



# The complete guide to managing your personal reputation



# THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO MANAGING YOUR PERSONAL REPUTATION

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# INTRODUCTION

Stuart Skinner

No one in their right mind would spend years saving for the house of their dreams, neglect to take out insurance and leave the door open overnight. You might as well line up all your valuables in the front garden with first editions, family heirlooms and fine art clearly labelled.

It is all the more surprising, therefore, that many people and organisations are so busy building a positive personal or business reputation that they forget to put protection in place should it ever be compromised.

Perhaps this stems from the relentless focus on how to design and develop your own image on your own terms, or perhaps it reflects a more fundamental misunderstanding of how brand and reputation interact, particularly in the digital era.

An organisation's brand is what it says about itself; its reputation is what its stakeholders have grown to expect from it, what they hear and feel about it. They are two integral parts of the same system and, when they inevitably overlap, the result is what the organisation stands for.

However, many companies still assess their brand and reputation in complete isolation, dedicating time and resources to creating the former and assuming that the latter will match up and fall in line. That is wishful thinking. Progressive

organisations now acknowledge the need to nurture a positive reputation that will help deal with challenges and crises when they occur.

Our PR plans are designed to put credits in the bank of reputation and build layers of protection, mitigating against any negative, damaging stories that may arise. This has become particularly important online, where a build-up of credible commentary and worthy associations can not only boost your ranking on Google but also encourage a strong reputation to take root. This will be very hard to unearth in the wake of a crisis.

With the growth of blogging and citizen journalism, it is becoming increasingly difficult to monitor the flow and sentiment of conversation about your organisation online and most will face a reputational crisis at some point, even through no fault of their own. The European Court of Justice ruling on the 'right to be forgotten', which applies to individuals not organisations, will not necessarily offer any safeguards. If the media, online and offline, publish details on who has made applications then the right to be forgotten will become irrelevant because those attempting to suppress damaging information will be named regardless.

Under such scrutiny and with so many threats present, it is vital that organisations give as much thought to

reputational PR as they do to branding and marketing. Developing a bank of positive content, seeded through influential channels online and offline, acts as an effective insurance policy; it provides a reference point, if and when negative stories surface, will help to put an organisation's work in proper context, as well as question the validity of negative inferences.

As well as putting reputational credits in the bank, it is also vital that organisations develop a specific plan of action, from the moment a crisis strikes. This should cover everything from key points of contacts and areas of responsibility, to priority messages that should come through in media and stakeholder engagement during and after a crisis.

In the midst of a crisis and the media maelstrom that follows, emotions run high and everything is at stake. That is not the time to put a reputation management plan together. We work with clients to create tailored crisis management manuals, with key principles, messages, and areas of responsibility, as well as an exhaustive list of crisis scenarios that may occur, with specific plans for each. When the plans are read and understood by everyone involved, we media train spokespeople to deal with tough questioning and run 'dress rehearsals' by staging simulations of crisis situations, with real journalists playing the role of media inquisitors, and critique on what was done well and where there may be room for improvement. Nothing is left to chance in the response to a crisis.

*'It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently'*

**- Warren Buffett**

# THE SEVEN RULES OF BUSINESS LEADER REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

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By James Clench

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# Rule 1

## Love your business

Few British business leaders have suffered a more spectacular or self-inflicted fall from grace than Gerald Ratner.

Standing in front of the Institute of Directors at the Royal Albert Hall in April 1991, he told his audience how his jewellery chain Ratners Group sold a sherry decanter, six glasses and a silver tray for a mere £4.95 – spectacularly cheap even then.

He declared: “People say, ‘How can you sell this for such a low price?’ I say, ‘Because it’s total crap.’”

If it was meant as a knowing joke to a sophisticated audience of like-minded senior executives, it backfired spectacularly.

The speech was reported in the media and customers deserted Ratner’s shops – and their shelves full of “crap” – in droves.

The value of the group plunged by £500million and Ratner himself was fired in November 1992.

The impact of his words was felt so heavily that the phrase “doing a Ratner” passed into the vernacular and even now – 25 years on – it is universally understood by business and communications experts as shorthand for career suicide and brand implosion.

It was an object lesson in a business leader failing his stakeholders, insulting his customers and destroying his own reputation.

# Rule 2

## Be yourself

But if as a company chief you are clear about the kind of reputation you don’t want to get, perhaps it is harder to pinpoint what you would like to represent.

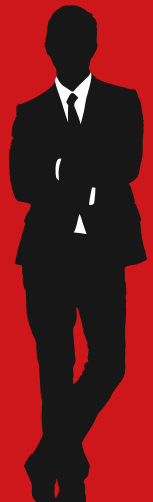
Is Sir Richard Branson your role model? Are you the flamboyant executive who wouldn’t think twice about an audacious publicity stunt? Could you ever swallow your pride and dress up as a female flight attendant just to grab attention?

Or are you more of a Stuart Rose, the former M&S chief and now ennobled Lord Rose of Monewden? Stylishly turned out in the high street fashion retailer’s suit, shirt, tie and shoes, his appearance alone gave him gravitas and made him a powerful ambassador for the business.

Or do you want to be Charlie Mullins, the straight-talking king of common sense, who built up London’s largest plumbing company and made himself a multi-millionaire in the process? Could you hear yourself saying that it’s important that “all my team is drinking out the same teapot”, as Mullins does?

Those examples demonstrate that the most successful business leaders are the most authentic ones. It’s an idea neatly encapsulated by the quote attributed to Oscar Wilde: “Be yourself, everyone else is already taken.”

# Rose, Branson & Mullins



# Rule 3

## Match your brand

As well as your own personality, you must consider if the image you want to project is a good fit with your brand.

City AM's list of the top 100 entrepreneurs featured dress designer Victoria Beckham second on the list and Lord Sugar third (not necessarily an order on which the Apprentice star would agree).

Both are entrepreneurs. Both are successful. Both are business leaders with clearly defined reputations.

But there the similarities end.

Despite being among the world's most recognisable celebrities and active on social media, former Spice Girl Beckham has cultivated an air of mystique, chic and control.

It is a reputation she is careful to manage, and with good reason.

The well-heeled buyers of her expensive dresses do not think of her as Posh Spice dancing around to Wannabe – they think of her on the cover of Vogue magazine.

Lord Sugar's reputation could not be more different. He is very clearly defined as the outspoken boss's boss, the straight-talking corporate warrior who ruthlessly despatches any hapless candidate judged to have fallen short.

If you suspend disbelief for a moment and imagine the personas of Beckham and Sugar were swapped in a Freaky Friday-style role change, it isn't hard to imagine the damage that would be wreaked on their respective businesses.

