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PSP
EXPO
ISSUE





PAM HASKELL



REPUTATION MANAGEMENT: WHAT IS IT AND WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

THERE'S NO DENYING it – customer service is everything in this industry. And nowadays, just like paying your bills, keeping in touch with friends and checking your bank balance, people are heading online to check what your customer service is like.

We've all heard the horror stories of a disgruntled customer leaving a bad review on Google, Houzz or Facebook and other people jumping on the bandwagon, and before they even realized what was going on, the business owner sees thousands of dollars going down the drain as people boycott their company. Remember that United Airlines PR disaster when they dragged a customer off one of their planes? Yeah, that cost them \$950 million – and they still haven't recovered from it.

Well, the good news is:

1. This is a relatively rare occurrence in the pool and spa industry. In our 15 years helping companies succeed online, we've only had

a handful of businesses come to us for help after an online review disaster. (Now if you've ever owned a cafe or restaurant, that's another story!)

2. There is a solution to handling bad reviews quickly and quietly while getting maximum exposure out of good reviews and publicity.

The secret to avoiding PR disasters? Reputation management.

WHAT IS REPUTATION MANAGEMENT?

Reputation management is referred to by a host of different names: online reputation management (ORM), internet reputation management, rep management and brand perception.

Whatever you want to call it, the goal is to shape public perception about a business, resulting in your company getting more customers through the door.

There are two categories of reputation management: offline and online. Today, we're going to run

through an introduction to a number of techniques you can try both in-person and on the web.

OFFLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

Offline reputation management includes simple things you can start doing today in the interactions you have with your customers. The ultimate goal of offline reputation management is to provide a positive in-person experience, which encourages people to tell their friends, family and colleagues about how great your company is.

Things you can do to manage your reputation offline include:

- Ensuring employees provide stress-free, friendly service to everyone they interact with
- Delivering on your promises – yes, all of them
- Completing work to the highest standard possible
- Collecting feedback from past clients and making meaningful

- improvements to your service
- Asking for reviews/referrals upfront – if you don't ask, you probably won't get them!
- Setting and sticking to guidelines for conflict management
- Responding to negative feedback professionally and quickly

ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

Now this is where things get time sensitive. You need round-the-clock monitoring and a consistent level of effort to make any real impression — but don't let this put you off. Online reputation is essential in today's market and you don't have to do it all by yourself.

Online reputation management includes, among other things, having a regularly updated, good-looking website. If you already have a website, half the battle is won! When people are searching for a service provider like you, what do they do? They ask Google for recommendations. They'll browse Houzz and Facebook groups looking for companies in their area. Once they've found your name, they go to your website.

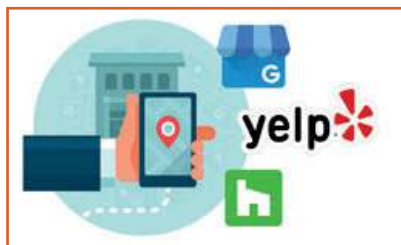
If your website looks old, isn't usable on their phone or tablet and/or obviously hasn't been updated since 2009, they'll think one of two things:

1. You've gone out of business
2. You don't care about their impression of you, and what does that say about the level of service you'll give them if they hire you?

This leaves them with one option: Go find one of your competitors that cares more. They're spending their hard-earned cash on this deal. They want the company that cares the most!

If your website needs a refresh, do it. The initial cost of the refresh will soon be recouped in the boost it will bring to your business.

One of the best ways to keep your website regularly updated is by blogging. Blogging is an amazing online tool – when you update your website with original, creative and useful content, Google rewards you by placing you higher on its search results for relevant search words. Not only that, blogging shows your customers that you're the expert to go to when they need help – you know your stuff and you can solve their problems.



With your website current and rising to the top of local search results, it's time to take ownership of your online business listings. By that I mean Google My Business, Houzz and Yelp.

By tending to each listing, you can optimize them to give potential customers exactly what they're looking

for. Upload high quality images of your premises and completed projects. Update opening hours, company descriptions and contact details. Most importantly, it gives you a chance to thank customers that left good reviews and respond to customers that left less-than-favorable reviews (in a completely professional manner, of course).

GET ACTIVE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

You don't have to join every single social media platform out there, just pick the most popular options for your target market and manage your profiles really, really well.

You'll want to share content on a regular basis, update your followers on special offers and new products/services, answer questions and interact with other people's profiles to really make an impression.

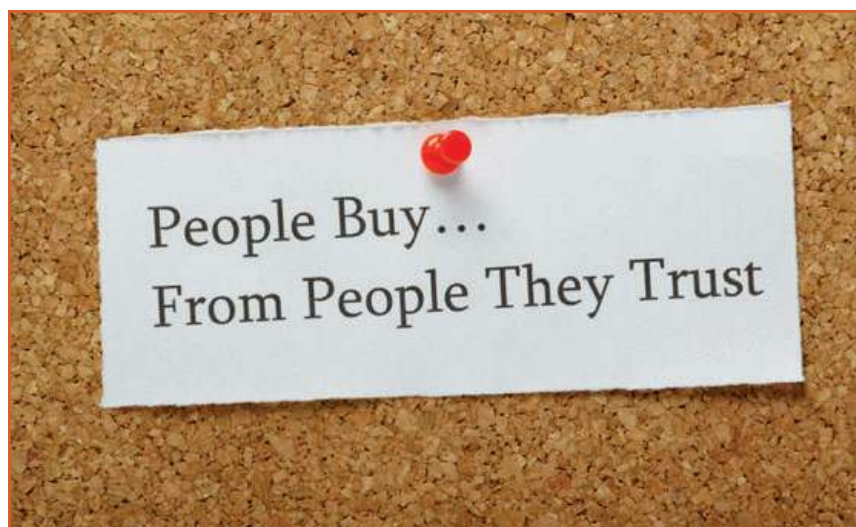
Social media's role in the buying process is huge: 31% of customers in 2017 used social media to make pre-sale inquiries before a purchase or commitment. If you're not investing in your presence on social media platforms, you could be missing out on a huge customer base.

MONITOR YOUR REPUTATION CONSTANTLY

This one just can't be done without the right kind of monitoring software and management. Reputation monitoring alerts you to where your business is being talked about online and what's being said about it.

As well as monitoring review sites, reputation monitoring services can also auto-respond to both negative and positive reviews.

This is one of the best ways to streamline the customer service experience available – which means you don't have to worry about what people are saying about you and get back to doing what you do best! ~



Pam Haskell's website design and development company Chili Pepper Design (Pool & Patio Marketing Division) helps businesses in the pool and outdoor living space create and maintain a modern web presence and provides online marketing and reputation management services. She can be reached at 410.757.7852 or pam@cpdesignco.com. Visit cpdesignco.com for more information.