

Canadian Consumers: Online Reputations, Awareness, Misuse and Repair

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Executive Summary

In “the early 90’s” the Harvard Law Review examined the privacy and reputation issues resulting from recent advanced technologies. In the article “*The Right to Privacy*” they stated:

“Instantaneous photographs and newspaper enterprise have invaded the sacred precincts of private and domestic life; and numerous mechanical devices threaten to make good the prediction that ‘what is whispered in the closet shall be proclaimed from the house-tops.’”¹

When we said the early 90’s, we meant the 1890’s – 1890 to be precise.

More than a century has passed. Generations of communications and technologies have come and gone; yet, a fundamental issue remains. **People continue to thoughtlessly, ignorantly, and maliciously misuse information about others in ways that will damage reputations.**

Nevertheless, despite the similarities, there are three key differences that have direct and impactful effects on consumers today:

1. The availability and accessibility of a comprehensive wealth of information that would have been unimaginable 121 years ago. The Internet has become, for some, the first recourse for an answer to almost any question.
2. The nature of information has changed. It is primarily user generated, raw, and unfiltered – a veritable gold mine, if one is willing to dig and sift for the nuggets. That social discourse was available 121 years ago. It just wasn’t ‘kept’.
3. The speed at which such information can be accessed, synthesized, cross-referenced, misunderstood, misused, and cause irreparable and wildly disproportionate damage has accelerated as quickly as air travel in that same timeframe. As Winston Churchill is reported to have said, “*A lie is halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on.*”²

Just like in 1890, reputation matters. It is important. Online information is considered credible by consumers and the courts, and can directly affect reputation. This growing risk to the privacy and reputations of Canadian consumers is significant.

As services delivered over the Internet, Google and Facebook have refashioned human behaviour to create new social forces. Google has become a primary starting point for research, answers and decision-making support, while Facebook has created a new social environment with its own brand of peer pressure and need to belong, especially among young people. The implications for a consumer and his or her online reputation? It’s simple – “Ignore it at your peril.”

These dramatic expansions of availability and accessibility, and the changes in the nature of information have a clear impact. The misuse of other people’s information, and the resulting reputational damage is rising. From this challenge has arisen a new discipline – that of managing one’s online reputation, and if necessary, repairing it. The issues driving consumers to seek such service, the organizations that provide such service, the value of these services, and the efforts consumers can make to manage their own reputations online form the substance of this research.

¹ Warren, Samuel D. & Brandeis, Louis D., *The Right to Privacy, Harvard Law Review Vol. IV* December 15, 1890 No. 5

² www.quotedb.com/quotes/1350

This research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are key issues for consumers in the management of their online reputation?

Reputation Does Matter

There continues to be an inexorable drive of many individuals to go online to develop and augment their reputation. Despite this push by many, others make concerted efforts to keep their information offline. Either position requires diligent and ongoing efforts, as a person's reputation is at greater risk online than in other forms of media or on account of meeting others face-to-face. More importantly, regardless of one's stance, online reputation has become a significant part of one's reputation, and because of the lack of online context, it is susceptible to misuse.

There are many reasons one's online reputation is important: the risks of bullying, defamation, identity theft, scams, and personal branding, although it seems that the drunken picture on Facebook affecting employment prospects gets much of the publicity. This is for good reason. A study conducted by Microsoft for Data Privacy Day, 2010 found that "70% of surveyed HR professionals in the U.S. have rejected a candidate based on online reputation information."³ From a positive point of view that same study found that "86% of HR professionals stated that a positive online reputation influences the candidate's application to some extent; almost half stated that it does so to a great extent."⁴ The bottom line: Reputation Matters.

Anonymity

On the Internet today a person can be helpless as they are anonymously attacked, their personal information presented in false context, or outright untruths about them are displayed, whether to a potential audience of millions or to the one person who matters to them most. The increase of anonymity and the corresponding decrease in accountability is a key concern in online reputation management. Not surprisingly, the malicious, salacious and anonymous attacks garner the most attention. This is one social force that remains unchanged from 1890.

The newness of the Internet to the Canadian courts brings some uncertainty around anonymity. The courts will allow access to the identity of anonymous bloggers, but generally only when a prima facie case of defamation has been made. Canadian courts through several decisions are working through the issues of anonymity on the Internet as it relates to defamation. In particular, they are attempting to balance the freedom of speech rights of Canadians with the right of Canadians to protection from defamation.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, anonymity can increase the credibility of information in the eyes of a reader. The Canadian courts have recently ascribed more credibility to anonymous bloggers as able to inflict harm, causing them to be more susceptible to a charge of defamation – if they can be identified.⁵

Awareness

Many individuals check their online presence, or reputation, regularly. A large number do not. Established research indicates this, as do our discussions with experts in the field. Many people do not know that they already have an online reputation issue. They are unprepared to avoid injury to their reputation.