Victoria Beckham picking a fight with Piers Morgan on Twitter would leave her customers bemused, while Sugar giving off an air of quiet, coy mystery in the boardroom would see Apprentice fans turning off in droves.

The modern business leader must love their company, their public image must suit their personality and their reputation must match their brand to be effective.

# Rule 4

## Learn how to speak

There are certain communication skills that all business leaders need in their toolkit to enhance their reputation.

A CEO who is a great public speaker can impart their message with clarity and impact and take their audience on a journey with them.

A true leader is as happy networking with the Governor of the Bank of England as they are making small talk with the new apprentice on the shop floor.

The boss who is prepared to be the face of the business in a crisis situation by having the confidence – and media training – to face a hostile live TV interview could be the difference between a share price crash and a recovery.

The key to holding total command of your audience – and thus enhance your reputation – in all these situations is to speak clearly with detailed knowledge.

Footage from April 2016 of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at the country's Perimeter Institute explaining quantum physics to an astonished reporter – who had asked him in jest to do so – is a textbook example of what clear communicating can do to enhance your reputation.

Trudeau might not have a secret passion for theoretical computing – some believe the question and answer were set up – but he was shrewd enough to be properly briefed.

# Rule 5

## Know your audience

How do you project and protect your reputation in a bewildering era of multi-channel online and offline PR?

As the business leader, you should always keep your audience in mind. Are you trying to connect with your customers, potential suppliers or potential investors?

Are they at home on a Sunday with the business section of a broadsheet paper spread across the kitchen table, or are they on inner-city bus checking their phone every five seconds?

Depending on the demographic of these stakeholders, traditional “old” media remains a powerful tool to build your reputation.

A full-page profile in the Sunday Times for a traditional business leader may be worth more than 10,000 Twitter followers.

A half-hour slot on Ian King Live on Sky may do more for your reputation than any amount of LinkedIn shares.

But if you are leading a fashion or lifestyle business, opening up your own Snapchat account is a more valuable way of connecting with your consumers than any number of newspaper or TV interviews.

Using traditional and social media in the right way is an incredibly powerful way to build your reputation.

# Rule 6

## Credit in the bank

Think the only credit in the bank your business needs are financial? Think again.

Any effective business leader will develop relationships with all his stakeholders, and that includes the media.

Some CEOs simply refuse to engage with the media while others have adopted confrontational approaches in their dealing.

Sir Philip Green was renowned for ringing up individual journalists on their mobiles to frankly express his views if he disagreed with something they had written.

He is unlikely to be able to count on their support now that he is in danger of losing that knighthood over the hole in the BHS pension fund.

Conversely Richard Branson has always maintained strong, friendly relationships with journalists. As a result, even at times of crisis, he has received fair and balanced treatment in the media.

Business leaders who have courted the key influencers in their industry across national and trade press and taken the time to nurture those relationships will reap the dividends when a reputational issue strikes.

# Rule 7

## Get a professional

Isn't it just vanity to hire a PR agency for helping shape your reputation as a business leader?

Absolutely not.

Most leaders have got enough nous to avoid a Ratner-style blunder, but you might need a skilled communications expert with real media nous to warn you about a throwaway one-liner in a speech.

They can show how to make the most of your personal strengths and use them to create your public persona while ensuring your image fits your brand.

Media training will empower you to deal confidently with the toughest TV grilling and deliver erudite speeches at industry conferences.

Experienced PRs will already know the powerful journalists and social media influencers within your industry – saving you precious time having to do the legwork yourself.

And because of those relationships, a good agency will already have credit in the bank – which you can take on loan for an extended period.

One other gag Ratner delivered in his career-ending speech was that earrings in his stores were “cheaper than an M&S prawn sandwich but probably wouldn't last as long”.

Business leaders who want to hang around a little longer should follow the seven rules.

**KEEP  
CALM  
AND  
MANAGE  
YOUR  
CRISIS**

*Tim Jotischky*



Until you have been in the eye of a media storm it is hard to understand just how all-consuming the experience can be. It can take a lifetime to build your reputation; it can be destroyed in the blink of an eye.

Often, the biggest challenge is to keep a sense of perspective. It can all seem so unjust and the temptation is to take it personally. That's almost always a mistake. Journalists rarely have a pre-conceived agenda; it's just business. Treat it the same way - you need to take a business-like approach to a crisis.

The first question to ask yourself is: are you crisis-ready? If you're a high-profile individual, a business leader or responsible for your brand's reputation you should ensure you are media trained. The time for media training is not when a crisis hits; it's before you are in crisis mode.

Former BP chief executive Tony Hayward did not believe in pro-active media engagement and one of his first live TV interviews came in the aftermath of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster in which 11 of his employees lost their lives. "There's no one who wants this over more than I do, I'd like my life back," he said. Hayward's reputation never recovered.

Being crisis-ready means having a plan in place. Every company needs a crisis template; it will include an escalation policy to help you identify what constitutes a serious threat to your reputation; clearly defined roles for the key members of your leadership team; procedures for keeping internal and

external stakeholders fully informed; and designated spokespeople to lead the response.

The plan needs to be rehearsed and tested; bringing in external consultants can provide a necessary reality check, show up the gaps and tell you who is the best public face for a crisis. It isn't always the most senior member of the leadership team; they might lack the necessary communication skills. But that's an easier observation for an outsider, than an insider, to make.

There are times when the leader of a business needs to do just that: lead from the front. Nick Varney, chief executive of Merlin Entertainments, headed straight for Alton Towers after a catastrophic accident on one of the rides left four young people with life-changing injuries; he made it clear the company would unilaterally compensate them without waiting for legal action. It was a decisive and necessary intervention.

But there are other occasions when it is a mistake to wheel out the chief executive. Doing so can turn a here-today-gone-tomorrow problem into a full-blown crisis, sending out a message that the brand's reputation is on the line when a lower-key response might have been more appropriate. If the chief executive is not sufficiently familiar with the details it can be cause serious embarrassment that could have been avoided.

The key to dealing effectively with any crisis is sound judgment. But the truth is, that's often the first victim in a crisis scenario. A bunker mentality

# TONY HAYWARD

CEO of BP Oil. BP Oil Crisis

**3 MAY**

Denies all responsibility

"Well, it wasn't our accident, but we are absolutely responsible for the oil, for cleaning it up, and that's what we intend to do."

**14 MAY**

Dismissed the scale of the problem

"The Gulf of Mexico is a very big ocean. The amount of volume of oil and dispersant we are putting into it is tiny in relation to the total water volume."

**18 MAY**

Appears nonchalant in the face of the crisis

"Everything we can see at the moment suggests that the overall environmental impact of this will be very, very modest."

