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further reading

www.gottaquirk.com

– the blog from Quirk eMarketing regularly posts the latest viral marketing buzz from the Internet.

www.adverblog.com

– Adverblog posts interactive marketing and other great advertising from around the world – great inspiration

10. online reputation management

What's inside: The **introduction** to ORM gives an insight into the topic and the **key terms and concepts** are outlined for this chapter, followed by an example of what can happen **when a company does not listen** and manage its online reputation. We discuss **how it works** outlining the significant steps of **listening, analysing and influencing**. The **10 rules to recover from an online brand attack** are a practical approach to ORM, followed by a **summary** and **the bigger picture**.

introduction

"If Dell were really smart, they'd hire me (yes, me) to come to them and teach them about blogs, about how their customers now have a voice; about how their customers are a community -- a community often in revolt; about how they could find out what their customers really think; about how they could fix their customers' problems before they become revolts; about how they could become a better company with the help of their customers.

If they'd only listen."

- Jeff Jarvis on his blog, Buzzmachine.com, in 2005.

Online conversations are taking place all the time: about politics, about Britney Spears, about a pet dog, about just about anything. People everywhere are engaging in and creating blogs, videos, mashups and more. It's called consumer generated media (CGM), and it's big news for any company or personality today.

We've learned about the tools of social media and the importance of word of mouth when it comes to viral marketing. Consumers trust each other, and search engines find that trust very relevant. Increasingly, CGM is showing up in the top results of the SERPs (search engine results pages).

The use of social media has equipped consumers with a voice and a platform, and the ability to amplify their views. The connected nature of the Internet makes these views easy to share, and the accessibility of social media tools makes it easy for other consumers to respond. Whether positive, negative or just slightly off-centre, consumers are making their views known.

Added to this, is the rising prevalence of CGM in search results. Entries that companies have no control over are ranking highly in brand search results. A Google search on "brand name + complaints" will display a whole lot more CGM.

A company's reputation can make a difference to its bottom line. Companies seen to engage with their customers; who appear honest and transparent and who listen to their consumers, benefit from a growing fan base of loyal customers who can then turn into passionate spokespeople. Companies who ignore the voices of their customers will see diminishing loyalty, and a growing resentment among the vocal online consumers.

Companies, and individuals, need to listen to what is being said about them, and learn how to respond to and engage with their consumers in this world of shifting power.

The screenshot shows a Google search for "macbook". At the top, there are navigation links for Web, Images, Maps, News, Shopping, Gmail, and more. The search bar contains "macbook" and a "Search" button. Below the search bar, there are more navigation links for Web, Video, Shopping, Blogs, and News.

The search results are as follows:

- Apple - MacBook**: The new MacBook features the latest Intel Core 2 Duo processor, larger hard drives, and up to 2GB of memory standard. And the best part: MacBook still ... www.apple.com/macbook/ - 17k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - [Note this](#)
- Apple - MacBook Pro**: With the latest Intel processor, a bigger hard drive, more memory, and even more innovative features, the new MacBook Pro has all the power, performance and ... www.apple.com/macbookpro/ - 18k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - [Note this](#) [More results from www.apple.com »](#)
- MacBook - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia**: The original MacBook was released on May 16, 2006, and utilized the Intel Core Duo processor and 945GM chipset, with Intel's GMA950 integrated graphics on a ... en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MacBook - 88k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - [Note this](#)
- Macbook Destruction**: When Apple refused to honor my warranty, I destroyed my ... www.youtube.com/watch?v=hHbrQqgVgg
- YouTube - MacBook**: 2 GHz, 2 GB RAM MacBook, showing the speed of the build in ... www.youtube.com/watch?v=BxdK-bZQ698
- MacBook - Appledefects**: The MacBook is a line of consumer Macintosh laptop computers developed and marketed by Apple Computer. Introduced on May 16, 2006[1] to immediate ... www.appledefects.com/wiki/index.php?title=MacBook - 75k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - [Note this](#)
- The Apple Store (U.S.) - MacBook**: The 2.4GHz MacBook models now include 2GB of memory standard — perfect for ... Every MacBook has a larger hard drive, up to 250GB, to store growing media ... store.apple.com/.../WebObjects/AppleStore.woa/wa/RSLLID?nnmm=browse&node=home/shop_mac/family/macbook - 45k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - [Note this](#)
- Amazon.com: Apple MacBook MB062LL/B 13.3" Laptop (2.2 GHz Intel ...**: Amazon.com: Apple MacBook MB062LL/B 13.3" Laptop (2.2 GHz Intel Core 2 Duo Processor, 1 GB RAM, 120 GB Hard Drive, 8x SuperDrive) White: Computers & PC ... www.amazon.com/Apple-MacBook-MB062LL-Processor-SuperDrive/dp/B000RG0RFA - 287k - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#) - [Note this](#)
- Posts from the Macbook Category at The Unofficial Apple Weblog (TUAW)**: If you already own a MacBook or MacBook Pro, you can send it to ExperCom's Logan, Utah office and have your hard drive replaced with a 60GB (\$599) or 120GB ... www.tuaw.com/category/macbook/ - [Similar pages](#) - [Note this](#)
- MacBook - Gizmodo**: Perhaps MacBook Shank is more apt; or the MacBook Shiv; or even something cross-promotional, like the Ginsu Mac. Regardless, we've seen this thing cut bread ... gizmodo.com/gadgets/macbook/ - [Similar pages](#) - [Note this](#)

