

## 1 Agenda

Introduction – who is Tailormade4you and Christine Anderssen

What is Online Reputation Marketing

Two approaches – Reactive and Proactive

Monitoring tools and methods

Manage your online assets

- Online assets (website, blogs, microsites)
- Blogosphere
- Forums, consumer complaint/opinion sites
- Pay per click campaigns
- Corporate communications (press releases)
- Social media (E.g Youtube, facebook, myspace, twitter, linked in, wikipedia)
- Article marketing

Own the search engines

- SERPS
- Corporate profiling/brand building (squidoo, hub pages, aboutus.org, etc)

## 2 Introduction

Tailormade4you has been involved in web design and online marketing for the past 4 years. We are a small company but are aiming to grow and expand our user base even more this year.

We specialize in web design using content management systems such as Joomla and Wordpress, to build responsive, rich functionality websites that can provide Web 2.0 functionality as well as perform well in the search engines. We also specialize in SEO and Internet Marketing and have managed to obtain first page rankings in Google for a number of our clients.

Christine Anderssen has over 20 years of experience in the IT industry, with her skills ranging from programming, database design, business consulting, project management, test management to web design, web development, SEO and Internet Marketing. She holds a Masters degree in Management Information Systems at Wits University.

Tailormade4you currently serves the SMME market primarily but would like to branch out into the larger corporate market, especially on the SEO, Internet Marketing and ORM side.

## 3 Online Reputation Marketing – definition and concepts.

What do these people have in common?

Zuma.... Joost van der Westhuizen....

They are two very high profile examples of people whose reputations were damaged in recent years. Whether their actions justify their reputations or not is immaterial, the important thing is that their reputations have been tarnished in the eyes of the public.

A couple of years ago the only way that news were disseminated was through official news channels such as newspapers, magazines and television. Today, there are over 100 Million blogs, and over 1.6 Million blog posts done per day. Other social media platforms such as Youtube have millions of videos about companies, celebrities and yes, potentially even you or your company. For example, Kryptonite manufactures a range of bike locks which are supposed to be quite secure, however, in 2004 someone posted a video of how to pick a Kryptonite bike lock with a BIC pen, leaving the company with egg on their faces and

having to replace 380 000 locks worldwide with an upgraded, more secure version of the lock.

The difference between today and a couple of years ago is that in previous years news was formally managed through media channels. Journalists published information that had at least a measure of veracity behind it – or at least had to be verifiable to some degree, these days, ANYONE can write ANYTHING about ANYONE and play the role of the so-called 'citizen journalist'.

While lawsuits against bloggers have increased in the past couple of years, the blogosphere still remains a very big space to monitor, with 175 000 new blogs being created on a daily basis (these are new BLOGS, not blog posts!)

The upshot of this all is that not only is it easy for a disgruntled employee to write bad things about your company, but it is also easy for a company to do research about an employee before they employ him. Your reputation is an open book on the internet, whether you are a company or an individual.

Remember that your reputation is a valuable asset. It is something that can take years to build up and only a few minutes or days to break down. The Weber Shandwick PR firm estimates that it can take up to four years to recover from a reputation blemish. Your reputation is what creates trust and makes business possible. Without a good reputation you are going to find it difficult to get new business or land that job. In fact, like Joost, your career could be in jeopardy due to a bad reputation.

Side Note: This is not to say that bloggers do not get sued for defamation. Recently in South Africa, the blogger Donn Edwards was sued by Quality Vacation Club for defamation (it was settled out of court) and a woman in the USA was recently jailed for what she wrote about Anna Nicole Smith. In fact, due to the popularity and awareness of ORM and the tools available today to monitor the blogosphere, lawsuits against bloggers in the United States have been doubling every year since 2004 with 15 million dollars in judgments so far against them.

ORM stands for Online Reputation Management. It is the combination of marketing, PR and search engine marketing. The goal is to enable you or your company to achieve high rankings in the search engines and so increase your overall positive web presence.

## 4 Approaches to ORM

The steps involved in ORM are to MONITOR the internet for any references to your company or product, to analyze the results and then to take action.

This can take place in a reactive fashion or in a proactive fashion.

Let's take a look at the actions involved in ORM

### 4.1 Monitor

What should be monitored?