**30 MAY**

Makes the crisis all about himself

"There's no one who wants this over more than I do. I would like my life back."

**3 JUNE**

Spends £50m on a nationally broadcast TV advertisement to apologise

Is criticised by Barack Obama for this rather than putting the money into the clean-up operation

**19 JUNE**

Takes time off to go sailing on his boat

Criticised by White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel for taking time off to go sailing.

This has "just been part of a long line of PR gaffes and mistakes".

takes hold. No matter how experienced your leadership team, if you're at the epicentre it's very easy to lose your sense of perspective. It happened at Thomas Cook in 2015 when chief executive Peter Fankhauser refused to apologise at the inquest of two children who had died from carbon monoxide poisoning in Corfu nine years earlier. He was acting on legal advice, but it sent the company into a tailspin within the space of a few days, causing untold reputational damage.

Eventually, he realised the only way out of the crisis was to ignore his lawyers and follow his gut instincts, delivering a personal apology to the family which they had waited almost a decade for the company to deliver.

It was an invaluable lesson, which can be applied to most crisis situations. The key is to make a personal connection. All too often, whether it's an individual or a company, the temptation is to hide behind formal, impersonal language. This is usually a mistake. The most effective way to take control of a situation is to speak human, not to dance on the head of a legal pin.

Sorry is the most powerful word in the English language - as long as it is expressed sincerely. If your brand has been battered by a crisis the four key steps to follow are: Apologise; Investigate; Punish; Reform. But the first is the most important because if the apology lacks credibility everything that follows appears to be no more than empty rhetoric.

After the collapse of BHS, triggering financial meltdown for the company's pensioners, Sir Philip Green's problems stemmed largely from his failure to accept responsibility and apologise at the outset. When humility was required, he resorted instead to bluster and bravado. The slow-motion car crash of Sir Philip's reputation was inevitable, albeit painfully played out over several months.

Perhaps it is no accident that Sir Philip had always prided himself on managing his own reputation. When times were good that worked well. He had plenty of journalists on speed dial and plenty of favours to dispense. But in a crisis situation that doesn't work; when the stakes are high you need a properly formulated strategy; expert advice from outsiders who aren't afraid to impart home truths; and a healthy dose of common sense.

A well-known insurance company promises in its advertisements not to make a drama out of crisis. That's probably too much to promise. A crisis is dramatic; an extraordinary situation requires an extraordinary response. And, because every crisis is different, and throws up a unique set of issues they can't be run entirely by the playbook.

But there's a world of difference between making it up on the hoof and executing a plan. If the plan is robust and those following it are properly trained then it's possible to manage and survive almost any crisis, no matter how extreme.

# NICK VARNEY

CEO of Alton Towers. Smiler Crash

- 2ND JUNE** Releases a statement expressing his devastation for the victims and reassuring the public of their proactive response  
"The safety of our visitors is our primary concern. The park will remain closed until we understand better the cause of this dreadful incident."
- 3RD JUNE** Travels to Alton Towers to be at the scene of the incident and put himself in front of the media for live TV interviews.
- 5TH JUNE** Accepts full responsibility on live TV interview  
Kay Burley's intense questioning of him comes under scrutiny and a petition is started to have her fired for her treatment of Varney. It amassed 50,000 signatures.
- 14 JUNE** Offers support to Victims  
'Alton Towers have been really good to us after the crash, making sure my parents and Leah's family are looked after in hotels and everything and announcing that we won't have to sue them to get a settlement'.
- 27 SEPTEMBER** Pleads guilty and offers continued support to victims "for as long as they need it".
- 28 SEPTEMBER** Gives his company a human face  
"Alton Towers and the wider Merlin group are not emotionless corporate entities, they are made up of human beings who care passionately about what they do."

██████████ The truth ██████████  
██████████████████████ about ██████████  
██████████ blackmail ██████████ plots ██████████  
██████████████████████ and how ██████████ PR ██████████  
██████████████████████ can help ██████████

Blackmail is a crime which has developed with technology - and is now a digital threat as much as any other form.

We all hold various passwords, cloud accounts, stored pictures and videos. This means we are all hackable.

And in a world where online reputation is everything, so has risen the monetary lure for blackmailers with a mind to target High Net Worth individuals, company CEOs, and celebrities.

The scene is something that has become all too common. Whether it is the chief executive receiving a threat that his company is going to be falsely exposed by a whistleblower, or a multi-millionaire who is facing demands for cash to stop embarrassing materials emerging online, the common theme often involves the leaking of damaging content in one or multiple online sources. Another common threat – particularly to companies who rely on tech – is the use of ransomware, which has become more and more sophisticated.

*“We are seeing more and more of this kind of threat to people who contact us seeking help,”* says The PHA Group chairman Phil Hall.

*“The scenario is always a variation on a theme – pay up or be exposed. The material – should it exist and it doesn’t always – is usually stolen, manufactured or embellished. And the avenues are now more varied. In the past the threat was ‘I’m going to the newspapers.’ Now it is ‘I’m posting multiple blogs, or posting a video, unless you comply.*

*For most in that situation, it is terrifying. Sometimes, there is not even a demand for monies attached, just a blatant, malicious threat.”*

**Blackmail is, of course, a criminal offence. And as most victims will know, unless the police are able to apprehend a suspect quickly, that does not stop the destructive act of the releasing of materials taking place.**

**To give a flavour of one element of this and the threat to businesses, the FBI estimated that cyber-criminals extorted \$209m from US businesses in the first three months of this year alone, simply by being able to lock up servers and holding those firms to ransom.**

**As CNN reported:** *“At that rate, ransomware is on pace to be a \$1 billion a year crime this year. The FBI told CNN that the number “is quite high” because a few people “reported large losses.” The agency also said that the losses could even be bigger once other related costs from these extortion schemes are factored in.”*

**It is being taken so seriously that in the UK, the National Crime Agency has teamed up with agencies from 12 other countries to form a coalition that will aim to publish decryption tools for victims whose data has been locked in by hackers.**

**But what more can be done proactively by HNWs and corporate entities who receive an actual threat, and how can media and digital experts within a PR firm help?**

**The ultimate aim is to prevent the spread of the material – to choke the fire by removing the oxygen.**

*“We have dealt with corporate clients who have faced the threat of ‘exposure’ by a disgruntled former employee or perhaps a customer. The first thing to do is not panic and call in people who can help you deal the situation,”* says Mr Hall.

