

The Ideal Online Reputation Marketing Strategy

By: D. Wendal Attig

**CEO and Managing Director,
Advanced Small Business Marketing
and Online Reputation Marketing Systems**

September 14, 2013

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This information was originally shared in-part on the Saturday Business Magazine on KRDO-Radio with Co-Hosts Robin Roberts and Ted Robertson on September 14, 2013. For the benefit of our visitors and their listeners, additional content is included here.

The Big Question:

What's happening to small business branding?

Three main issues have changed the branding game for small business.

First: Consumers Have Embraced Smart Phone and Mobile Devices and “Collaborative Consumption”

The most important change is the use of mobile phones and mobile devices and collaborative. The speed of getting to important information is almost instant and the risk of making a bad decision has all but been eliminated.

We've learned that as consumers we can get to the information we need to know to determine which business we want to use much faster than we ever could before.

Traditionally we used to go to our friends or family or coworkers close acquaintances to get recommendations .We trusted those people as our key source for referrals, reviews and opinions.

But once we begin to get the smart phone, and other mobile devices, we began to look online for those reviews, for those recommendations and for those opinions, and our *“who you gonna trust”* factor begin to change.

Since we could no longer wait to make contact with our traditional sources for reviews and opinions, we learned quickly that in about 20 seconds we could discover all we needed to know to make a decision about doing business with a certain company.

Let me give you an example: if we passed a restaurant we had never seen in a town we've never been to, we can put the name of the business and the city into our mobile device and within 20 seconds call up the information about that company where it's located and more importantly what kind of experience we should expect.

That's powerful information! And that has changed the way we have to manage our brands online. Not only is our reputation online, but it is on the line.

This is the first time in history that consumers have embraced technology and a way of communicating ahead of small business. In fact small business has been reluctant to embrace the technology and deal with the consumer reconnaissance it provides.

The review sites and search engines are determined to deliver the best possible experience they can for their users, and most recently determined that showing those review scores that online reputation score contributes to that experience. The faster they can deliver this information, the more often they will be the search engine or review site of choice and of course we can't fault them for that.

Second: The Consumer Has a Voice—Equal to--or Larger Than Our Own (for FREE!)

As consumers, clients, and patients, we now have an opportunity; we can share the details of our experience with certain company instantly whether that experience was good or bad. Traditionally if we had a bad experience with certain company, we could and would share that information with seven – to –

12 of our friends, but that information would dissipate fairly quickly. If we had a good experience we typically told no one.

Today using mobile technology and smart phones, we can share opinions often before we leave the restaurant, the medical practice, or the automobile servicing company. Our reviews are timely, relevant, and sometimes unfair. The problem for us in small business is that other mobile device users don't know the story behind the review. That puts us in a situation of being simply one review away from a bad online reputation score.

It also throws a new dynamic in how we manage our brand: we have to acknowledge "collaborative consumption" and be more concerned about our reputation than almost anything else if we plan to stay in business.

Third:

The Consumers' Quest to Find Performance Perfection

As consumers there is some interesting psychology behind our reaction when we see those scores. Let's say we are looking for an orthodontist in Colorado Springs. Likely we believe we're going to pay a similar amount of money and fees for the service we expect to get, but the whole time we're comparing, we're thinking about the outcome----- and here's the key----- We Believe We Deserve a Five Star Experience---Every time!

We've learned on our own jobs, in our own careers, that our clients, customers or patients expect nothing less than the best from us. So when we're spending our own money why should we expect less than the best from them.

Since we can access that information quickly, again by simply entering the name of the business and the city, we've learned we can predict what our own experience is likely to be.

Resource: If you have a chance, to get a hold of WIRED magazine or look at their online archives for the August 20, 2012 issue ---an article written by Rachel Botsman---“Welcome to the reputation economy” – provides interesting insight on how important our business reputations have become. The article characterizes the reputation economy as a place, “..... where your online history becomes more powerful than your credit history.”

Who’s Listening in Small Business but What Are They Hearing?

I talk with a lot of small business owners about the changes and why it is critical to understand that in the last 12 months online reputation has become so important to their future and it is interesting to see their response. They usually fall into one of three camps:

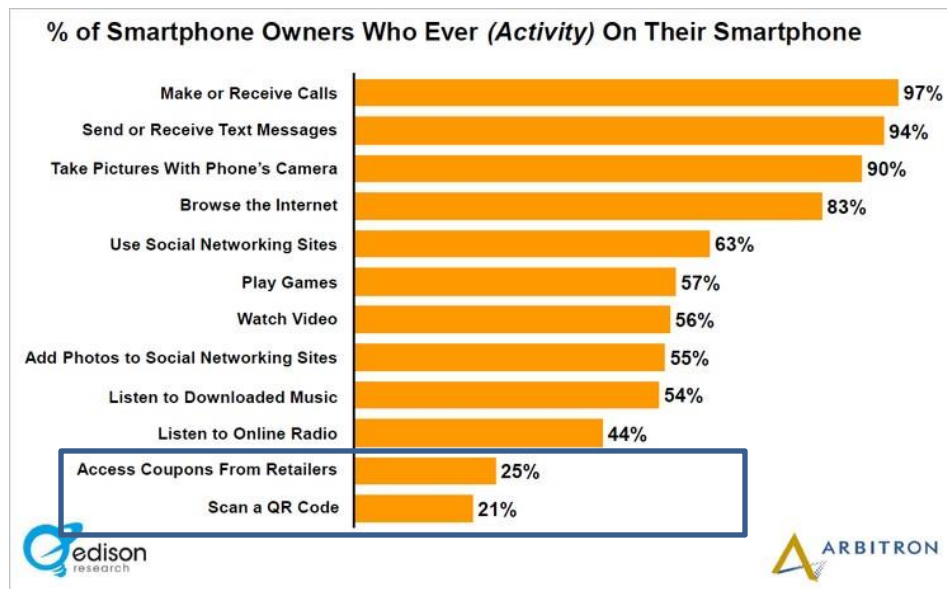
1. **The *Wake-up Call* reaction**, where the business owner realizes what they’ve missed it was to take action immediately to rectify the situation – – and at this point in time take advantage of the situation over their competitors
2. **The *Snooze Alarm* reaction**, where the business owner is hoping that if they do nothing for just a little bit longer this will go away and they will have dodged the bullet
3. **The *NOT FAIR!* reaction**, where the business owner sees bad reviews, and believes that since they are not accurate, that they don’t count, but everyone else who reads these reviews will not know it was a disgruntled employee or their competition. These guys question the research that’s been done by credible organizations. They are not happy with their online reputation scores. They really hope their online prospects are going to be as skeptical as they are.

It's likely if you've gotten this far, you recognize your reaction in one of those three categories. And I understand that, but hopefully we can give you some information that will be valuable to you, and equip you with some solutions, in a framework for developing the Ideal Online Reputation Marketing Strategy --- for positive impact on the overall branding for your company or your private practice.

Before we unfold a strategy, let's examine some statistical realities:

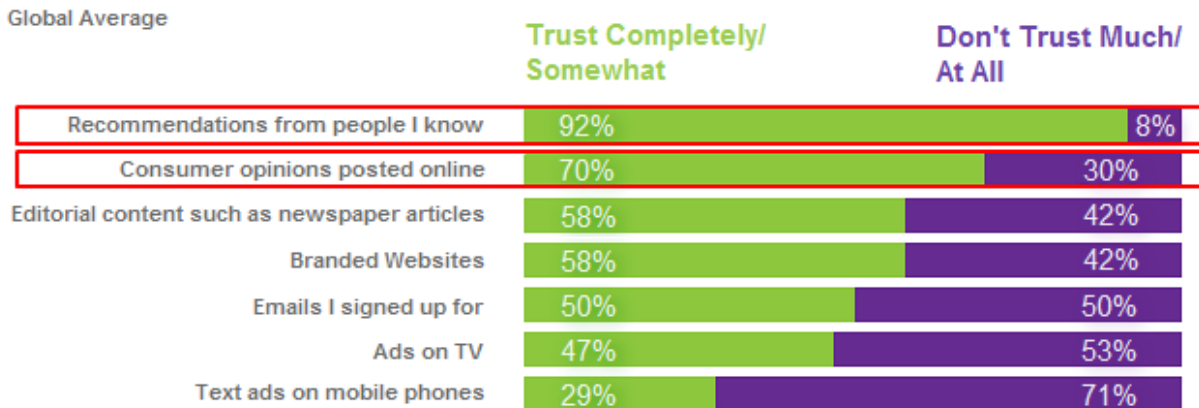
A Nielsen Study shows Smartphone usage continues to climb in the U.S. More than three out of five (61%) mobile subscribers in the U.S. owned a smartphone -- *if anything, it's effect on our abilities to manage and market our brands and to do business effectively is likely to increase.*

Arbitron commissioned Edison Research to do a study of smart phone user activity. Among other indicators, respondents claim that 25% of their smartphone activity is centered around looking for coupons from retailers.--- *They've come to expect their device to connect them with discounts and are fairly aggressively, "on the hunt".*



Nielsen research conducted a global trust in advertising survey in the third quarter of 2011. Survey says 92% of people trust completely or somewhat, “recommendations from people I know.” The next highest category was “consumer opinions posted online,” at 70% ----that ought to tell us something about “*who you’re gonna trust*”

To what extent do you trust the following forms of advertising?