At the bottom, there are "Searches related to: macbook" with links for [macbook review](#), [macbook vs macbook pro](#), and [macbook coupon](#).

User Generated Content

User Generated Content

A search for "Macbook" shows that there are a lot of entries on the SERP that Apple does not control.

key terms and concepts

Alexa rank A number indicating how popular a web site is compared to other sites, based on information returned by the Alexa Toolbar and SearchStatus. The number is the index of a given site in long ordered list of popularity, the most popular site at index 1, the second most at index 2 and so on.

BrandsEye BrandsEye is Online Reputation Management (ORM) software, developed by Quirk eMarketing, which allows for real-time monitoring of a brand on the Web. BrandsEye combines human subjectivity with sophisticated technology, allowing the quantifying and benchmarking of online reputation.

Consumer generated media Information that is published online by individuals. This refers to videos, photos, blogs, audio and more. It is also referred to as social media.

Dell Hell The term used by Jeff Jarvis when his Dell computer malfunctioned, and he had a hard time getting appropriate customer service.

Feed reader An RSS aggregator that lets you view all your RSS feeds in one place.

Flog A fake blog.

Keyword In online reputation management, a keyword is a term that is used when searching the Internet for mentions.

Mentions In online reputation management, mentions refer to the instances when a selected brand, company or staff members are talked about online, usually by clients or consumers.

Online reputation The aggregation of sentiment from mentions of an entity online will give its online reputation.

ORM Online reputation management - understanding and influencing the perception of an entity online.

RSS Really Simple Syndication abbreviates all the content most web sites on the World Wide Web contain in order to provide you with specific content you want. RSS allows you to receive / syndicate this information without requiring you to constantly open new pages in your browser. Also see RSS Reader.

SERP The search engine results page - what is seen on a search engine when a search is performed.

dell hell - what can happen when a company does not listen

"Dell Hell" was a term coined by influential blogger Jeff Jarvis as he recounted the failure of his Dell computer and the failure of Dell customer service. His blog posts resonated with many readers who added their own comments of misery at the hands of Dell customer service. These posts caused the first popular study of the influence of blogs on brands, and have come to be definitive of the effects of a brand not listening.

The archives of all posts on Jeff Jarvis' blog related to this can be found by going to http://www.buzzmachine.com/archives/cat_dell.html.