*“Media and digital experts, such as those who form the crisis team at The PHA Group, will be able to work across multiple disciplines to form a plan of attack to deal with the threat of publication.*

*“Clearly, the legal route is a powerful one and we have worked in tandem with multiple law firms in dealing with blackmail threats. “But we have also been able to operate journalistically in order to gather information – and speak to publications on a non-legal level to ensure an outcome where clients – and their reputations - have been protected.”*

**We are [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] seeing [REDACTED] more [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] more [REDACTED] of this  
kind [REDACTED] of [REDACTED] threat [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] to [REDACTED] people [REDACTED] who [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] contact [REDACTED] us [REDACTED] seeking [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] help**

# 33,150

## Google searches on blackmail every month

Online monitoring and evaluation is a major part of the combat plan.

*“Online threats have become more and more sophisticated but so have the tools to combat them,” says Ian Smalley, head of Digital at PHA Media.*

*“The ability to monitor, trace and then deal with offending blogs, social media posts and other digital output is key in the fight against online threats, including blackmail. Monitoring allows an overview of the source of any threat, from which an action plan can be developed on how to deal with it.*

*“One aspect in determining the correct course of action is influence. Monitoring and evaluation allows the context of the issue to be identified. It is easier to put the threat or issue from someone with limited twitter followers threatening to do you reputational harm into context, for example, than if someone has tens of thousands of followers.”*

**Among scenarios The PHA Group has dealt with include whistleblowers threatening to release sensitive material about a former employee via blog posts, and a HNW client who was fighting**

**spurious allegations online which was threatening to derail a finance deal in Europe.**

*“Blackmailers are devious and smart. They often use blog sites outside of the UK, and where laws on materials are more relaxed in the UK and so harder to take down,” said PHA’s Head of Strategic Communications Neil McLeod.*

*“This is where PRs, particularly those who can speak on a journalistic level, can come into their own in preventing or negotiating the takedown of sensitive material which has stemmed from a blackmail threat. It is also important to demonstrate that the purported evidence being displayed or offered is the result of a blackmail plot.*

*“In truth, this is as relevant for traditional media as it is for digital.”*

**As Mr Hall concludes:** *“By its nature, the threat is against those with something to lose. But not having a strategy – and experts who can execute it - and failing to act quickly, is where most needlessly go wrong. It is important to call in professionals as soon as the threat emerges.”*

**Online [REDACTED] threats [REDACTED] [REDACTED] have [REDACTED] become more [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] more [REDACTED] sophisticated [REDACTED] but [REDACTED] so [REDACTED] have [REDACTED] the tools [REDACTED] to [REDACTED] combat [REDACTED] them**

**Online  
Reputation  
Management**

– The Basics

# 1 | Online reputation management - the basics

## When the storm hits.

In today's age of 24/7 multi-channel communication, online reputation issues in the digital landscape can strike at any time, in numerous forms from numerous angles. When an issue arises, it can leave a brand, business or person feeling exposed amidst a deluge of messaging across multiple channels.

An additional issue with online reputation is that they can remain in public, accessible view long after the initial storm has cleared. Whilst the initial issue may have been successfully resolved, the last damage of online material can still cause detrimental issues for a brand

This includes all aspects across the online sphere, from official news based websites, to personal blogs, through to social media.

## Remaining calm in the eye of the storm

The key to dealing with online reputation issues essentially falls to Four key areas.

### Immediate response.

Take some control back of the situation. Issue an open, honest response as soon as possible. Host this on your website, and direct your social channels to the post, such that media outlets have an original source to either quote or respond to.

## Monitoring and evaluation

With a multitude of negative content attacking from every angle across every channel, it is impossible to try and defend and respond to every single post, website or comment. It is vital to evaluate to then evaluate the key influencers. By either knowing who is or where the potential source of the issue comes from will allow you to then tailor the correct response, be that messaging, or legal. It is more effective to understand the actions and issues of someone with 20,000 twitter followers, or an influential blog, rather than some one with 100 followers or a blog which does not have a significant domain authority.

You can use a range of software tools to evaluate influence and share of voice.

## Response

Once you have determined the source of the key threats to your online reputation, you can then further develop your response strategy. This can include a range of options, including legal routes.

# 2 | Online reputation management tools

When you're engulfed in an online crisis, the first thing you need to do is discover exactly what it is your audience is talking about, and where. You need to gain a firm grasp of how the conversation started, what information is being shared and, most importantly, the sentiment of discussion.

A manual search across on Google and various social media channels can help you scrape the surface and provide top-level insight into conversation, but you need to dig much deeper. How can you even begin to douse the flames of crisis when you don't know what the trigger was?

Using advanced online monitoring software, it's possible to scour the online landscape, monitoring every major channel from online news and social media, right through to blogs and forums, to pinpoint how the conversation started, the sentiment tone in which discussion is held, and the size of the audience engaged in discussion surrounding your crises.

From there, you can begin to paint a picture of just how large the online reaction is. Are there any key influencers shaping the discussion with their huge engagement levels? Is discussion confined within one country, or has it evolved into a global conversation? If the latter, where precisely has the crises spread and who's partaking in conversation? These are questions that need to be answered. Using in-house monitoring software, we can supply the answers to these crucial questions and help to construct a recovery to your online reputation.

When time is very much of the essence, you might not be able to spare the minutes to assess the online impact. This is where regular reporting becomes vital. By extrapolating the data into visual and easy to read reports, you can gain a clear understanding of the online conversation as and when you need it. You don't need to be told that social media and the internet is a 24/7 business. It's unrelenting. What if crisis erupts in the early hours? How can we possibly man the online front and sound the alarm when talk explodes? This is where alerts come in.

You can be alerted to a surge in discussion at any time of the day thanks to our software that constantly monitors discussion in real-time. Should volume increase by as little as 5% during any passing hour, you can be alerted straight away. If sentiment dramatically decreases in the middle of the night, an email alert will signal this change and provide you with the opportunity to respond immediately. As we said, the internet is a constant pool of conversation. In crisis, when every passing minute is a minute wasted in terms of finding a solution, you'll need to be able to respond to online conversation before it swells into an uncontrollable fire.

## 3 | Online crisis support

Of course, when a crisis situation shifts to the online sphere, and thousands of people are engaging in discussion, you cannot silence every individual. After you've launched your monitoring search and have begun to gain an understanding of the scope and breadth of conversation, you now need to evaluate how best to respond, and which community takes priority when it comes to neutralisation.

When you're confronted with thousands of online mentions about you or your brand during a crisis, originating from just as many individual users, it's impossible to respond to every single Facebook comment, tweet, blog post, forum thread, Instagram photo or news article. Instead, it's vital you identify the users and channels that need urgent attention.