- Your company name – this is probably the easiest and most obvious thing to monitor.
- Your products or services, especially if you sell any brand name products. Examples in South Africa would be 'Plascon', 'Huggies', 'Nissan'

- Your executives and spokespeople. These are people that are sometimes actively in the limelight and whose actions will reflect on the company.
- Industry trends. Industry and market trends will sometimes give you an indication of anything that might impact your sales or your turnover. New legislation, downward trends in the industry and any other trends that might impact your industry should be monitored so that your company can react in time to negative OR positive trends that you could potentially leverage off.
- Competitors. If you track what is happening with your competitors in the industry it will help you better position your own brand.

#### Where to monitor?

- Casting a wide net initially: This involves monitoring a wide range of activities from a wide range of sources. Sometimes this is not practical since the signal to noise ratio is such that there is too much noise and little signal. This can lead to a huge waste in time and effort to try and distinguish the important mentions from the false positives or even the coincidental mentions. But it is often useful to start with a wide net so as to get an initial idea of what is out there. You can then use the initial monitoring to tighten the net and focus on specific mentions. Casting a wide net means monitoring blogs, forums and social media sites.
- Centers of influence: This could be specific blogs or forums important to your industry, or else specific customer review sites such as [www.hellopeter.com](http://www.hellopeter.com) or [www.getclosure.co.za](http://www.getclosure.co.za)
- Communities: These would include social networking sites such as Myspace or Facebook but it must be noted that it is important to only monitor sites where the profile of the community matches that of your company or product, else it will be a wasted effort.
- SERPS – Search engine results. You need to do searches in the search engines for all the keywords that you have identified as being worth monitoring, such as company name, product names, executives and spokespeople names, to see what the results are on the first couple of pages of the search engines.

## 4.2 Analyse and Take Action

Analyse the results – this involves doing an analysis of all the results that you gathered in the monitoring step.

What is needed is to make a list of the sites and capture:

- What type of site the result appears on (blog, forum, community site, social media, other website etc)
- What the 'value' or 'strength' of the site is – this can often be measured in terms of Page Rank, number of links, number of subscribers etc.
- Whether the comment is positive or negative or neutral

The next step is then to decide what needs to be done with regards to the results.

The results could have one of three potential outcomes:

1. No conversation, few results in the search engines
2. Largely neutral results in the conversation and search engines
3. Negative sentiment in the conversation and search engines.

Obviously number 3 is the result which indicates an obvious problem, and the actions that will have to be taken would then concentrate on addressing the negative comments, and/or removing the negative results from the search engines. This is largely a REACTIVE approach. By the time that there is a lot of negative sentiment around, you are sitting with a potential PR nightmare and a lot of work to try and remove negative results from the search engines.

But results numbers 1 and 2 have their own sets of problems.

With number 1 you are sitting with a potential problem. If you have few results in the search engines, the possibility that the first few positions in the search engines will be filled with negative results SHOULD anything untoward happen, is big. In other words, you do not 'own' the search engine space and if any negative comments appear on any consumer related sites, blog sites, social media sites etc, these results will quickly dominate the first couple of results.

With number 2 you are dominating the search engine results space, but the results that come up are hardly flattering or positive, they are merely neutral. You need to remember that potential business partners, clients, and other people that you do business with will certainly research you or your company on the Internet before doing business with you. You WANT the results that they see to be positive, to win them over and impress them with your 'Google CV'.

The best approach for both the number 1 and 2 type outcomes is to PROACTIVELY build your reputation online. You should own the search engine result pages and make sure that you do not leave room for negative, or indifferent sentiment to appear!

## 5 Detailed ORM strategies

### 5.1 Monitoring tools and methods

There are two approaches to take with regards to monitoring tools. The first is to make use of one of the many excellent commercial tools available on the market.

The cost for these tools vary from relatively cheap (i.e. cost effective) at a couple of dollars per month, to quite expensive at around 2000 or 3000 Euros per month. In general, these tools provide the following:

- Ability to scan a wide variety of websites such as forums, blogs, News feeds, social media sites such as Youtube, and other websites (such as those of competitors or industry influential sites)
- Ability to provide feedback in multiple ways, for example via email or RSS
- Ability to tailor searches in sophisticated ways (e.g. use negatives to try and filter false positives). Some tools also have some measure of Artificial Intelligence built in to 'learn' what is important and what is not.
- Ability to provide sentiment analysis and attach levels of importance to the references found.

The second approach is to set up your own network of tools. There are multiple free options available mostly centered around setting up RSS feeds from various sites that offer RSS capabilities.

