

MarketingPilgrim

Online Reputation Monitoring Beginners Guide

Every single day, someone, somewhere is discussing something important to your business; your brand, your executives, your competitors, your industry. Are they hyping-up your company, building buzz for your products? Or, are they criticizing your service, complaining to others about your new product launch?

A great brand can take months, if not years, and millions of dollars to build. It should be the thing you hold most precious.

It can be destroyed in hours by a blogger upset with your company.

A new product launch could take hundreds of TV commercials, dozens of newspaper ads, and an expensive ad agency.

It can also spread like a virus with the praise of just one customer, at one message board.

A company can dominate market share, throttle competition and hold the #1 brand in the world.

It can also crash in months if it fails to listen to what its customers want.

By now, you should have an understanding of just how powerful consumer generated media (CGM) is. Your next action could be the difference between your company's success and failure. Do you click the "back" button and ignore the conversation, or; do you read the tips and strategies outlined below, arm yourself with valuable knowledge and join the foray?

You may decide you need professional reputation management services. Or you may simply follow the advice we've put together below. Either way, you should engage!

What to track?

- Everything related to your company: variations of company/product names, names of your key employees, all applicable product or service names.
- Information related to your competition: variations of company/product names, names of key employees, all applicable product or service names.
- Information related to your industry: Moreover.com¹ (feeds include retail investor news, clothing industry news, consumer durables news, retail sector news, etc.) as well as applicable trade publications.

How to track?

- If possible, monitor hourly as early action is crucial.
- Create custom RSS feeds based on keyword searches: Feedster.com, Technorati.com, IceRocket.com, Google.com/blogsearch, Blogpulse.com, MSN Spaces², Yahoo! News³, Google News⁴, MSN News⁵ and PubSub.com.
- Monitor This⁶ allows you to monitor a single keyword across 22 different search engine feeds at the same time.
- Filter all feeds into one RSS Reader for easy and time-efficient monitoring options include: Newsgator.com, Bloglines.com, Google Reader⁷ or Pluck.com.
- Sign up for Google and Yahoo email alerts using your desired keywords (<http://alerts.yahoo.com/> and www.google.com/alerts).
- Determine message boards/forums to track: BoardReader.com, ForumFind.com, BigBoards.com, BoardTracker.com, iVillage⁸, Yahoo Message Boards⁹, MSN Money¹⁰.
- Determine groups to track: Yahoo Groups¹¹, AOL Groups¹², MSN Groups¹³, Google Groups¹⁴.
- Track changes on web pages via tools such as Copernic Tracker¹⁵, Website Watcher¹⁶ and WatchThatPage.com. Monitor every page of your competitor's web site and specific keywords on pages, etc.
 - o Also, a good tool for tracking posts to user groups, message boards, forums and blog comments.

Helpful Free Tools:

- Create your own search engine at Rollyo.com. This is a great way to track sites that do not offer RSS feeds for keywords such as Consumerist.com, PlanetFeedback.com, ComplaintCenter.com, Complaints.com, Better Business Bureau¹⁷ and RipOffReport.com.
- Use Keotag.com to search for tagged blog posts across multiple blog search engines.
- Get a feel for stories that are creating "buzz" in the blogosphere via sites like Techmeme.com and Blogniscient.com.
- Acquire an overview of blogger opinions (both negative and positive) via Opinmind.com, a blog search engine that allows you to type any subject into its search box.
- Learn about a specific blog's traffic, credibility and popularity via PubSub.com, Alexa.com and IceRocket.com¹⁸.