Source Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising Survey. Q3 2011

Let’s say for the moment that we’re in Colorado Springs, Colorado, with a metro population of around 600,000. A Google research of keyword terms indicates that people are searching for local services. In the month of July 2013 alone:

- 14,820 Searches for Colorado Springs Cosmetic Dentistry
- 12,510 Searches for Colorado Springs Italian Restaurants
- 390 searches for Zios (a single location Italian Restaurant)
- 3700 searches for Heuberger Subaru (the nation’s largest Subaru dealership)

As a postscript to those search numbers: while we can’t tell exactly how many of those searches were from a mobile device, Google statistics show that

- Mobile search has grown 400% in the past year.
- 95% of mobile searches are for local providers,
- 59% visit a local store after searching on the mobile web and
- 88% of those searchers take action within the same 24-hour period.

Harvard University did a study that showed that an increase of just one point in a restaurant's Yelp rating could result in an increase of 5 to 9% in annual revenue.

So we know there's a relationship between your online reputation score and your annual revenue, but more importantly:

You have a chance when managing and marketing your online reputation as your "brand" and bring it to a five star level is to get your phone ringing (instead of your competitor's phone) with:

- **Prequalified** (they've read the reviews and like and believe what they saw)
- **Presold** (they are convinced they can expect an equally satisfying experience)
- **Buyers** (clients or patients who are ready to exchange their money for the goods or services you offer)

Whatcha You Gonna Do?

As we strap in to take-off for "*Reputation is Paramount*" land, here's the bottom line:

1. Users are going online in increasingly massive numbers from mobile devices everywhere at any time they choose, to access information over which we have little control.
2. They are instantly discovering our reputation scores and can immediately see reviews and opinions
3. They are making decisions about doing business with us –or our competitors--based on the reviews by people they don't even know!

So the most serious questions to be answered:

- 1. How we can manage and market our online reputations so they give us a competitive edge and become an asset to our business*
- 2. How can we show up in the most positive light in the place where consumers, clients, and patients, already exist?*
- 3. What will it now take to capitalize on the hard work you've already done to become the choice provider?*

In the next segment will talk about how to set up a strategy. I don't guarantee this will be easy – in fact I suggest you are going to need some professional help to pull it off-- but let's talk about what is necessary to make it happen.

STOP—Check Your Fit Factor

Pre-assess your situation. As we move ahead, plug ONE of these realities into your thinking --Pick the One That You Believe Fits Your Company Best:

- 1. You find your company or perhaps some of your offices, locations or franchisees have bad reviews. (If this fits, do this yesterday!)*
- 2. You Have Some Good Reviews but your Online Reputation Score isn't What it Could Be (Do whatever it takes to build toward 5 stars and keep it there)*
- 3. You Have No Reviews (Online Users Expect to Find Them to Determine Your Credibility—Get Started As Soon As You Can Afford to Stay Competitive)*

LOOK--at your advertising and promotional budget

Just a tip: unless you have positive reviews and the ratings required to provide prequalified and presold customers, we advise looking at your advertising and promotional expenditures and temporarily cutting those dramatically.

Especially if you have bad reviews, advertising is simply throwing good money after bad. In other words you are simply paying people to discover your bad reputation online. Chances are this will do significant damage to your overall brand position.

Better at this point to put the strategy in place that we're outlining next, and then go back to a more aggressive advertising and promotion schedule.

Ready? Let's Get Busy!

The Ideal Online Reputation Marketing Strategy

There are some key steps to be aware of when you determine that your business reputation is not serving your brand well:

- Claim the Listing in the Best Online Directories for your Business
- Develop Your 5-Star Reputation Online
- Market Your Reputation for Maximum Leverage
- Manage Your Reputation for Consistency
- Create An Internal Reputation Marketing Culture

★ Claim the Listing In The Best Directories For Your Business

It's amazing to see how many small companies miss this step entirely but it is critical if you plan to position your company in its best light. So, the first thing to make sure is that your company is listed on the correct directory sites.

Thousands of customers every day search on local business directories like Google plus, yelp, Yahoo local, and dozens of other sites to find the most reputable companies to do business with. You want to be sure your company is listed consistently on those directories.

Solution: Research, setup, and claim local and industry specific directories

- Do the proper local and industry – specific directory research
 - Do some detailed research on the local directories based on industry keywords specific to your business

- Research the top competitive companies in your marketplace and find the directories they are listed on
- Set up and claim your business listings
 - Set up accounts on the best industry-specific directories
 - Consistently enter your company information in the right categories on each site
 - Claim your listings in order to control the content that appears on those and provide you with the ability to respond to reviews

★ Develop Your Five Star Reputation Online

Discover your current online ratings and assess your own company profile.

Honestly assess how your prospective customers are likely to see you when they search for your services online. Look objectively at bad reviews and poor ratings about your company especially on local business directories. Understand that each poor review not only is publicly read by your potential customers but also brings down your reputation score on local directory sites.