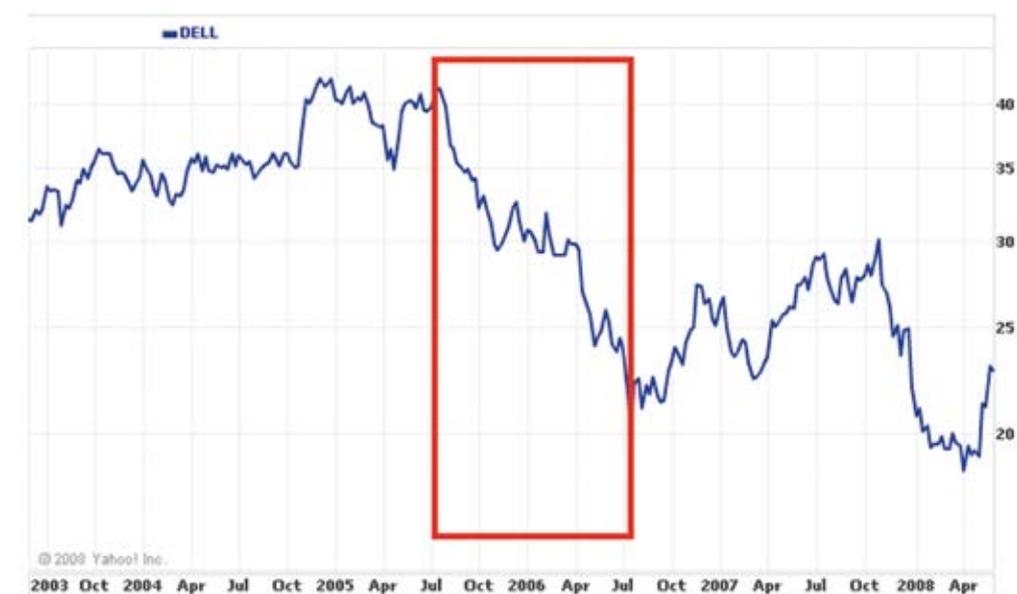
The series of posts began on 21 June 2005, in a post that has elicited over 250 comments to date. The laptop Jeff Jarvis had just bought was clearly not functioning as it should. What irked him even further, though, was that he had "paid a fortune for the four-year, in-home service" yet he was told by Dell that if they sent someone to his home to assist him, the person would not have the parts necessary to fix his machine. The post ends:

"DELL SUCKS. DELL LIES. Put that in your Google and smoke it, Dell."

Jeff Jarvis catalogued the repeated failings of Dell customer service, from emails sent to him that used the wrong name, to many time inefficient diagnostic tests that Dell wanted him to carry out, and still after much to-ing and fro-ing he had a computer that did not work and a warranty that seemed useless. His posts continued to attract many comments, and he often spoke directly to Dell in his blog, exhorting them to listen and to respond.

Eventually, he worked out the email address of Dell's Chief Marketing Officer and Vice President for US Consumer Business and sent him an email detailing the ongoing saga that was not being resolved. Predictably, Jeff Jarvis received a phone call, and eventually the matter was resolved when he obtained a refund in early July 2005.

Analysts noted the influence of social media and a brand's online reputation, and this showed in the falling consumer confidence in Dell. It may not be directly related to one blogger, and Dell admitted to neglecting customer service for some time, but *"in the midst of this silicon opera, Dell's customer satisfaction rating, market share, and share price in the US all shrank."* (Jarvis, 2005)



The stock price for Dell Inc shows a decline that seems to correspond with Jarvis' Dell Hell.

Today, Dell has come a long way. Dell has launched www.dellideastorm.com – Dell IdeaStorm – where Dell customers and enthusiasts can communicate with the company. Crucially, customers can, and do, tell Dell what features they want in a laptop, and Dell then feeds this into its product development.

how it works

Online reputation management uses the tools of the Internet to monitor and analyse a brand's reputation and to engage in conversation so as to influence its reputation.

On the Web, reputation matters. Many communities have their own reputation management for members, such as eBay, Digg and Reddit. This is based on the feedback given by other community members, and affects the success of that member's ability to transact within the community. Generally, participation, engagement and response are all used to rate a member's reputation.

Web sites which place an emphasis on the reviews of the community, such as IMDB.com for movies or Amazon.com for books, have algorithms which determine their most trusted reviewers, and they base some of their rankings on the opinions of that part of their community.

