

What is Reputation Management?

It may take years for a center to grow, establish itself as a credible one, and become a profitable venture. But it takes only a few minutes to tarnish its reputation and discredit it.

While most large organizations have inbuilt reputation protection and management systems in place; smaller centers may hesitate to invest in such a process. Yet it is a small investment compared to the results it can offer.

So what is Reputation Management and why is it important to an organization such as a school or study center?

With any company, and this includes the education sector; reputation can be divided into the following:

Creating a reputation: This has a lot to do with momentum. As you start a new enterprise, it may take weeks, months or years to get it off the ground and running successfully. As you work on creating this business, you are also working on creating a good reputation and image for yourself.

Maintaining a reputation: Once you have created your reputation, the next logical step taken, is to maintain it. However, most people do not think of installing protective systems in place, to safeguard what is one of the most important assets of a business, its reputation.

Recovering or regaining a lost reputation: Once your reputation is tarnished, it's often a very difficult process to reverse this image. However, it is not an impossible feat, just one that will take a lot of effort, time and often money.

Online, reputation management is all about monitoring the web for sites that have mentioned your school, center, staff or service.

Offline, reputation management is about seeking feedback from your network and users, who include parents, students and faculty members. It also involves word of mouth praise or negative feedback, which is often quite difficult to control.

Reputation Management versus Reputation Repair

Reputation management is a very time and labor intensive process. With different sectors, reputation management takes on a different requirement. In the education sector for example, reputation management may involve the following:

- Monitoring the web to track your school/center's name
- Building a popular web following with downloads and blog postings on offer
- Directory listings
- Media releases in the event a new service is offered
- Online reviews
- Networking on related educational sites

The problems arise when the school or center faces a crisis. While regular crisis are part of an organization's day to day dealings; a problem that can cause a serious damage to the center's reputation will need to be handled immediately and effectively. A school's reputation may be damaged from within (example, staff badmouthing the school services) or from without-parents discrediting the school). While the source is important and should be managed accordingly; it is resolving the situation expediently that should be the primary concern. This is where Reputation Repair comes in.

Reputation repair allows you to handle any given crisis thrown your way, in an effective manner. If you do find yourself in a situation where you need to take action, then the following steps will help you:

1. **Stay calm:** As with any crisis situation, staying calm and thinking logically will help resolve the problem on hand. As Donald Trump said, why waste energy on thinking about the problem, when it can be channeled into solving it?

2. **Have a plan ready:** Just as most organizations should have a crisis communications manual in place; your center should have some kind of reputation management manual to guide it. This would essentially be a list of things to do in a situation, where your center's reputation has been damaged. Who is the one in charge? What are the steps to be taken? What are the steps to be avoided? All this should be noted down so there is no last minute confusion within the organization and staff.
3. **Have someone in charge:** Along with having guidelines in place, you also need someone to handle it. This could be the principal, headmaster or a member of the staff. Whoever is in charge should be well briefed and competent to handle this delicate situation.
4. **Remember that situations vary:** Be prepared for different possibilities to arise when one is dealing with a crisis such as this. It's important to avoid pointing a finger of blame at anyone; especially within the organization and if that person is not wholly or completely at fault.
5. **Handle people sensitively:** This could be the person who created the situation, the media or both. If you need to apologize, then do so. Create a few key points, including your apology, and stick to it. You don't have to contribute more than what is necessary and remember that even an apology can be misconstrued, so choose your words wisely.

Which organizations are targets for reputation repair?

No school, no center, no organization is too small to have its reputation targeted. In the past, it was only large organizations, usually in the corporate sector that had to watch what was being said about them. And cases in example are Coke and iPod that have had negative reviews alongside positive ones. However, nowadays it's possible to get a great Google ranking; and you do not have to be a multinational to rank on the first 10 spots in Google's search engines. A negative review which gets posted on a popular site or blog will get a higher ranking, and consequently, the name of the center tarnished, appears in the first few web searches. And research has shown time and time again that most people will look at the first top 10 searches; and not move beyond that.

Following is an example of the brand Splenda. As you can see, number 5 and 8 discuss possible negative consequences of using Splenda.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "splenda". The search bar includes the Google logo, the text "splenda", a "Search" button, and links for "Advanced Search" and "Preferences". Below the search bar, there are radio buttons for "the web" (selected) and "pages from Canada".

The search results are listed under the heading "Web":

- SPLENDA®** (with icons for print, share, and close)

23 Oct 2008 ... **SPLENDA** No Calorie Sweetener combines the great taste of sugar with incredible heat stability so that it can be used in cooking and baking.
www.splenda.ca/ - 19k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - [Feedback](#)
- SPLENDA®** (with icons for print, share, and close)

23 Oct 2008 ... By joining the **SPLENDA®** Recipe Club you will be one of the first to receive brand-new recipes, cooking and baking tips, healthy lifestyle ...
www.splenda.ca/splenda-recipes.aspx - 35k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - [Feedback](#)
[More results from www.splenda.ca »](#)
- Sucralose - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia** (with icons for print, share, and close)

Though marketed in the U.S. as a "No calorie sweetener," **Splenda** products that ... [12]
 Because **Splenda** contains a relatively small amount of sucralose, ...
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Splenda - 81k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - [Feedback](#)
- SPLENDA® Brand Sweetener** (with icons for print, share, and close)