Also understand that many local directories like City Search and insider Pages, aggregate reviews from other sites therefore both good and bad reviews can spread to other sites very quickly.

Solution: Average up your reviews and bury your bad reviews.

- As quickly as possible work on soliciting five-star reviews from your current customers to bring your reputation score up. (Remember the search engines have been watching how many reviews are being posted for your company and how often. An immediate onslaught of five-star reviews may be seen as a bogus attempt to increase your scores, make sure these

reviews are legitimately posted by your customers from their own locations.)

- **Posting these positive reviews will help to push the bad reviews off the first page of your listings. Over time these will also increase your overall reputation scores.**

Quickly develop enough reviews to be trusted.

We know from research, that consumers will read an average of 10 reviews before making a decision and research also shows that customers do not trust the company unless they have at least 10 five-star reviews.

Solution: Create a customer review strategy

- **Determine how you will ask customers for reviews Keep in mind it is not their job to remember to provide positive reviews, but your job to ask them, especially following a positive experience with your company.**
- **This could be in the form of direct mail, which asked them to go to a specific webpage or a specific directory to post the review.**
- **Keep this strategy at the forefront of your interpersonal relationships with these customers.**

★ Market That Five Star Reputation for Maximum Leverage

A lot of companies get great reviews from customers but they can't post those reviews online themselves in the local directories like Yelp like Google like dozens of others because they have proprietary filters like those we mentioned -- algorithms to delete reviews that are posted from the same IP network -- meaning coming straight from your company.

So if you post those reviews from inside your business, Google, Yelp will delete them and ---here's a critical thing to remember --- they might even flag your Google account as spam because there is no way to tell if yours is real or made up. Whoops. So what we do?

Here's the solution:

- **Develop a strategy to bypass review filters -- not to cheat the system-- but to take advantage of the legitimate reviews you have collected in some other ways -- maybe from postcards, maybe from written survey forms, or other off-line methods.**
- **Post real reviews from customers into a special place on your own website.**
- **When you get reviews, sort through those to find the best for posting**

Market Your Website:

Almost 3 out of four consumers say that online reviews are major factor in their decision --we know that. You want to make sure that your website has the authority or social proof to show these prospects who visited your site that you are the leader in the marketplace.

Here's what I suggest: Harness the power of written and video testimonials. Add them directly to your website for new and existing customers to see.

- **Brand your company through video reviews**
- **Add video testimonials and reviews to your website add the latest testimonial reviews from your local directories to your site**

★ **Manage Your Reputation for Consistency**

Develop a reputation monitoring system.

There are actually hundreds of different software programs that can monitor your social engagement, Branding, and company name, but these technologies like Google Alerts cannot monitor your reputation.

Here's why: when people leave reviews on a directory site like Yelp, they rarely mention your name because they're already on your business listing. So with dozens of review sites that are out there is no way for even the most sophisticated social or branding software to know if bad reviews are being posted about your company and no way to follow up to get bad reviews eliminated.

Our Solution:

- **Develop a monitoring process that daily monitors, tracks, and reviews your online review sites.**
- **It's important that any system of this kind, notify you when bad reviews are posted.**
- **Also make sure the system notifies you when five-star reviews are posted, so you can follow up with the reviewer, for possible referral.**

Put a Reputation Reporting Process in place

It's important that you and your team keep up to date on the progress of creating and maintaining a five-star reputation online. So you need a detailed process that will inform you of both the good and unfavorable reviews in some kind of a report that you can share with your team.

- **You'll need to create a reputation reporting procedural system**
- **Put the system in place that will report the highlights of all your reviews from the various online directories every 15 to 30 days.**

- Use this report to share with your staff and others to encourage them on the great job that they're doing.
- Note: use this report as a learning tool to educate them on the issues that will arise when receiving bad reviews. Give them an opportunity to help you develop solutions.

★ Commit to developing a reputation marketing culture

It's important to remember that every company is only one customer away from having a bad reputation. It isn't enough to create and manage a five-star reputation. It has to be intentionally championed within the company.

Solutions:

It's important to be proactive in creating a reputation marketing training process for your staff.

The most successful companies create a reputation marketing business culture using an online training center to ensure their employees help the company maintain a five-star online reputation.

That commitment to training your staff to continually recognize what your customers value when they provide five-star reviews.

Go over those reviews and the periodic reports and you'll discover what your customers' value.

Then make that your mantra in continuously delivering a five-star experience

(OK now to reinstate your promotional and advertising initiatives at this point—much more likely to be an investment instead of an expense.)

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719-422-6605 is our office number. Please call if we can be of help.

We also have a website: [Advanced Small Business Marketing .com](http://AdvancedSmallBusinessMarketing.com) -- look for Reputation Marketing

We invite you to register for our free webinar coming again soon, where you can learn more about some turnkey solutions we offer and get a complimentary, comprehensive online reputation analysis.