

Using online reputation management proactively

 By [Diane Charton](#)

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Online reputation management (ORM) is the discipline of monitoring and analysing the reputation of a person, organisation or industry. Far from only using it as a crisis management tool, it can also deliver benefits to businesses that use it in a more proactive manner by analysing content across all types of online media.

It is about listening to and engaging in the online conversation and measuring reputation among online communities. Here are six ways to use ORM as a tool to build a reputation online and understand customers, rather than only using it reactively and defensively.

1. Understand what makes consumers tick

Consumer research is costly and time-consuming. Often, consumers will tell you what they think you want to hear in surveys and focus groups than what they think and feel. However, with ORM tools, you can listen in on your customers' candid conversations about what matters to them and what they are looking for from brands such as yours. Social media is an up-to-the-minute guide to consumer trends.

2. Competitor analysis

You can use ORM tools to listen to what consumers are saying about your competitors. This information can provide you with valuable insights into your strengths and weaknesses compared to your competition. This can help you in product development, marketing and customer support strategies.

3. Build an early warning system

If you are proactively monitoring what customers are saying about your brand, products and service, you can often nip issues in the bud before they blossom into major reputational crises. A quick reaction to a consumer who found your TV ad offensive could prevent the complaint from snowballing. A few tweets about long waits at your call centre may alert you to a problem your customers are experiencing that has caused call centre volumes to rise. You could possibly resolve the problem and issue a statement before it turns into a crisis.

4. Gauge consumers' reactions to your marketing campaigns

If you have spent a lot of money on an online or offline advertising campaign, you can watch social media discussions to gauge what consumers think about it. You can use this information to adapt existing campaigns on the fly, to take advantage of positive momentum, or change course if the campaign bores or offends a significant part of your target market. This information will also be valuable for your future campaigns.

5. Shape your social media strategy, policies and guidelines

It's easy to set up a Facebook page or a Twitter account, but harder to understand how successfully you are using these tools to engage with your customers. Are you improving buzz and sentiment about your brand, or are you alienating and irritating customers? Is your social media strategy effective in reaching your customers and getting them to engage with your content? ORM can help you to measure just how successful your social media approach is in meeting your business goals so that you can adapt it if necessary.

6. Identify and influence your advocates and detractors - word of mouth spreads quickly

With ORM tools, you can identify people who talk about your brand a lot - your advocates and detractors alike - and get an idea of just how much influence they have on others. From there, you can look at ways of influencing them to keep saying positive things about your brand or try to swing your critics over to your point of view.

In much the same way as world-class companies use traditional reputation management to proactively build their image, even when there is no crisis, organisations should be using ORM to enhance their online reputations by engaging in conversation with their customers outside of complaints and crisis. Any organisation that wants to maximise its return on investment from social media should be using ORM to listen to, engage in and measure the online conversation.

ABOUT DIANE CHARTON

As managing director of Red & Yellow, Diane Charton steers the strategic direction of the business. She strives to empower and educate the SA marketing communications industry through a myriad of traditional and digital educational platforms. With a unique combination of marketing, leadership and engineering experience, Charton brings a multifaceted approach to using marketing trends and insights to innovate and empower the industry as a whole. Follow @DCharton on Twitter.

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