



# Managing Your Online Reputation

What Property Managers Need to Know

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## Why Should We Be Managing Our Online Reputation?

Digital footprints are everywhere. Each time you leave a comment on a blog, change your profile picture, or even post a status update, some database has archived your activity. The same can be said for businesses. Managing your online reputation is more than shameless promotion. Consider it self-defense and make it a priority at your organization.

A company's online reputation has become synonymous with a real-world reputation, now that the business world has become more digital. Professional connections begin within search engines and social networking sites. "Connecting" is the new handshake.

It is important to listen to the online conversation about your company, and when appropriate, solve any underlying issues and engage in the conversation. In addition to managing your brand's online reputation, it is equally important to manage the reputations of team members and executives. Privacy settings are critical to protecting the employees of your organization and your own reputation.

Over 50% of adults  
Google each other  
and over 90% of B2B  
buyers use search when  
starting the buying  
process.

Some users prefer not to contact a company through email or telephone. Make both options available on your [website](#) and set expectations by explaining that you will respond to all feedback within 24 hours.

Many reputation problems occur because one individual or a group of individuals are unable to effectively communicate with the company. In frustration, they turn to social networking channels like blogs, complaint sites, Twitter and Facebook.

Anyone can create a web page that describes you inaccurately or criticizes your performance at a company. A good example of this is the Dell Hell experience. The unintended consequences of ignoring your online reputation could result in an unintentional boycott of your company. Besides financial implications, there are potential legal ramifications of having your company's credibility questioned; thus consuming your time and energy. Aside from legalities, negative content within top rankings of search engines could last far longer than any court case. If your brand has online reputation issues, they will be discovered.

## How Do We Begin Managing Our Reputation?

### Start With Search

Begin with a simple search on Google, Bing, Yahoo, ApartmentRatings, DoNotRent, Twitter, Blogs, Forums, YouTube, Digg and other websites for combinations of keywords associated with your brand. Search for the names of key employees, addresses of properties, the company name, and variations of these terms. Include modifiers such as "sucks" "scam" and "hate." Monitor Google and Yahoo by setting up free alerts.

Most users will not look past the first page of search results, so focus your efforts there first. Remember to log out of Google to disable the personalized search features and get a more accurate view of search results as others would view them.



Create a spreadsheet and make a list of the top 25-30 search results and highlight the sites that have privacy controls available. Delete old or dormant online profiles and remember to treat everything posted online as if it were public and permanent. Notate the sentiment associated with each URL. Do they have negative, indifferent or positive commentary? This will help you determine where to begin responding.

If competitors, former employees and residents are actively following your activity online, leaving false reviews of your company, employees or properties, then it is obvious you have an online reputation management problem. The most common reputation management problems come in the form of squatted usernames and domains, doppelgangers, job and name changes, negative comments, false information, fake profiles, trademark infringement, industry perceptions, corporate and personal

scandals, hate sites, reviews sites, and bad news coverage. In extreme cases you may need the services of a reputation management company and a public relations agency.

If you find that there were not any comments or mentions of your company online, this means you should start to build your reputation. Although there may be no obvious problems, now is the time to be proactive. Establish a positive reputation for your company online. The more branded content that appears online the more diluted the negative content will become.

### Use Tools That Help Monitor Your Brand Online

There are tools available to help you monitor and track your company's brand online. Set up alerts and feeds to catch every mention of your name, key employees names, the company name, domain name, etc. By doing this, you will receive a notification before a situation escalates or enters into the top search results.

Here is a short list of free reputation management tools:

- [Google Feed Reader](#) will help you track keywords and phrases
- [Google Alerts](#) will track web results, blogs, news, groups and video
- [Social Mention](#) is similar to Google Alerts, but is targeted towards social networking sites - you can even subscribe to and download the results
- Twitter Search is available for up to four days after a tweet is sent and you have the option to subscribe to updates via RSS

## How Do We Handle Review Sites?

Complaints on review sites are not always the fault of the company, but it doesn't matter to the one reading the negative review. Begin by replying to negative posts with a personalized response, include a thank you, an apology, a follow up, say something positive and extend an invitation to continue the conversation on an alternative platform if allowed (i.e. phone, email, etc.).

For the most part, people just want to be heard. You do not necessarily have to address every issue that is mentioned. Focus on the key issues and make sure the response is personalized and thoughtful.

Set objectives for each review response. Responding to reviews should accomplish the following:

- Demonstrate you're listening and you care
- Provide the opportunity to explain the situation
- Attempt to change perceptions
- Win over new residents
- Reinforce the positive
- Understand the resident's perspective
- Be accountable / provide solutions / solve problems


Almost 80% of review site users feel that a management response to a bad review is reassuring.

~ TripAdvisor, 2010

Respond to positive reviews occasionally, in a natural way (meaning no canned responses). Search engines will crawl the review sites and help boost your search results.