When shifting to the greater community of the Internet, participation, engagement and response remain key factors in determining a company's reputation.

step 1: listening – monitoring the buzz

Focus groups are not required for gauging customer sentiment on the Internet. It's all out there, connected via hyperlinks and crawled regularly by search engine spiders.

Keywords – the foundation to categorising and indexing the web – make it relatively simple (though possibly time-consuming) to listen to the chatter online. Customers are not using channels designated by a company to talk about that organisation, but the good news is that the Internet makes it easy for a company to use the channels that customers have selected.

ORM keywords

ORM allows a company to track mentions of itself, its staff, its products, its industry and its competitors. In fact, the tools allow for the tracking of anything; it just comes down to deciding what is relevant to you.

Company

- Brand name
- URL
- Key products
- Key personnel (names, job titles, etc)

Industry

- Conferences
- Patents
- News

Competitors

- Brand names
- Product launches
- Web site updates
- Job vacancies

For example, if Apple were to use these tools to monitor reputation, some keywords used might be:

Company

- Apple
- ["apple.com"](http://apple.com)
- Macbook, iPod, Macbook Air, iTunes
- "Steve Jobs"

Industry

- Consumer Electronics Show Las Vegas
- CEBIT

Competitors

- Microsoft, Creative

It is also important to track common misspellings, all related companies and all related web sites.

Tracking the names of people key to a company can highlight potential brand attacks, or can demonstrate new areas of outreach for a company.

Brand names, employee names, product names and even competitor names are not unique. To avoid monitoring too much, identify keywords which will indicate that a post has nothing to do with your company, and negative match that keyword in your searches.

For example, “apple” could refer to a consumer electronics company, or it could appear in a post about the health benefits of fruit. Finding keywords that will indicate context can help to save time. So, you could negative match words like “fruit”, “tasty” and “granny smith”.

how to track: CGM and search

Thankfully, ORM does not entail hourly searches on your favourite search engine to see what is appearing on the SERPs. Although, being aware of your search space is vital as well. There are a number of search engines that allow for narrowing a search to particular media or industries. And RSS means that these results can be updated regularly and kept conveniently in one place.

note

Remember RSS from the social media chapter? It means that you can keep track of everything in one central place.

Monitoring all mentions means that the following need to be tracked:

- Blogs
- Twitter
- News
- Forums
- Comment boards
- Photos
- Videos
- Job listings
- Events
- Patents
- Web site changes
- And many more!

There are a number of different tools that monitor these areas, and supply the results via email alerts or RSS feeds. Below are some free tools that are available.

Google has several bespoke search services, and periodically adds more to the list. With the services below, an RSS feed is available for the search (Google Alerts sends weekly or daily emails with updates), so that all updates can be available through a feed reader.

- **Google Alerts:** www.google.com/alerts
 - Google Alerts will send an email when the keyword is used in either a news item or a blog post.
- **Google News:** news.google.com
 - Google News searches all news items for mentions of a keyword.
- **Google Blog Search:** blogsearch.google.com
 - Google Blog Search searches all blog posts for mentions of a keyword.
- **Google Patent Search:** www.google.com/patents
 - Google Patent Search allows you to keep track of all filings related to an industry, and searches can be done to see if there are patent filings which might infringe on other patents.

- **Google Video Search:** video.google.com/videosearch
 - Video Search relies on the data that has been added to describe a video, and will return results based on keyword matches.

There are several search engines which focus solely on tracking blogs, news and other social media, and can provide trends for searches. As well as providing regular updates of new postings, these search engines can also provide an overview over a certain period of time.

- **Blogpulse:** www.blogpulse.com
 - Blogpulse tracks conversations and trends and supplies an RSS feed for updates.
- **Technorati:** www.technorati.com
 - Technorati tracks blogs and tagged social media.

Keeping track of blogposts is one thing, but mentions of a company can also appear in blog comments and on forum postings. The following two services assist in monitoring comments and forums.

- **Boardtracker:** www.boardtracker.com
 - Boardtracker monitors popular forums and provides alerts via SMS for keywords mentioned in a thread.
- **Co.mments:** co.mments.com
 - RSS alerts can be created for mentions of a keyword in the comments of blogposts.