### Map your audience

If you identify a user with a very large reach who is playing a very significant role in spreading negative sentiment about your or your business to an extensive audience, the obvious step is neutralise them. Our software can map every single connection the influencer has made, determining their impact based on audience reach, volume of mentions, visibility and location. Taking them out of the equation won't solve your crisis, but it will go a long way to stifling discussion, and offer you more online space to begin fighting back and spreading your messaging out there.

### Identify brand ambassadors

Conversely, it can also work in reverse. Unless you're a global business with an unrivalled audience reach, you won't be able to combat negative sentiment using just your online channels; you'll need an array of ambassadors and key influencers to help diffuse the online conversation and begin to seed your positive response. This influencer could take the form of a blogger with a significant subscriber base,



a prolific Twitter user with a huge, loyal audience, or a forum community full to the brim with specialists and experts from within your industry. Monitoring software can help to identify these groups, communities and individuals and establish a dialogue that will provide with the foundations to start fighting back.

## 4 | Social media crisis management

No matter what the sector, every company should be concerned about social media's influence on their image. Social media is a powerful tool, which allows consumer opinions and influences to spread very quickly. In the digital world, public opinions and expectations often lead the charge. No brand, company or individual is immune to reputational assaults via social media. Response to these attacks can be stressful for even the most experienced crisis managers, particularly when social media is just one large element of a crisis management equation.

Social media and reputation go hand in hand. Reputation is fragile. It is critical that all businesses have a social media crisis management plan in place for when their reputation is threatened. In addition, social media communication should be a focus at all times. Businesses and individuals must listen and respond in a way that aligns with the brand and satisfies the needs of the customer.

But what constitutes a crisis? There are three key elements of a crisis to be aware of:

### Instability

A crisis situation has occurred when you are in the depths of the unknown. When you don't have all the facts or any additional information to offer the general public, it can be deemed as a crisis. If the facts are clear and you can respond clearly and carefully, it's not a crisis.

### Significant change

When a new issue emerges, and social chatter and conversation around the topic increases dramatically, a crisis has occurred. If the issue is already known, it should not be a crisis. The brand/company or individual in question should be prepared and able to address it coherently.

### Material impact

If the ongoing issue has a significant material impact, or affects the majority of your stakeholders, it is a social media crisis. A social media crisis is broad in the sense it could impose a lasting impact on reputation and business.

Are you ready for a crisis? The most successful way to manage a crisis is to aim for prevention. Be mindful of social media in all communications strategies to initially prevent a crisis taking place, and have a plan in place if it does. Social media crises are largely human issues and need to be dealt with correctly in order to 'firefight' against long-lasting brand and reputation damage.

Here are the PHA rules when it comes to preventing a social media catastrophe:

1. Listen and be available to your customer on each channel that you are present on
2. Establish a consistent tone of voice which resonates and aligns with the brand
3. Be transparent and honest at all times
4. Set expectations clearly and always be 'on message'
5. Respond consciously – do not lose your cool or attack critics on social media
6. Implement some 'house rules' and social moderation etiquette within your T&Cs

7. Hire professionals! Use experienced social media community managers who can deal with unhappy customers and take any negative conversations offline
8. Have a crisis management team on-hand including PR, legal and marketing

## 5 | What social media tools are used by businesses?

As a business owner, one thing that you probably don't have enough of is time. Social media community management can become time consuming and difficult to keep track of. Using the best social media tools to schedule, monitor, analyse and engage will enhance social media efforts, reduce the stress of multi-tasking and aid workflow. When choosing a social media tool, a number of factors come into play, for example:

- How many people are running my social media channels?
- Which tools support my social media channels?
- What do I need from the tool in terms of reporting and analysis?
- What sort of budget is available?
- What are my strategic objectives? What do I want to achieve?

There are a large variety of complex solutions available to consolidate social media presence. Here is a run down of some of the most widely-used tools:

### For scheduling – Hootsuite and Buffer

Hootsuite offers a complete overview of all your social media networks, including Facebook, Twitter, G+, LinkedIn,

Instagram and YouTube. It is one of the most popular platforms which offers the option to schedule content, analyse performance and monitor topics. An alternative to Hootsuite is Buffer, which focuses on content creation and scheduling to make the process simpler and quicker. The Buffer upgrade for businesses also offers a very thorough analytics platform.

### For monitoring – Tweetdeck

Catering only for Twitter, Tweetdeck is very helpful in terms of real-time tracking of trending topics and hashtags. It looks quite similar to Hootsuite's interface and can also be used to schedule content.

### For analytics – Facebook Insights, Twitter Analytics and Google Analytics

Some of the social media channels available offer native analytics platforms to review page performance. Facebook and Twitter in particular offer reliable insights, including the best times to post, analysis of the most successful posts and data which allows you to track traffic to website, your audience demographics and performance vs your competitors.

If your website is particularly important to your business or professional activities, Google Analytics will also help to track 'social referrals' i.e. traffic to your website via social media. Any analysis in this area will allow you to refine your social media strategy so that you make the best decisions in terms of what your audience are responding to, and where.

All in all, there are so many tools out there which will help consolidate your social media activities, however it is important that these are used in the correct way in order to gain maximum benefit for your personal, brand or company profile. It is also important to note that use of these tools could mean that you spot a social media disaster on-time, allowing for successful implementation of your crisis plan.

## 6 | Social media crisis plan

A social media crisis can hit at any time across any channel. A small spark can quickly turn into a flame and engulf. At this point it can be hard to maintain control, with the risk of fanning the flames further. There are six simple points of a basic social media crisis plan, that can both buy you time and enable you to take control.

### 1. Your social channels.

It sounds basic, but which channels do you actually have, and who manages your social channels? Is it a dedicated social media team, or is it left to the most junior member of the company because “they are always on Twitter”? Ensure that the correct people have access to your channels, and importantly know the passwords!

### 2. Establish a defined structure

Simple preparation can save greater damage. If a crisis hits, who will be the lead point of contact? Is it still the office junior? Delegate roles and responsibilities, so that everyone knows what their individual tasks are, who will be creating the content, who will be approving and who is in ultimate control.

### 3. Establish a defined messaging plan

A simple messaging plan can be developed in advance. What tone of voice will be used, which channels.

### 4. Monitoring

Once points one to three are established, you will be more effective in dealing with social media issues that suddenly arise. It is however vital that you are actually monitoring the social conversation around your brand across your channels. If you're unaware of an issue it can quickly escalate. Whilst it's impossible to read every single tweet or post, keeping an eye on your channels will allow you to maintain awareness and some control of what is being said. You can also use a range of social tools to alert you to sudden changes in sentiment, again, potentially giving you time to plan and react.

#### Evaluation

As with online reputation, evaluate the source of the issue. This includes the authority or either the individual or the channel.