Many consumers need to address their lack of awareness of the significant effect of their online reputation, and the potential for damage to it. They have plenty of choices, all of which appear to be in practice today. They can be blissful in their ignorance – until something happens. They can knowingly ignore it. They can monitor and protect it. They can get it fixed if they have a problem, ideally with the benefit of some education, assessment tools, and a reasoned continuing effort to monitor and maintain.

³ Online Reputation in a Connected World, Microsoft /Cross-Tab for Data Privacy Day, 2010

http://www.marketingtecnologico.com/ad2006/adminsc1/app/marketingtecnologico/uploads/Estudos/dpd_online%20reputation%20research_overview.pdf

⁴ Online Reputation in a Connected World, Microsoft / /Cross-Tab for Data Privacy Day, 2010

⁵ Barrick Gold Corp. v. Lopehandia, 2004 12938 (ON CA)

The Quickness and Severity of Reputation Damage

An individual can make one mistake and become a lightning rod for the criticism and concerns of others. When videos go viral, there is no going back. Viral material can never be removed from the Internet. It will remain somewhere. A small indiscretion can attract all the attention that a communications mechanism open to billions of people can bring. The key point for consumers is that some indiscretions, if they are publicized and tickle the public's fancy, may never be forgotten and attach to your "résumé" for life.

Maintaining a Reputation

Consumers must determine how they intend to maintain their online reputation. They have to determine what their risks are and their level of risk tolerance. It may be by ensuring no information is made available about them on line. It may be by diligent monitoring. It may be by aggressive legal pursuit. Given the risks, basic maintenance if left unchecked may be catastrophic for an individual.

Fixing a Problem

Knowing what to do when there is a problem may be an issue for many. Removal of information from the Internet is not simple, and in some cases if approached the wrong way will only exacerbate the situation. Consumers have to ask themselves some questions. What do they do when they find that information? Do they attempt to remove it? If so, how? Do they attempt to refute it? Do they attempt to obfuscate or conceal it? Do they pursue legal action? How do they determine the extent of damage to date and prospectively?

Getting help to repair one's reputation may not be as easy as assumed. Finding an organization that is clearly consumer focused, particularly if the issue to be managed is insignificant may not be overly burdensome or challenging, but it does require effort on the part of the consumer. Fortunately, material that can most help an individual repair their reputation is typically information written or provided by them.⁶

Getting Help

The online reputation management (ORM) industry is a fluid one. The efficacy of the services offered by this new industry is uncertain. The level of consumer satisfaction with the products of this industry is difficult to determine. In many cases consumers will need help in fixing their online reputation given the risk involved with having a damaged reputation, but they will first need help in getting the right kind of help.

2. What information is misused and how?

Out of Context

Virtually any information can be made available about an individual consumer on the Internet. Some is there appropriately. Some is not. Much information is made available without appropriate context. The Internet does not excel at providing context. The degree of context provided by search engines typically depends on the ability of the individual to query and evaluate – skills imbued to greater and lesser degrees on individual members of the public. Context, or the lack of it, is the primary source of misused information. As one executive in the industry put it, misused information is "*anything out of context.*"⁷ The lack of context and the willingness of many users to rely blindly, and heavily, on information gathered from the Internet combine to create potential and potent misuse of virtually any information available about an individual.

Source of Information

Information can be misused when it is put up on the Internet, or when it is copied or used from the Internet.

Information can be misused unknowingly, carelessly or thoughtlessly – or maliciously.

An important point to note is that often the victim is the source of the misused information.

⁶ In interviews with two ORM executives, both echoed this point. – Chris Martin, Founder – Reputation Hawk, and Ezra Silverton, President 9th sphere

⁷ Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

Type of Information Misused

Information that may be made available, and be subject to misuse, can include:

- Photographs
- Videos
- Audio⁸
- Blog posts or blog comments
- Twitter tweets
- Discussion forum entries
- Traditional media stories
- Quotations
- References to oneself on a social network site, particularly in a photograph
- Document
- Official/public record (e.g., criminal record)

3. What prompts consumers to seek such repair?

A consumer finds information on the Internet

An individual searches his or her name in Google and finds information that is either wrong or which may easily be taken out of context, or information that is private and should not be available on the Internet.