Some sites that you need to monitor might not have RSS feeds. In this case it is a good idea to make use of software that monitors changes on specified sites. Good examples of these are Copernic Tracker, Website Watcher and WatchThatPage.com. Of these three, only WatchThatPage is really free. The other two have free trial versions but cost a nominal amount each of about \$50 or so.

The different channels that must be watched are the following:

- Social media sites such as Youtube

- Blogs – in this case it is useful to set up a Technorati feed. Technorati offers various search options and using this you can already filter your RSS feed and tailor it to fit your specific requirements.
- Google sites such as the news channels, trends, video, groups etc. For this is best to set up Google alerts, which are also delivered into your inbox via email.
- Social communities such as Facebook and Myspace
- Forums and message boards
- Customer review sites. In South Africa for example [www.hellopeter.com](http://www.hellopeter.com). Luckily Hellopeter does offer an RSS feed. I would suggest that you either sign up for a company specific feed if you have a company that is listed with the site already, or for a industry specific feed if you just want to keep your eye on the industry itself. Another site in South Africa that also handles customer complaints is [www.getclosure.co.za](http://www.getclosure.co.za), although the complaints themselves are not published directly online. All that is published is the rating that is given to a company with regards to the way that it handles complaints. The site is therefore difficult to use for tracking specific mentions or problems.

#### **Convert RSS feed into Email:**

If you are not comfortable using an RSS reader to aggregate all these RSS feeds and read them, you can make use of a service such as [Feedmyinbox.com](http://Feedmyinbox.com). This service is also completely free and allows you to enter an RSS feed which it will then scan and send to you via email on a daily basis.

The advantage of taking this approach is that it is a low cost option – if you do it yourself. If you start to outsource this to an external company you need to realise that it might turn out to be quite expensive in terms of man hours since the amount of data that must be collated and processed can be quite extensive.

## **5.2 Manage your online assets**

Your online assets are websites that you have direct control over that could be used to dominate the search engines. There are more of these than you might think.

Some examples are:

- Your own corporate site(s)
- Micro sites and sister sites
- Domain names
- Blogs – your own corporate blogs as well as hosted blogs that you can create on popular blogging platforms such as Blogger and Wordpress
- Social networking sites such as Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIN and so forth
- Corporate communications such as Press releases and articles (published online)

For each of these you need to do the following:

#### **Corporate site:**

Make sure that your corporate site is fully search engine optimised and appearing at the top of the search engines if people look for your company name. Your corporate site should also be up to date with the latest content. You should also make sure that you are using pages such as the About Us page in a manner that shows your company in the best light possible and builds trust. All contact information need to be displayed clearly.

#### **Micro Sites and sister sites:**

The same counts for any related sites, micro sites and partner sites that you have control over.

#### **Domain names**

Register all versions of your company's domain name as well as brand names, even negative ones. You should do this to prevent any disgruntled employees or customers from being able to do the same!

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### **Blogs**

You can easily build blogs on the popular blogging platform such as Wordpress.com, Blogger and others. Think about starting a corporate blog or employee blogs on these platforms. If you do allow your employees to blog, just be careful with what they are allowed to say and do provide guidelines with regards to the information that they are allowed to disseminate.

### **Social network sites**

You do not necessarily need to become intensely involved in these sites, however, they do offer the opportunity of opening more communication channels with potential customers. The important thing here is that you should make sure that you register usernames and create profiles with your main brand names, else you are leaving the opportunity for other people to take up these names with the viewpoint of either doing malicious damage, or wanting to make a quick profit by selling them back to you.

### **Corporate communications**

Online press releases and articles offer the opportunity of getting your brand name and company out there. These articles and press releases need to be search engine optimised to advertise your brands or company name. Write useful information about industry problems, offer tips, tutorials and solutions. This will serve two purposes, namely that these press releases and articles will contribute to the overall search engine presence of your company, and because you will be offering useful information it will also contribute to the overall levels of the credibility of your company.

### **5.3 Own the search engines**

Lastly, but almost most importantly, you need to make sure that your company occupies as much of the search engine space as possible, on all possible fronts. Not only do you want your company to appear in the first couple of results pages for mention of your company name or other brand names, but also when you do a search for the keywords related to your industry. From a marketing perspective, this gives people confidence in your company and what you can offer.

## **6 Conclusion**

Online Reputation Management combines search engine optimization (SEO), marketing and public relations to help you present a positive image of your company on the internet. This builds trust in your company and will help you retain existing customers as well as expand your customer base.