#### Response

Based on the evaluation, then respond accordingly. The key elements are:

- Respond quickly
- Be open and honest
- Where possible, aim to take the conversation off line, such as a Direct Message.

Finally, ensure that the response action is communicated internally so that everyone is aware of what has been said and when.

## 7 | How to recover from an online or social reputation issue

### Time

Unfortunately time is a key factor. As the internet connects the planet and allows opinion, it can take time for an online reputation issue to subside. Indeed, the continued presence of false or slanderous messaging after an event is one of the key issues that affects individuals or brands.

Whilst many spend time and effort getting to the top of Page One on Google to promote their brand or message, it's then a race to remove content from Page One of Google when the message is negative.

Due to indexing and sharing, it is almost impossible to make content just disappear. As an example, whilst an inflammatory content unit may be removed from a source website or blog through the legal route, the page may have been copied, linked to or shared. Indeed, despite Google's right to remove policy, it may still be accessible across different territories.

Along with further legal action, there are three methods which can be adopted to help displace the negative content from search engines.

### Positive content:

Crafting positive content, ideally across a range of formats including written and video, can help to reposition your brand. This includes blog posts, news-related information through to white papers.

Where possible engage and submit content across sites with domain authority.

### SEO

- It's also important to make sure that all aspects of your website and the content you create are fully optimized so that they are indexed by Google. This includes the correct use of tags and links.
- Check that your social media profiles are also fully optimized as social channels are also indexed.
- Finally ensure that all of your own existing content assets will not lead to further issues. Remove potential damaging content or social posts.

### Monitoring

Continue to monitor and evaluate the digital arena. Whilst the fire storm may have appeared to pass, there is still the potential for a rogue blog or key influencer to re-ignite the embers, especially if it appears that the original negative content is being displaced or removed.

## 8 | How much does online reputation management cost?

By its very nature, online reputation management is very time intensive, specifically during a full scale crisis situation, which, subject to a brand's global presence, can pull major resources.

By planning and developing a crisis strategy, some of these costs (and time) may be potentially reduced as planning and preparation can reduce initial set up and output at the time of a crisis.

Similarly, establishing background on-line monitoring provides a safety net, and importantly can provide an early warning system. In respect to the value of a brand, a price that is worth paying.

# STEPPING INTO POLITICAL LIFE

## Business built, money made, but what's next?

Have you thought about politics? A role in public life? Some kind of recognition?

If you want to invoke influence on a mass scale, you can generally either do one of two things: garner support from the media, or from politicians.

Ideally, you do both and so political strategy or 'public affairs' is often dovetailed with PR to help individuals to realise their ambition.

## But how?

For those who have never engaged in political life before, it can be frustrating. The status achieved within business doesn't naturally transfer to the political world, which itself can at times feel like an alien planet. It can be easy to get demoralised and just give up.

The good news is that there is a way through the minefield and, as with the Press, it is all about messaging, relationship building and influence.

People's motivations for stepping into the political limelight vary:

- The currency of politics is power, which can be an attractive prospect, even if your middle name isn't Machiavelli. (It's nothing to be ashamed of).
- Others feel strongly about an issue, or simply want to make a difference on a bigger scale.
- Some feel that there is scope for

greater political awareness of what they've achieved already, and can't quite see why others in their sector have received honours or Government commission while they haven't.

Ambitions vary too, whether it is to secure an honour, a peerage, to stand for election, to launch an effective lobbying campaign, or to be appointed to a Government role. Every situation is different and there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution. You need your own strategy based on your own experience, strengths/weaknesses and interests.

But how do you create a strategy to pursue a career in politics? My top four tips are as follows:

- Establish a realistic goal. You may want to be a Minister, but you will need to get into Parliament first. If you want to change the law, you will need a campaign that builds Parliamentary support for practical legislation. If you want an honour, you need to be able to show why you deserve it.
- Develop your platform. You've achieved a lot, but who knows about it, and why does it matter to the political world? We will help you to develop a narrative of public value or concern and help you communicate it, via the media and to politicians directly.
- Raise your profile. We will help you raise your relevant profile assets in the media, online and in Westminster. This is the bread and butter of PR and will sit well with a



**Prime Minister**  
Theresa May



**Chancellor**  
Philip Hammond



**Home**  
Amber Rudd



**Foreign**  
Boris Johnson



**Defence**  
Michael Fallon



**Education, Women & Equalities**  
Justine Greening



**Justice**  
Liz Truss



**Business, Energy, Industry**  
Greg Clark



**Brexit**  
David Davis



**Communities & Local Govt.**  
Sajid Javid



**Trade**  
Liam Fox



**Leader of the Commons**  
David Lidington



**Health**  
Jeremy Hunt



**Work & Pensions**  
Damian Green



**Transport**  
Chris Grayling



**Leader of the Lords**  
Baroness Evans



**Scotland**  
David Mundell



**Wales**  
Alun Cairns



**Environment, Food & Rural**  
Andrea Leadsom



**Northern Ireland**  
James Brokenshire



**Culture, Media & Sport**  
Karen Bradley



**International Development**  
Priti Patel



**Conservative Chairman**  
Patrick McLoughlin

broader PR campaign, but we will give you a strategic focus that will leave you more influential.

- Identify and develop key relationships. Politics is still as dominated by patronage as it was in Tudor England. To progress, you need champions and you need to earn that patronage. We will help you identify politicians worth engaging with and help you win their support.

### **The strategy is in place. Now what happens?**

From the personal experience of our political team, who all built their careers in Westminster and Whitehall, we have tried and tested tactics that help you to achieve your goals:

- Campaigns that make their mark. We love issue campaigns and we're good at them. Our Public Affairs team won Consultancy Campaign of the year for a campaign that helped one of our clients grow their share of voice on a high profile national issue from 2 to 25%, shift the terms of public debate, and contribute to the defeat of legislation that was previously expected to pass.
- Events that stand out from the crowd. We can help you organise roundtable or issue based events that make an impact. Last year we won Fringe Event of the Year for an event we organised for an individual client at Conservative Party Conference. The judges recognised

our innovative approach and the impact beyond the hall.

- Speechwriting excellence. We will help draft and deliver speeches that make an impact, tell your story and engage your audience.

### **What are the skills I might need to buy in from a Public Affairs / Political Strategy team?**

- Policy briefing. You may need briefing on any aspect of public policy, legislation or the political process.
- Submissions. You've got the expertise, you want to share it with decision makers. We can help you make submissions to Government and select committee consultations that demonstrate your knowledge and with a bit of luck get you called to give oral evidence or to meet with the minister.
- Pitching for your goal. At some point there will be a pitch. Whether it's a written nomination for an honour or a meeting where you bid to do something for the Government. We will prepare you.