Yahoo! has a number of social media companies under its umbrella, and most provide the opportunity to monitor mentions via RSS.

- **Flickr:** www.flickr.com/search
 - RSS updates for searches on a particular keyword will reveal when a brand name has been used in tagging a photo.
- **Yahoo! Upcoming:** upcoming.yahoo.com
 - Yahoo!'s Upcoming will alert you via RSS for any upcoming events related to the keyword you have selected.
- **Del.icio.us:** del.icio.us
 - An RSS feed can be created for URLs tagged with keywords, or for new bookmarking of a URL.
- **Yahoo! Pipes:** pipes.yahoo.com/pipes
 - Yahoo! Pipes allows anyone to set up a custom buzz monitoring tool with bespoke filters.

There might be web sites that a company would like to monitor for keyword mentions that do not offer RSS feeds. Using a service such as Rollyo (www.rollyo.com) allows the creation of a custom search engine which will search those specific sites only.

Listening is the first step to getting involved in the conversation surrounding a company. Using search tools and RSS feeds means that information can be accessed quickly and in one place, without the need to visit hundreds of web sites.

step 2: analysing – what’s being said by whom

As a marketer, the first step in looking at who is saying what is to take stock of the messages being sent by your own company. This includes: all web sites and domains owned by a company, all blogs maintained by employees (whether company blogs or personal blogs) and all blogs maintained by ex-employees. An audit should give an idea of the content that is available to the public and what that content is saying.

With regular RSS updates declaring that selected keywords have been used in some form of social media, a growing list is being created of mentions surrounding a brand. Now what?

Even in the democratised world of the Internet, not all mentions are equal. They vary in terms of positivity or negativity and influence. Not all mentions require action from a company. Some require drastic measures to be taken. But all, no matter how quiet or how loud, are an indication of consumer sentiment.

Whether a post is positive, negative or indifferent can be quickly assessed by reading it. Influence can be a little harder to establish.

Indicators such as traffic, links and subscriber numbers can all assist in assessing the influence of a blog. There are also services such as Blog Influence (www.bloginfluence.net) and Social Meter (www.socialmeter.com) which will show the audience and reach for an entered URL. However, statements, particularly inflammatory ones, should still be monitored as traffic can increase substantially and quickly online.

Influence can also assist in establishing the credibility of the author. Factors which can indicate credibility include the size of the blog’s audience, the frequency of posts and the age of the blog.

The source should also be looked at: is the mention a news item or a tag on photo from someone’s holiday?

To be able to monitor reputation over time, it can be a good idea to aggregate the information into a spreadsheet or database along with the factors mentioned above. It is necessary to determine what is important to the reputation of the company you are monitoring, and perhaps adapt factors accordingly.

note

BrandsEye uses the mentions to generate a reputation score. The reputation score is based on an algorithm that uses a number of factors, including the number and frequency of mentions, the sentiment of the mention and the influence of the mention.

Your database might look something like this:

URL of mention	Sentiment	Source	Credibility	Action
PositiveExample.com/123	3	Example News	6/10	Contact journalist
NegativeExample.com/abc	-2	Blog	4/10	Contact blogger

There are also a number of paid for services on the market that will assist in monitoring and aggregating this information.

BrandsEye (www.brandseye.com) is a tool launched in 2008 that does just that. Not only does it track mentions, but it allows the user to assign sentiment and importance to mentions, and provides a benchmark of a brand’s reputation. Trackur (www.trackur.com) is another tool that monitors the volume of mentions, but provides limited analysis.

step 3: influencing – engaging in and leading the conversation

The best way to show that you are listening is by responding. Online, there are many channels available to companies to respond to the conversation and to become an active participant in it.

what if everything being said is nice?

A fantastic position to be in is that every possible mention that includes your company, its employees and products, is overwhelmingly positive. Well done. However, that does not mean that there is nothing to do. Consumers want to know that a company is listening; it needs to respond. Positive comments should be acknowledged.

All of these mentions can also indicate new avenues for marketing and growth.

what if everything being said is neutral?