Someone else finds a consumer's information on the Internet

Someone, ideally a friend, not so ideally an individual on the other side of a business transaction or employment situation, brings to your attention some information about yourself you did not know, you know to be incorrect, or you hoped would not see the light of day. In some cases consumers are proactive in seeking repair, but typically these services are sought in reaction to adverse revelation of some information on the Internet.

When the problem is big enough to warrant attention

People seek to repair their reputation when the potential for damage, or damage already incurred, is serious enough. However, knowing what is 'serious enough,' can be a difficult and even impossible act of judgment.

Most people will have 'controlled' issues. This means that an individual posted something to Facebook and didn't realize it was available to the public, or a friend posts an image and tags the individual. In both these cases the fix is straightforward – just remove the information, because the individual has control over the troublesome content or knows the person who's posted it. Those that need to use a repair company are likely a small percentage. The majority of people probably only need guidance in self-management and basic online reputation management – hence, the extensive list of tips and steps for consideration at the end of this report for the do-it-yourselfer.

4. What organizations perform repair?

Several types of organizations perform online reputation management repair. They can be classed in roughly four categories:

1. *Organizations that primarily service businesses for brand management and online reputation management.* They may also provide service to high-end consumers – executives, celebrities, professionals, politicians, etc., or to average consumers with a significant online reputation issue.
2. *Organizations that provide search engine optimization for businesses, and also provide online reputation management services to a variety of individuals, including high-profile individuals.* These organizations might be considered boutique organizations in the field of online reputation management.

⁸ The ability of smartphones to surreptitiously record conversations, and upload immediately to the Internet, provides a significant new avenue for reputation damage.

3. *Organizations that have prepackaged systems, or processes, and service primarily mass market consumers.*
4. *Organizations that have little background, and provide services from what might be considered to be a shady position.*

There is a fifth category: Lawyers. A person dealing with an online reputation problem typically retains a lawyer for serious instances of libel or defamation. Lawyers can be useful at the outset of problem resolution when a consumer needs to apply pressure on a website or blog or seriously intends litigation.

Our research focused primarily on organizations in the first three categories.

There are not a significant number of high-volume retail consumer-focused reputation repair and management organizations. The number gets considerably smaller when one looks to solely Canadian solutions.

5. What services are provided?

The services provided are simple, yet can require considerable time and effort to produce results. Accountability for results may be difficult to ascertain, as the methodology of service delivery may not be transparent to a consumer. The services include removing material from search engine results, removing material from websites, removing basic personal information from ‘people sites,’ blogs and other social media, as well as concealing information from search engine results. The latter is by far the most common activity. What is called repair or removal in the industry is typically moving search results from the first page of Google further down the first page or to the second or third page of search results. One ORM/Search Engine Optimization executive placed the probability of true removal of material at less than 10%.⁹ Even in those cases removal may not be complete, as such information can still reside in various archives available on the Internet.

Some organizations also provide monitoring and maintenance services. They will monitor to determine what your online reputation is and whether there are any difficulties. They will continue to monitor to ensure that nothing else arises. And they can perform maintenance/protective type services that strengthen online reputation proactively.

6. What is the value to the consumer?

Generally, the value provided by online reputation management and repair organizations may be less than expected by many average consumers. Higher costs and longer times to repair may be experienced than expected, and uncertainty around the product and any guarantees available combine to potentially limit value. It can be a rude shock to a consumer that they just can’t request something to be removed and then it’s done. Technology, the legal environment, the global environment of the Internet, and the vagaries of irrational human actions combine to make it difficult to truly remove material from the Internet.

Organizations that have programs to remove some of an individual’s basic personal information from ‘people’ sites can be useful – an easy task that can be done by an individual themselves, if they take the time and effort to find out how.

Getting value will require picking the right organization to provide services. Getting value will require working together with such an organization.

For some of the minor offences and material on the Internet, such as Facebook pictures, removal can be simple, particularly if the consumer has access to the account in control of the offending content. Some repair organizations counsel or educate the consumer to varying degrees, but it is often an insignificant part of their program or services. Astute consumers would gather information during the repair service and use it to reduce the incidence of such future information being shared publicly, or excise the information themselves.

The most significant value for many consumers of seeking this service may be the impetus for monitoring, or ideally self-monitoring, of their online reputations. The result may be that consumers experience the difficulty of removing personal information from the Internet, so they commit to monitoring for themselves or hire a lower cost organization to manage the work for them. Online reputation management, when practiced at its best, is more of a promotional and reputation-enhancing process, than it is one of repair.

⁹ Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

High profile individuals (executives, professionals), although not in our scope, would appear more likely to benefit, given what is typically a greater need and commitment to the process.