So, if you got a burning political ambition, an issue you care about and want to make your own or you want help to get the recognition you deserve contact The PHA Group's Political Strategy team today.

We serve a wide range of individuals to help them translate their business success to achieve their political ambitions and play a bigger role in national life.

If you come to us for help, we will sit down with you for a strictly confidential discussion of your aims and objectives, motivations and credentials. We will see where you're at, and where you want to be, and we'll construct a roadmap to help you get there.

## **Business leaders who have become successful politicians**

### **Baroness Karen Brady**

**Business life: Vice Chair of West Ham FC and star of the Apprentice**

**Political Life: Championed sport and small business. Appointed as a member of the Women and Sport Advisory Board and as a Government Small Business Ambassador in 2013. Was appointed to the House of Lords in 2014.**

### **Dame Dido Harding**

**Business life: CEO of TalkTalk**

**Political Life: Appointed to the House of Lords in 2014. Championed flexible working and entrepreneurship.**

### **Dame Gail Rebeck**

**Business life: Chair of Penguin Random House UK**

**Political life: Appointed to the House of Lords in 2014. Had campaigned for female empowerment, arts, culture and education.**

**●**owning  
**Y**our  
**●**online  
**B**rand  
**S**pace.

*James Hamilton-Martin*

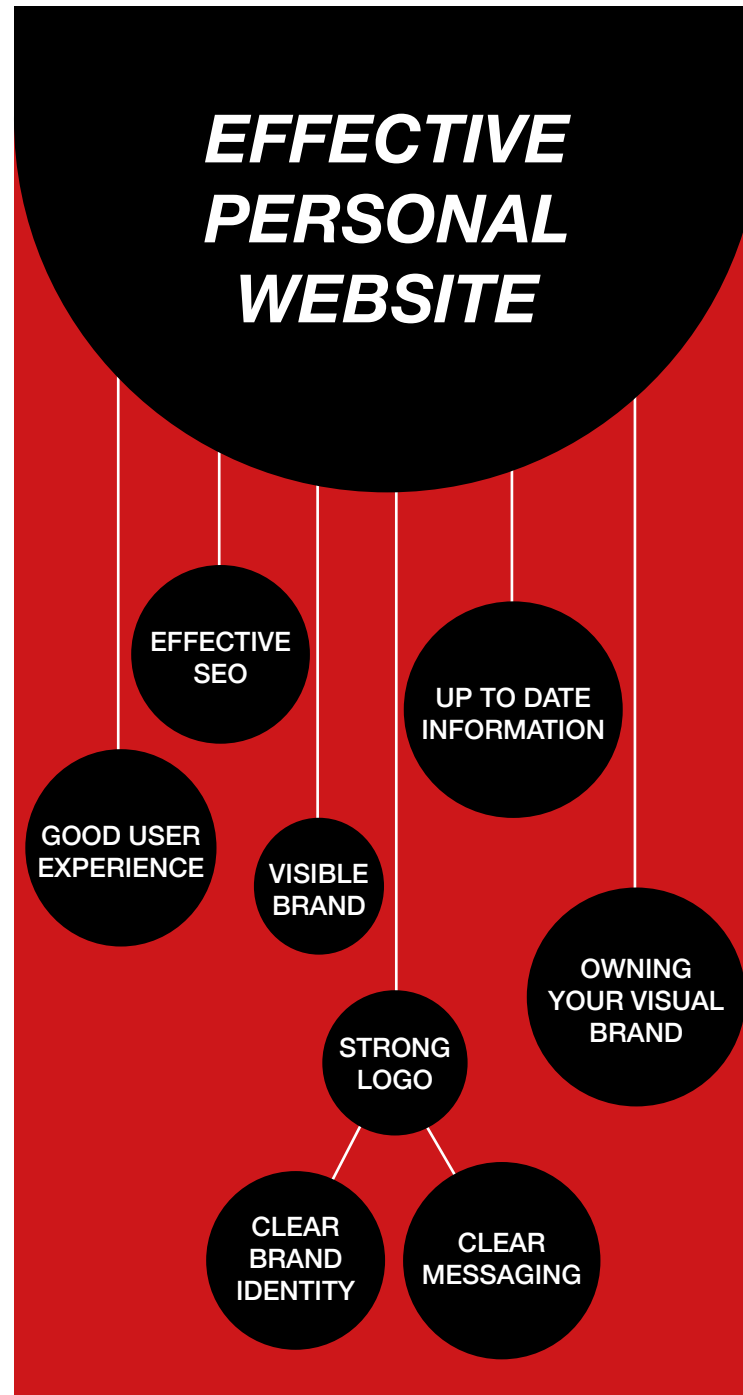


When any crisis hits, it's vital to be able to control the situation as much as possible. This includes owning your own communication channels. When it comes to social media, many brands and individuals have set up their respective Twitter and Facebook channels, but owning your own digital brand space via a website is vital.

Whilst social media channels allow instant communication, that communication can very quickly become lost amongst the flurry of noise. Utilise your website as the key hub for all forms of communication, be that a holding statement or a response statement.

Websites provide a solid, reliable, controlled reference point. They are a place that a journalist for example will visit to understand the issues or response around a crisis.

Whilst the importance may well be within the detail of a statement, to ensure that the website fully maximises the opportunity to own your own brand space, there are a few things that need to be taken into consideration.



## Access

As part of any crisis planning or crisis response, time is vital. Similarly to the use of your social media channels, ensure that you understand the process for updating your website. Five vital points can save vital hours:

- Who has log-ins to the site?
- Can they be contactable out of hours?
- Who is crafting the message?
- What is the chain of command?
- How does this flow through to social media?

There are millions of online opinions regarding websites. We've taken two of them which relate to crisis or reputation management.

## Positive image reflection

In the current digital era a website is the shop window to all companies and brands. It can provide a visitor with instant indication of brand. At a very basic level, is it up to date?

These days a huge portion of websites are accessed through a mobile device. Statistics show that 33 percent of internet users would think to use their mobile device first over a desktop, and that figure is only growing with the introduction of low cost smart phones and faster wireless internet.

This means ideally you need a home page that makes the most of the mobile space. An easy to read, clear and clutter-free interface is essential to get the most out of your home page.

## User experience

Mobile now caters for 65 percent of all digital media browsing time. Desktop usage on the web has dropped 12 percent since 2013. It's important therefore that your site is responsive (which means that the user experience works across mobiles, tablets and desktops).

Mobile users have a shorter attention span than desktop user, so getting the right content to them quickly is important.