Then it sounds like the company is very boring. As Seth Godin (www.sethgodin.com) puts it, “safe is risky”. If a company is playing it so safe that no one can be bothered to either send praise or criticism its way, it’s in danger of being forgotten. The next step is no one talking about the company at all.

what if negative things are being said?

Negative statements should be seen as an opportunity for growth. Negative statements can be complaints or criticisms, and both should be dealt with.

Complaints are from stakeholders who have had dealings with a company. By complaining, this customer is giving the company the opportunity to make things

right and is probably indicating where the company can improve. Usually, the skilled customer service department of a company should deal with these.

If a complaint is online, the resolution should be there as well, although you can try to have it taken offline first. Even though the customer service will likely take place either over email or by phone, posting a comment in a blog post, for example, will show the community that the company both listens and responds.

Criticism need not necessarily come from customers, but it is important to be aware of it. If a criticism includes false information, it should be corrected. And if the criticism is true, then it should be dealt with as such.

responding

Responding involves recognising that consumers dictate the channels of communication, and that a company needs to go to the consumer, not the other way around.

tip

Visit

www.mybroadband.co.za
to see how Vodacom
is using the forum to
interact with customers.

In South Africa, vodacom3G is the name of a Vodacom representative who monitors the forum mybroadband.co.za and resolves complaints and queries and offers assistance. Instead of directing customers to an FAQ section on a Vodacom site, Vodacom has followed their consumers to the channel that the consumers prefer.

Not only do Vodacom resolve questions on the forum, but they also use it to provide key information that consumers are wanting.

If you are responding to a blogpost, find the writer's contact details on the blog and email her directly. At a last resort, use the comments to make contact with the blogger.

When responding, be transparent and honest. Remember that emails can be reproduced on blogs. At all times, remember that you are engaged in conversation, not a dictation.

influencing

In the chapters on WebPR and social media there are guidelines for companies to lead the conversation using the tools of social media. Influencing and leading the conversation can also have the consequence of there being more results that are lead by your company in the SERPs.

Companies can also get proactive by purchasing negative name domains, such as www.companynamesucks.com, to prevent angry customers from buying these and having them hitting the SERPs.

Lastly, take a look at negative brand name searches on major search engines, and consider PPC advertising to offer the company's point of view.

10 rules to recover from an online brand attack

These 10 rules to recovery should provide a practical approach for brands facing an online threat.

1. humility

Before you can recover from an online brand attack, you have to be aware that your brand can be attacked - no matter how big it is or how untouchable it may seem.

2. listen

Once you have a clear understanding of the scope of the possible effects of an online attack and are committed to maintaining a good reputation online, you're half way there. Next you've got to understand how the process of consumer complaints has evolved. Use this understanding to guide your actions.

3. act immediately!

One of the easiest ways to solve the majority of brand attacks is to respond quickly. A brand that shows it is listening and does indeed care, will go far when it comes to ensuring a solid online reputation. A conscious reaction is the only way forward - acknowledging what has been said and reacting accordingly.

4. if what they're saying is false...

If the mention of your brand is factually incorrect, in a friendly tone, send the blogger (90% of the time it will be a blogger) evidence that they are wrong, ask for removal or retraction of the entry, and offer to keep them informed of future news. If no action is taken by the blog author, then add a comment.

5. if what they're saying is true...

If it is true, learn from the "Dell Hell" phenomenon. If the mention is negative but true then send your side of the story and try as hard as you can to take it offline.

6. keep the negative pages out of the search engines

Keeping more people from reading negative things about your brand is imperative. What you can do is knock them off the first page of the results with basic SEO topped with some social media page setups such as Squidoo and MySpace or forum posts. Keep adding pages and links until you've forced the offending pages out of sight.

7. maintain communication

If you aren't an active member of the online community, it tends to be a little harder to recover from an online attack. If your company doesn't have a blog, start one. Participate in industry forums and chat rooms. Build genuine credibility as a member of these conversations and you'll find that people will have more respect for you and your brand.

note

Apple came in for heavy criticism from fans when it dropped the price of the iPhone from \$599 to \$399 just two months after it launched. Steve Jobs from Apple responded within days with a candid open letter, and a \$100 voucher for customers who had bought the more expensive phone. You can read his letter at www.apple.com/hotnews/openiphoneletter

8. engage in the conversation

Keep your brand in the face of consumers by engaging in the conversation. This could be done by making use of blogs, communicating with customers and being as open and honest as possible. Engaging in, and leading, the conversation allows you to build an authentic voice. If a crisis hits, you will be well placed to respond in a way that is authentic.

