews. Of course, there will be other listings where you might have reviews, but for this article we will concentrate on these 'starred reviews' that you see on the first page of a search for your company or brand name.

How are your reviews?

So what are the results for your company or branch location? The reviews will generally be one of three - non-existent, mediocre to bad or at best good - with the number of reviews in single figures. You can quite justifiably ask 'How important is all this anyway?' While prospective customers might use such reviews to select a restaurant, surely this is not the case when deciding on an equipment provider?

According to a study by the Acuity Group - 'State of B2B Procurement' - 94 percent of business buyers do some form of online research and 77 percent of them use Google. Moreover, wouldn't you want your company to be portrayed as well as possible to anyone interested in you?

So why are the online standings of most companies either patchy or downright negative if they are doing all the right things? The reason is often that people rarely heap praise on an anonymous review platform but are more than happy to vent their spleen through such channels. This is usually because they are out of options - they have tried complaining to you or your staff and got nowhere. So, a review platform can frequently be the last resort. You may well have been there yourself where you think "I can't get anyone in that organisation to listen but

A screenshot of a Google My Business profile for "Botchit & Screeder Hire". The profile shows a 1.0 star rating based on 11 Google reviews. The address is "High Street, Anytown, Anyshire, AA1 1AA". The hours are "Closed - Opens 7AM Tue". The phone number is "0333 4466 1234". There are three negative reviews visible: "Avoid at all costs. Would give no stars if I could!", "Never responded to my countless calls!", and "Poor service. Surly staff." The profile also includes options for "See photos", "See outside", "Website", "Directions", "Suggest an edit", "Own this business?", "Know this place? Answer quick questions", "Questions & answers", "Send to your phone", "Write a review", and "Add a photo". A note at the bottom right of the screenshot reads: "Yes it's a fictional company, but would you hire from this company?"

maybe this might make them think about their stance or failing that, at least I can warn off other people from making the same mistake!"

Positive feedback on the other hand is normally delivered personally, and it is frequently not acted on, other than at best a bashful "thank you". This is a missed opportunity and a shame that the organisation, as a whole, is not made aware of such

plaudits and to what is being done well. However, it is an even greater shame that prospective clients are also not being made aware of the high regard you are held in by your customer base.

Use positive feedback

Many of my clients are bemused when I tell them that this anecdotal feedback can be turned into a process that can be managed and

TESTIMONIALS

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developed. They initially assume I mean offering incentives such as a prize draw or freebies to leave reviews, but this could not be further from what I am suggesting. Moreover, besides going against the guidelines of pretty well all third-party review channels, it will at best only result in very sketchy, or at worst a rating only feedback, without any insight into what people really value about your company. What I am suggesting is capitalising

on the moments when you or your staff receive effusive feedback from a client - be it in person, over the phone or via email. This is a golden opportunity to mention that you not only really appreciate their feedback, but it would be great if more people were aware of how good your product/service has been. At this point you can let them know that there are several channels available for them to leave that feedback in written form and can immediately email or text them a link to your company's GoogleMyBusiness, Facebook or Yell etc.. review pages. If you make it easy for them to leave a quick on the spot review they might do it, before something else gets in the way and they forget. It works. Statistics from a BrightLocal's 2016 Local Consumer Review Survey showed that about seven in 10 people - if asked - will leave a review. So if your client is

already feeling positive about you, there's a good likelihood they'll leave a highly positive and detailed review, highlighting a specific instance rather than some vague "they're great" one liner. You might say that you and your staff never receive such glowing feedback. In that case you might have more to worry about than obtaining good reviews! That said, choosing the right moment is key. I appreciate that you might feel that you cannot ask for such feedback until a transaction is fully completed. If so you might consider a customer courtesy call at the end of the process, to judge satisfaction levels. This can have many greater business benefits than a possible review of course. If the customer is glowing about their experience, then it is well worth connecting them to the channels where they can articulate this to a larger audience. Finally, a much-overlooked benefit from this is that you will generate an immediate arsenal of testimonials that you can use on your website or in your marketing materials. Doing it this way around means you don't

have to ask a busy customer for both a testimonial and to write a review on Google.

About the author: Guy Willett has over 10 years marketing experience working in the powered access sector. If you would like to know more about reputation management, including removing bad reviews, claiming and optimising your GoogleMyBusiness listing, or other SEO services that can be provided to the rental market then contact guy@readysteadygoseo.co.uk or visit www.readysteadygoseo.co.uk.



Guy Willett

GOING UP IN THE WORLD

A history of Simon Engineering, the development of the powered access industry and a lifetime as an engineer, by Denis Ashworth

Ashworth was a keen engineer and from an early age found himself in at the very start of the modern powered access industry.

His book is an unusual combination of autobiography and history of Simon Engineering Dudley, a pioneer of the powered access industry and at one time, the world's largest manufacturer of aerial lifts.

The coffee table sized book, is highly readable and includes around 150 photographs and drawings from the very beginning of the industry. It is a 'must read' for anyone who is interested in powered access, the hydraulic equipment industry or in comparing modern day engineering challenges with those of an entirely different era.

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