Splenda information and dessert recipes made sugar free! Low carb, low calorie desserts from **Splenda** - great for individuals with diabetics.
www.splenda.com/ - 19k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - [Feedback](#)
- Splenda (Sucralose) Toxicity Exposed** (with icons for print, share, and close)

Well documented presentation of academic and scientific data to support the dangers of chlorine containing **Splenda** (Sucralose).
www.splendaexposed.com/ - 23k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - [Feedback](#)
- Oct 24 How Splenda Was Discovered Dr. Mercola of www ...** (with a small video thumbnail)

Details of how **Splenda** (sucralose) was accidentally ...
 4 min 56 sec - ★★★★★
video.google.com/videoplay?docid=1594426815725517357 - [Feedback](#)
- Canadian Living : Food : © Think sugar, use SPLENDA®** (with icons for print, share, and close)

Replace oil in your cake or bread recipes with unsweetened applesauce; and sugar with **SPLENDA®** No Calorie Sweetener. These healthy options are easy to ...
www.canadianliving.com/food/_think_sugar_use_splenda/ - 63k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - [Feedback](#)
- Is Splenda Really As Safe As They Say It Is? www.mercola ...** (with a small video thumbnail)

why there is simply inadequate safety data supporting the ...
 4 min 39 sec - ★★★★★
www.youtube.com/watch?v=jn7EMipoDFY - [Feedback](#)
- Baking with Splenda: A Healthy Exchanges CookBook - Google Books Result**

by JoAnna M. Lund, Barbara Alpert - 2005 - Health & Fitness - 320 pages
 This all-new collection also features: -Recipes for sauces, glazes, and toppings - Special section of recipes using Splenda(r) Sugar Blend for Baking - Cooking...
books.google.ca/books?isbn=0399532455...

With the education sector, it is important that the school in question is seen to be above any reproach. After all, parents are relying on the school to provide their children with the education and learning they need to survive and flourish in their lives. If a school has got a bad reputation, unfounded as it may be, it will still have parents reconsidering sending their child to it.

While erasing something that has been written in the negative sense may not be an option; managing it well to convert it to a positive, definitely is.

Open up an area for reviews: People will trust a site more if it allows for negative reviews to be published. If a parent posts that your schools music classes are not the best; don't erase the post, respond to it. In addition, other parents may post comments which could refute these negative comments.

Keep abreast of current trends: Social networking sites such as MySpace and facebook have gained tremendous popularity among both the younger (students) and middle age (parents) generation. Think of starting up a page on a networking site, where your center can gain a fan following

Be a producer: Counter any negative publicity by being a provider. Instead of being just a content consumer, be a producer. Online, generate content that parents will want to talk about, including video, audio or written posts. Offline, think about enhancing your center's reputation by doing something for the community – either donation though money or time, volunteering, handling a fundraiser event etc. Be creative and do something that will promote your center's positive image.

So, what should one monitor?

1. **School/Center name:** This is the front of your organization and should be well protected. Monitor where it appears in news and search engines.
2. **Services on offer:** The actual services your school or center offers are your bread and butter, and so knowing where they appear and in what context is important.
3. **School/Center URL:** This is the website your company uses. Ensure its name is not being used by another organization.
4. **Key members of the organization:** Keep a look out for the key players in your school/center and monitor their appearance on forums, in the news and via search engines. It's also a good idea to see what sites they visit on a regular basis.

5. **Industry sites, boards and forums:** Visit, participate and monitor these sites regularly to both promote and protect your school/center.

Pre-emptive measures to manage your reputation:

The following are some things you can do to reduce the risk of your organization's reputation being targeted:

1. **Own your name:** This is important if you are a private school or center. Very often, a 'brand' (a fictitious example could be 'Music-Theater') is built around its company name (e.g. The XX school of Musical Theater). If that's the case, make sure yours is an easy one to remember, yet one that sets you apart. Also, if possible, buy up other domains so no one else can have a name similar to yours (e.g. .com, .org or .net)
2. **Monitor the web:** Sites like Google are an ideal way to monitor what is being said about your center. If you own a blog, then there are a number of ways to monitor it: boardtracker, backtype and technorati are just some sites which will allow you to monitor blogs, forums and discussion groups.
3. **Become an expert:** Write articles and become an expert in your field. It's harder (though not impossible) to discredit someone with an expert label tagged onto them. There are a number of free ezine sites in which you can distribute your articles and knowledge. Along with you, your center too is billed as an expert and one to be trusted.
4. **Participate in discussions:** Join forums related to your field and participate in them regularly. It is a great way to learn about what's happening in the market. Get actively involved and start discussions and create dialogues. All this will make you and your center visible and give you a better chance at explaining things in the event your organization gets targeted for negative talk.
5. **Remember your manners:** You are your school or center; so remember what you say speaks volumes about who you represent. Always be polite, even when you don't agree with the discussion on hand, or if you are countering something negative said about you.

6. **Provide a place for complaints:** On your site or blog, provide a space where unhappy parents or families can vent their frustration and grievances. And always be sure to answer them immediately. This may prevent them from spilling their guts out elsewhere.
7. **Remember it's not always a virtual world:** If you are an organization such as a school or center with links in the offline community (and the web is only a part of what you do); then remember to offer impeccable services and opportunities for your parents/students/staff to provide feedback. What happens offline often takes only minutes to get online. And this is with regards to negative feedback too.

With a few well thought out plans and safeguards installed, it is possible not only to protect the reputation of your organization, but to also get back on track in the event negative publicity knocks you off it.