9. care

If you truly care what your customers think then most of this will come naturally. That's all people want. They give you their money; they just want some good service and respect in return.

10. be prepared

No brand is immune to an online brand attack. The best brands have strategies in place to immediately identify a reputation crisis and respond to it quickly enough to stop the negative word of mouth spreading.

If all else fails, apologise and move on.

Bottom line - by making bloggers familiar with your voice, you will be better placed to respond to criticism. Consumers can spot last-minute corporate fire-fighting - they should know and trust your voice already.

summary

Conversations are taking place all the time on the Internet, and it is crucial for companies to be aware of what is being said about them. Customers are now dictating the channels of communication, and companies that cannot engage with their consumers in this way stand to lose them.

ORM is about using the tools of the Internet, the same tools that customers are using, to monitor, analyse and ultimately influence the conversation. Companies need to learn to listen and engage.

There are many free and paid for tools available for monitoring online conversations, and with most it is easy to set up custom RSS feeds that will update with any new mentions. Mentions need to be analysed for sentiment, credibility, influence and source, and appropriate action to be taken.

Responses should be swift, factual, transparent and honest. The best way for a company to influence the conversation is to be involved in it through the tools of social media.

ORM can help a company to gain an inherent understanding of how consumers perceive and interact with their brand, and thus can provide a platform for planning marketing campaigns.

the bigger picture

ORM should monitor all mentions of a brand and guide a brand in using social media to communicate. It can help to identify hotspots for viral word of mouth marketing, and should be used to ensure that that word of mouth is positive.

WebPR works hand in hand with ORM. ORM tools are used to listen, and WebPR helps a company to respond and engage.

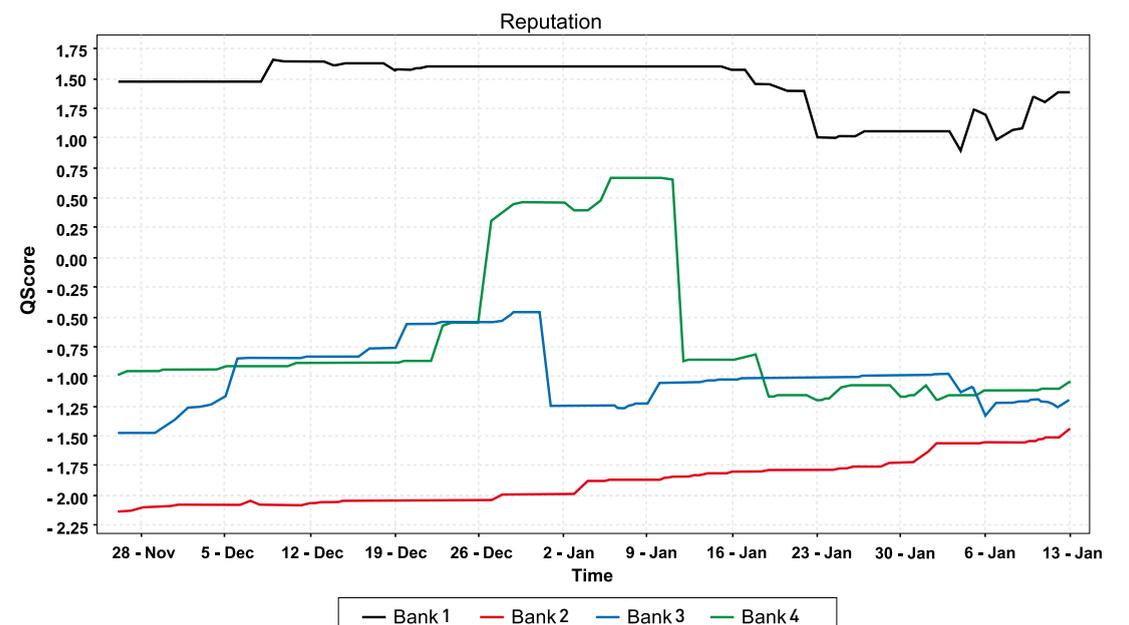
ORM can also identify new sources for possible link growth for an SEO strategy. Every mention can be used to build links, and to report on the links obtained. ORM tools can help to identify what keywords and key phrases to target (and which are being targeted by a company's competitors).

