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Businesses Should Create ‘Web Assets’ To Help Protect Against Online Reputation Attacks

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Businesses will be best equipped to handle online reputation attacks if they take steps upfront to protect their reputations; take preventative measures to try to thwart or limit attacks; and plan out how to address attacks if (or when) they really do occur.

Considering today’s internet landscape and current U.S. laws (such as the First Amendment and the [Communications Decency Act](#)), businesses must protect themselves as much as possible against the impact that negative statements can have. Therefore, protecting the business’s search results by generating as much positive (and neutral) content and publicity to rank highly on search engine results pages (SERPs) is a must.

According to a study released in 2012 by PricewaterhouseCoopers, of the 7,005 consumers interviewed worldwide, 80 percent researched products online before making purchases. That figure was 88 percent among U.S. respondents. Given that comScore, Inc.’s August 2014 data showed that more than 67 percent of the U.S. search engine market share is owned by Google, and that more than 91.5 percent of traffic on Google is on a business’s first s (per a 2013 study by Chitika), it is critical for businesses to consider the first impressions being formed by prospective customers on Google.

Thus, if a business can generate positive content to populate its first (and even second) SERP — which is good to have in general — it can also potentially prevent damage from occurring by others publishing damaging content about the business that might otherwise rank well on the search engines (e.g. harmful Ripoff Report complaints).

Accordingly, here are three categories of “web assets” that businesses should consider developing or strengthening to help protect their search results:

1. *Affiliate websites*: While most businesses will never reach (or even strive to reach) the size and status of those such as Microsoft, Coca-Cola, and Procter & Gamble, they can still learn lessons from them.

These multinational companies have several affiliate websites (supplementing their main websites) that rank among their top search results, which includes: jobs/career sites, investor relations sites, company news sites, and sites related to special corporate events. While Google frowns upon “interlinking” (i.e. creating a website solely to link back to their own website to boost their rankings), having legitimate affiliate websites can be very helpful for businesses’ search results – that is, if it makes sense for a particular business to have another standalone website.

2. *Social media profiles*: Surely most companies have some presence on social media. Nevertheless businesses should be sure to create and/or maintain quality profiles on worthwhile highly-rated websites and platforms including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. In general, this helps with branding. It also prevents others from trying to take ownership of a business’s potential brand pages or otherwise prevent people from misleading consumers with phony accounts. Accounts or profiles on these websites will likely rank highly as well.
3. *Blogs and guest articles*: For businesses of all sizes, it is also good practice to maintain a professional blog using a domain that includes the company brand name. By developing a blog with quality content such as industry trends and recent issues, a business can improve its ranking and web traffic, and also can position itself or certain professionals as an authority/authorities (which can generate leads and boost the overall reputation of a business). Furthermore, by contributing guest blog posts or articles, in particular for well-known and high-ranking online publications, there is further opportunity to create a good impression for one’s own business, while simultaneously boosting online rankings through generating quality links back to the business.

Online reputation attacks pose too great of a risk for businesses not to take protective measures upfront. Beyond these three strategies for creating web assets, businesses should also 1) have an active PR strategy that includes generating press stories and highlighting their positives through press releases; and 2) consider developing relationships with influential people on social media or that have blogs covering or within their industries.

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