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**[Know the Truth, No Matter How Hard It Hurts](#)**

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**“A 2% reduction in negative word of mouth boosts sales growth by 1%”**

-----London School of Economics and Political Science, “Advocacy Drives Growth” Study

If you are an active participant in today’s social media circles, you **NEED** to be monitoring and managing your reputation. I’m not talking about your street rep (the kind that keeps you from getting mugged by a rival gang), but your online rep (the kind that keeps your company and your name shielded from mudslingers). As shown in the [London School of E&PL’s Word - of - Mouth study](#), mismanagement of your online reputation has the potential to devastate not only your image, but also your sales rate and company growth. Thankfully, there is a bevy of web-based tools, both free and paid, that can assist you in your rep tracking.

“Reputation Management” may strike fear in your heart and conjure dollar signs in your eyes, but rest assured that you can effectively track and manage your web rep **without paying for anything**. How, you may ask? Well, as [David Salvato comments](#), “Free tools are the best tools when powered by Google.”

**1. Google Alerts/Google Reader, and Google Blog Search**

If it was deemed socially acceptable in a business setting, I would have ‘Google’ [tattooed on my forehead in full color](#). Unfortunately I would probably lose my job so I’ll have to be content with directing readers to use Google’s array of rep management tools. Firstly, be sure to set up [Google Alerts](#) for yourself. These keyword searches are completely free and are delivered to you as they are indexed by, you guessed it, Google. The easiest way to organize and view your Alerts is to send them directly to your [Google Reader](#), as opposed to routing them into an email inbox. Here is a list of keywords to get you started:

- Company & Product name
- Also track variations thereof, for example “Company X has terrible service”, “Company X is fantastic”, and so on
- Employee names
- Website Keywords
- Check your website analytics to see which keywords are generating the most traffic
- Competitor names

Setting up your Reader to the best of its potential can be a pill; check out [this preso from Ian Lurie](#) for an easy-to-follow walkthrough. Another great tool to familiarize yourself with is [Google’s Blog Search](#). As opposed to the basic Google Search, Blog Search scours blogs, forums, and comments to deliver results per the keywords you request.

## **2. StepRep**

In the same vein as Google Blog Search, [StepRep](#) delivers search results per the keywords you dictate, and files them according to your response. This means that every search result you receive will be filed in your “Reputation Monitor” within either the “Positive”, “Negative”, or “Not Relevant” folders. StepRep will oftentimes deliver pages that Google Alerts miss. They also provide a website widget you can embed in your blog or site that features an easily-updated list of the StepRep results you want to promote.

Between these two tools you will have eyes on almost every mention of your brand and your competitors indexed across the world wide web. Keep in mind though, that **beyond simply tracking your online reach it is imperative that you constantly produce good content.** Reputation management ties directly into social networking best practices. If you are posting regularly on your blog and syndicating your content to as many sources as possible, you will increase your reputation, be it positive or negative. If you are active on Twitter and like-minded ‘live interaction’ platforms, you will affect your rep. If you are responding positively to comments and linking out to sources and working on your SEO and...the list goes on and on. Basically, if you are following the guidelines and suggestions set out by successful social media marketers you will be effectively managing your web rep. By producing as much positive content as you can muster, you

will eventually smother the negative content nipping at your heels. One of the best ways to do this is syndicate your content to a multitude of sources; of course, this means that you need to set up a multitude of profiles/blogs in as many places as you can. This sort of 'spider-web' network increases SEO as well, since you now have 20 blog posts linking back to "Yourwebsite.com", as opposed to just 3 or 4.

So now you know how easy (**and FREE!**) it really is to manage your online reputation. The tools I have listed above are free or charge, easy to use, and extremely effective for both corporations and individuals. If you would rather not use the tools mentioned above, check [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) for more ideas. Remember that it is best to approach negative feedback with a customer-centric mindset; don't fall into the trap of hoping it will just go away on its own. Take the proactive approach: deal with the problem and then bury it under a mountain of positive web content. And always remember that cultivating a good reputation is tied directly to your social networking efforts. **If you are truly transparent in your networking efforts, your good reputation will make itself.**