- Bloginfluence.net and Socialmeter.com show you the popularity and audience-reach for any entered blog URL. Use it to get a snapshot of the credibility of any blogger discussing your company.
- Research backgrounds of bloggers, owners of forums and web site editors via domain name search tools such as DomainTools.com and BetterWhois.com.
- Get creative with the classified search engine, Oodle.com. Search for job listings in your industry, then subscribe to the RSS feed. You'll get an early alert of all the job listings your competitors' post. Now you'll know which areas of their business are expanding or get clues about potential new products, based upon who they are hiring.
- Not sure what keywords to track? Start entering your main "buzz" word at Google Suggest¹⁹ and see what's most commonly searched. Or try Google Trends²⁰ for the latest search query trends.
- Want to know what the blogosphere is saying about the page you're viewing? Use the Technorati Favelet bookmark²¹ to quickly view inbound links and posts according to Technorati. If you use Firefox, install the Blogger Web Comments extension²² to see what users of Google's Blogger have to say about the page.
- Need to know what news stories influenced your company's stock price? The new Google Finance²³ site let's you analyze what stories appeared at any given stock price movement. Simply move the "slider", located above the stock chart, and watch the stories on the right correlate with the date and time.

Overall Consumer Generated Media (CGM) Tips

- Investigate facts internally before taking action - could this be a competitor spreading rumor?
- Always take the high ground
- Be honest!
- Explain what you have done to rectify any issue
- Offer to resolve any complaints personally – have a senior-level staff member make the offer – try to continue discussion offline
- Rally friends, clients, peers and utilize your allies
- Don't create new "personas" to support your position in blogs, forums and message boards as you'll likely be caught

How to conduct outreach to CGM

Forums, user groups and message boards

- Task someone in-house with joining and participating in any applicable forums or user groups.
 - o When trouble strikes, impact will be reduced if someone from your organization is a regular contributor (has credibility already) and can voice your company's side of the story.
- Consider sponsoring most influential forums.
 - o Less likely to see sustained criticism if you are a supporter/sponsor.
- Build alliances/partnerships with most vocal members.

Blogs

- Identify the author of the blog, read their profile.
 - o Who are they? Who do they work for?
- Read author's previous work to get a feel for his/her "persona."
- Understand the threat level – How respected are they? What is their audience reach?
- *If a blog post is factually incorrect...*
 - o Ask for removal or retraction and send supporting evidence.
 - o Offer to keep blogger informed of future news - Google used this on me :-).
 - o If these outreach methods garner no response from the blog author, consider correcting the post in the comments section. This is a last resort - what you really want is correction/retraction.
- *If blog post is true, but negative...*
 - o Send your side of the story.
 - o Explain how you are addressing the situation.
 - o Add comment to post.
 - o Indicate your willingness to receive any email questions – take it offline.

Balancing Negative CGM

- *If it's true...*
 - o Don't ignore or hide
 - o Participate in the discussion and be honest
 - o Add response to your web site
 - o Issue statement addressing what has been done
 - o Engage crisis communication expert with CGM experience
- *If it's not true...*
 - o Politely request blog, forum, news site owner remove or retract
 - o Consult a lawyer
 - o Contact other blog and forum owners with correct information
 - o Ask them to consider publishing your response
 - o Add statement to your website – work with a search engine optimization consultant to ensure all content has been optimized and will achieve top search rankings

Referenced Links

1. http://w.moreover.com/site/other/categories_rss.html
2. <http://spaces.live.com/>
3. <http://news.yahoo.com/>
4. <http://news.google.com/>
5. <http://search.msn.com/news/>
6. <http://alp-uckan.net/free/monitorthis/>
7. <http://www.google.com/reader/view/>
8. <http://www.ivillage.com/messageboards>
9. <http://messages.yahoo.com/>
10. <http://moneycentral.msn.com/community/message/default.aspx>
11. <http://groups.yahoo.com/>
12. <http://groups.aol.com/>
13. <http://groups.msn.com/>
14. <http://groups.google.com/>
15. <http://www.copernic.com/en/products/tracker/index.html>
16. <http://www.aignes.com/>
17. <http://www.bbb.org/>
18. <http://www.icerocket.com/c?p=blogtools>
19. <http://www.google.com/webhp?complete=1&hl=en>
20. <http://www.google.com/trends>
21. <http://www.technorati.com/members/favelets.html>
22. <http://www.google.com/tools/firefox/webcomments/>
23. <http://finance.google.com/finance>

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Andy Beal is a blogging and search engine marketing consultant and is considered one of the world's most respected online marketing experts. Andy has worked with many top companies such as Motorola, CitiFinancial, Lowes, Quicken Loans, DeWALT, NBC and Smarter.com.

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