ORM should also be used for determining the success of any marketing campaign that is not directly related to sales. It can show growing brand recognition as well as consumer sentiment.

case study: four South African banks

Using a tool to measure one company's reputation will give an indication of consumer sentiment, but it is far better to be able to compare that to competitors' reputations. Using the ORM monitoring and analysing tool BrandsEye, the online reputation of four prominent South African banks was measured for the period 26 November 2006 to 13 February 2007.

Banks, and particularly their customer service, generate a lot of conversation, both online and off. BrandsEye was used to monitor mentions of the banks, to filter out duplicate mentions, and to generate a daily reputation score for each bank that could then be measured over time.



Changes in reputation, especially jumps such as for Bank 4 just after 26 December, can then be correlated to real world events.

Bank 1 has superior customer service levels, and this is shown in the reputation score. However, towards the end of January, Bank 1 experienced a backlash from local government when attempting to launch a public-service campaign. The offline media coverage was far reaching, loud and venomous, and within a short while the effects on the bank's reputation were expected to be seen online. On the contrary - what actually happened was quite surprising. While the ORM tool picked up a number of negative mentions, these were in fact directed at local government for seemingly coercing the bank into withdrawing their campaign.

With a temporary dip in reputation score, the result was that throughout February, Bank 1's online reputation grew stronger and stronger. Having their hand forced created a sense of empathy with the public, with the majority of criticism deflected away from the bank itself. Furthermore, when critics of the bank's withdrawal voiced their opinions, a number of respondents actually jumped to its defence. With an already high online reputation score, not only did Bank 1 survive what could have potentially been a major crisis, but their reputation thrived as a result.

Bank 2 on the other hand had the lowest reputation score throughout the investigation although tending to the positive towards the end of the test period. Their poor customer service levels, as perceived by their online customers, were negatively affecting their online reputation.

One of South Africa's most prolific online forums in fact had an established tradition of using Bank 2 as an example of what was wrong with the industry in general. A comment by one forum member went, "Bank 2 is evil! Evil! Evil! Evil!" The majority of Bank 2's negative mentions originated from this particular forum, and interestingly, where it was criticised, Bank 1 was offered as a suitable alternative.

case study questions

1. For Bank 1, media coverage regarding their public service campaign was negative, while social media coverage was supportive of the bank. How does each affect the bank's reputation?
2. How would you recommend that Bank 2 combats negative mentions on forums?
3. Bank 1 appears to be on the top of their game. What would you recommend to them to maintain and grow their reputation?

chapter questions

1. When dealing with complaints or criticism, why should a company try to take them offline first?
2. How do think a company can encourage customers to use established customer service channels as opposed to social media, and what are the benefits of doing so?
3. Choose a company, and use at least one of the services listed in the chapter to gain an overview of its online reputation. Find a positive mention, a neutral and a negative mention, and determine the influence of each. What action would you recommend to each?
4. Vodacom has a representative on the forum www.mybroadband.co.za. Visit the forum and consider the style the representative, vodacom3G, uses when posting. Does it sound corporate, or like an individual? What is the effect of the style that the poster uses?

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further reading

www.brandseye.com/blog

- the blog from Brandseye, Quirk's ORM tool

www.gottaquirk.com/blog/0/18

- posts from Quirk on ORM on their blog, Gottaquirk, highlighting real life ORM

www.marketingpilgrim.com/category/reputation-management

- insights from Andy Beal and others at Marketing Pilgrim on ORM, including how tos and tools

<http://notetaker.typepad.com/cgm/>

- Pete Blackshaw provides insights on ORM, social media and WebPR