Responding to negative reviews can be intimidating. Here are a few do's and don'ts to help.


NEGATIVE RESPONSE DOs	NEGATIVE RESPONSE DON'Ts
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Thank the reviewer</li> <li>2. Apologize</li> <li>3. Follow-up regarding the specific issues</li> <li>4. Keep as short as possible</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Don't repeat any negative comments</li> <li>2. Don't include your company name when responding to a negative review</li> <li>3. Don't respond to ugly reviews that attack staff or are offensive</li> <li>4. Don't make excuses</li> </ol>

 When responding to positive reviews, remember to repeat the compliment and your company name!

## What About Feedback On Our Social Sites?

When receiving feedback on social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, a response from the brand is expected ASAP. "Instant gratification" is the world in which we live today. Be sure to set up alerts to monitor your social media sites.

Many consumers are using social networking sites to research brands, to request customer service and to provide feedback. Because Facebook does not allow anonymous posts, unlike some review sites, you are able to see who it is that is in need of a response and determine the best course of action. Is this a long-time resident that has a quick question? Or is this a brand new resident that is having maintenance difficulty? In all cases, be polite. If the content posted is outrageous, offensive or attacking of your employees or residents, remove the content immediately.

 HyperAlerts is the best solution to-date for monitoring your Facebook pages and the pages of your competitors.

### Helpful Tips For Social Sites

1. Create a typical response plan but do not copy and paste the same message into every comment. Be unique, be personal, be human.
2. Develop a social media crisis plan, just in case, and educate employees on acceptable and unacceptable uses of social media to protect your company brand online.
3. Create a use policy for your company Facebook page to establish the ground rules and set expectations. For example, "Offensive or threatening updates will be deleted immediately."
4. Monitor your page and remove spam posts as soon as possible.

You can read more tips and [best practices about Facebook here](#).

## How Do We Respond To Negativity

Once you begin [monitoring your brand's online reputation](#) and you discover negativity, how should you respond? Research the situation before responding to negative comments online. Is there any merit to the claims against your company? If not, provide the facts and ask for corrections to the content. If there is merit, then offer to discuss the issue. Remember to listen, respond with honesty and be transparent. Never be defensive or appear to be attempting a cover up of the facts.

If your company has an [established blog](#), be prepared to respond on your own turf. Position your company as an authority in the industry to build credibility and increase your position in the search rankings. As an authority, the community is more likely to link to you and defend your reputation online. Start by building your company's professional network. Find coworkers, clients, friends, residents, business partners and get them involved in conversations.



### Search Engine Optimization

Optimization is a preventive measure that can help place your company in the position of control. Used in conjunction with reputation management response tactics, SEO can protect your brand visibility on the web. Start by optimizing every piece of content about your company online. From investor relations to video to images, use keywords to place this content at the top of search results.

### Protecting Your Company Name

Everyday a new social networking site launches. Building your company brand can be difficult when you don't have the same username across each of the social networks. Many times affiliates, angry customers or employees obtain a brand's name. There are services that can help with the process of obtaining consistent usernames, like KnowEm, but sometimes you'll be unable to obtain the username that is most familiar to your audience. Be creative.

Squatting is what happens when someone has obtained your brand's name as their username for monetary gain.

In addition to the company's URL and usernames, own the negatives as well. For example, you may want to own AshleyApartmentsSucks.com if you're finding a lot of negative commentary online from residents of a previous property management company. This is an opportunity to prevent angry residents, former employees or competitors from using your company name within a domain name.

Once you have established your social networking profiles, remember to protect your reputation by setting the appropriate privacy settings on each profile. There are opportunities for unintentional sabotage of your brand's reputation everywhere. From angry customers to dissatisfied employees, you can never predict where trouble will appear. You can only anticipate the potential for trouble.

## Our World Has Changed And We Must Adapt

Invite additional business opportunities by understanding the importance of your company's online reputation, taking steps to manage that reputation and by responding appropriately to reviews.

When prospects, residents, employees, owners, management companies and stockholders are seeking information about your company online, you want them to find relevant and positive results. If the search results are crowded with competitors, former employees, indifferent or boring content, the user may not be easily won over by the content they find. Having a good name for your company should be a priority. It is time to take a proactive approach to getting your name out there the way you want.

Remember, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." 📌




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### About the Author

Charity Hisle is a social media consultant, national speaker and trainer. After several years as a vendor in the Multifamily industry, Charity established [Socially Engaged Marketing](#). She has rapidly become a leading provider of social media consulting and services. She is known for her innovative and unique insights on using social media strategies to attract and retain customers. Her previous experience includes managing a national blogging and social media services program for thousands of customers, directing new media integrated marketing initiatives, planning and implementing Internet marketing campaigns, e-mail marketing campaigns, e-commerce campaigns, and classified listings strategies. You can reach [Charity on LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#) and Twitter [@CharityHisle](#) or [@SoEngaged](#).

### About AppFolio

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