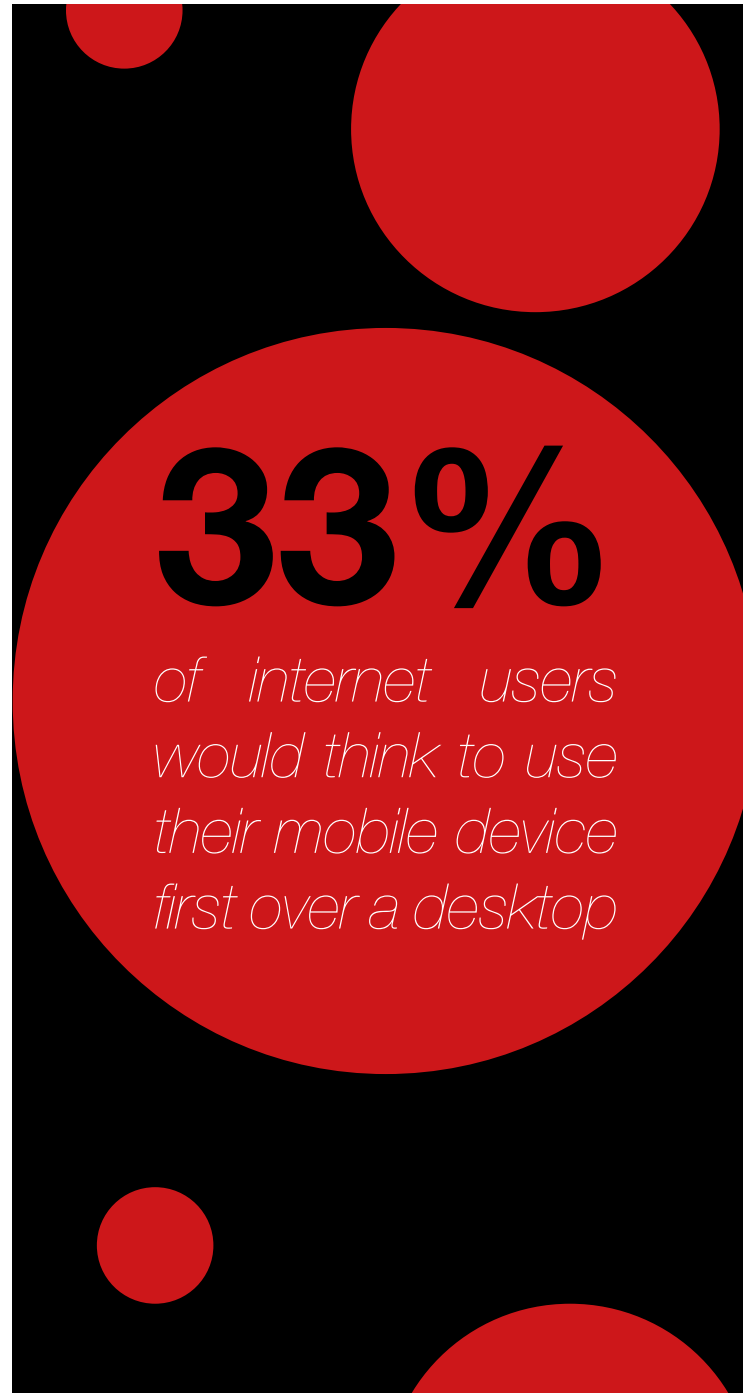
When it comes to issuing a statement for example, it needs to be accessible instantly. If a journalist has to dig around to find a statement, they can quickly conclude that there isn't one. If your site isn't responsive, pinching and zooming around an outdated site will not create a good impression.

From an SEO perspective, Google also rewards responsive sites within their site ranking, via their algorithms. Again, from a hypothetical perspective, it's better to have a solid domain authority so that your site ranks well.

To summarise, ensure that your site is up to date and reflects you or your brand, and make sure your site is ready for the mobile world.

**Q: I don't have a website, or it's old and out of date.**

If you don't currently own your online brand space, it's not too late. The following recommendations will help you when it comes to planning and setting up your new website.



## Establishing your brand

Building a brand is important as it establishes the brand identity. You need to think about a selection of things to find your identity

- What does your brand do?
- Who do you communicate to?
- How do you want to be perceived?
- What is your brand character?
- How do you connect with your customer?
- What is driving your business?

This is important as it gives you a clear direction for the company to grow and mature. This can change further down the line as it evolves but you need a clear purpose from the outset.

## Visual brand

The look and feel of your company is an integral part of your brand footprint. In today's crowded landscape, a strong brand cuts through noise and clutter and delivers a clear picture of who you are and what you do. A brand lets you formalise and codify the creative identity and approaches that work to create a market presence that is unique to you.

The association people make with logos and the brand can become so strong that simply colours and shapes can stimulate brand awareness. There are a multitude of logos which are instantaneously recognisable from the smallest component.

There are several areas to think about other than rebranding or conceptualising a logo. Some of the key areas are;

- Do you explain the services you provide?
- How you are positioned in your market?
- How people perceive you?
- What are the values of your brand?

Understanding how you can develop your brand to represent you and your company can be a complicated process. A good brand design process requires meticulous research into a huge range of aspects such as the competitor and market landscape, trends, colour association, channels and much more.

## Messaging

As a virtual window it is important to have clear messaging from the start.

It can be easy to want everything on the home page, but this can overwhelm your audience, you would need to think about your brand messaging and who you are targeting, this will keep your homepage clutter free and easily understood.

If your website messaging is unfocused and there is too much old content, then this can mislead users. Studies have shown that users scan pages rather than reading them fully when coming to a website for the first time.

You should be looking to update your website every two years to keep on top of trends and styles. Again, returning to posting a statement in times of crisis, if it's lost within the website, chances are it won't be immediately.

*“In the current digital era a website is the shop window to all companies and brands”*

## SEO

Overtime a strong SEO plan can make or break a website. A few years ago, it used to be all about filling websites with keywords, these days it's more about strategic planning and content creation. Search engines are more advanced and look at content, design, layout, loading speed, functionality and rankings.

There are many factors that contribute to a good SEO functioning website. A couple of examples are; fixing page errors, sitemaps, regular and creative content creation (including mixed formats) link backs, and even design.

If all these elements are checked, reviewed, and implemented it allows Google to search and index your site correctly resulting in more people being able to find it, or importantly, it will provide a single, controlled, point of reference in times of crisis.

## Summary

Whilst this may seem a long way from simply posting a holding statement, owning your online brand space with a strong visual brand, clear concise messaging on a fully responsive website with a well thought through user experience, can help create positive perceptions immediately.

**Want to talk about managing  
your personal reputation?**

**Get in touch, we'd love to  
hear from you!**