ORM is a business that has arisen from the services provided to businesses regarding brand and online reputation. Services provided to consumers in many cases require the same amount of effort to remove material. And the costs are similar accordingly.

Monitoring (typically an automatic search of social media and search engines which may contain references to an individual) can be fairly straightforward, and some basic protection can be easily obtained as a result of minimal to moderate efforts.

When it comes to moving damaging information off the first page of Google results, professional organizations can do this job better than an individual can himself or herself, although, as mentioned earlier, input from the individual is important.

7. What, if any, are the problematic practices of these organizations and this industry?

This service sector appears to be served by many organizations with vague credentials as to location, history and personnel/management. The frequency of name changes and unknown ownership, business relationships, management, and even phone numbers, do not portend easy access to redress for an aggrieved consumer. Of the organizations we evaluated, one had an address that is tied to a UPS store. Another only indicates the city in which they reside, and that statement is found only within the FAQ section. Neither gives the name of any individual associated with the organization. The organizations we evaluated were some of the more respected in the field of providing services to consumers. Even concerning this group, expressed concerns and accusations of unethical behavior could be found.

Lack of clarity around time to repair and the resulting cost appears problematic.

Clarity is lacking in marketing presentations on the nature of the repair service, in that “repair” generally amounts to meeting the goal of having offending content relegated to a second page of a Google, Bing or other provider’s search, rather than achieving outright removal of the material from the Internet. The statement that removal of material from the Internet is difficult in most cases, and impossible in many, is not always presented upfront in service claims. Furthermore, there is uncertainty around the definition of what will be removed, particularly around specific search terms or keywords. The nature of the information used to move the negative material down in search engines is not outlined in detail on some of the ORM websites. This is an important consideration for an individual; because the extra material used to push other material down in the search engine rankings must still be of quality. Rarely is repair a one-time event, and it can require several months, or a year to effectively “remove” information and have it disappear from ready public access.

Ironically, some reputation repair organizations demonstrated less than ideal Online Reputation Management (“ORM”) and Search Engine Optimization (“SEO”) skills on their own websites and presence on social media and often use techniques regularly obviated by the capabilities of large search engine service providers. However, the lack of SEO skills was considerably more apparent in the organizations we have focused our work on the least – those referred to as shady or fly-by-night.

The industry itself is evolving. There is a dominant service provider in Reputation.com with significant venture capital investment and well-developed and marketed consumer-focused packages. No other organization appears to have been able to capture this market in such a way. We believe that this dominance by Reputation.com may be changing the way others do business, causing some of them slowly to move to services for businesses and high-end/high-profile individuals.

This leaves organizations, without the clout or capability of a Reputation.com, trying to compete on the low monthly fees that Reputation.com charges for some of the basic services. Others take on the more sophisticated reputation problems, becoming in essence, boutique firms but nevertheless still having to compete with Reputation.com’s high-level service. They work with individual and business, clients with problems that require significant shaping of search results, work that cannot be done with just a series of simpler measures (e.g., blog posts, press releases and social media sign ups).

8. What can consumers do to maintain and repair their online reputations?

As one person put it – stop what you are doing right now and go search your name on Google. If everybody started there and read through the first three pages of search results it would serve to catch many of the issues immediately – before they are brought to one’s attention by someone on the other side of a business transaction or employment interview.

Consumers considering the use of ORM services should see the chart in the Recommendations section of this report, and consider some of the questions this report poses in advance of selecting an ORM service provider.

For consumers looking to maintain and repair their own online reputations, see this report’s extensive list of recommendations.

Summary Recommendations

For Consumers

1. Be careful about your online presence and reputation. Don’t put information on the Internet if you wouldn’t want your parents to see it. More importantly, don’t put it up if you don’t want potential employers to see it. They will not be as forgiving as your mother or father.
2. Exercise care when using information gathered about others. Information can easily be taken out of context, and our findings indicate that this is a significant form of personal information misuse.
3. If you do have a problem with information online that may damage your reputation, be very careful how you deal with it. Make an initial assessment of the situation, the probability of it being found, who might find it, how it might be taken out of context, and the resulting risk/damage.
4. There are reputable and disreputable organizations available to assist you in repairing your reputation online. If you choose to deal with an online reputation management organization, it is important that you do the following:
 - Do your homework about your situation.
 - Pick a reputable organization to repair your online reputation. Do your homework in assessing these organizations.
 - In determining which organization to use, call the organization. Question, and trust any suspicions you may have. Talk to someone, preferably the owner. If they will not take your call, find another organization.¹⁰ One’s reputation is too important to trust to an organization that may not see the situation as seriously as you do.
 - See the Evaluation Grid for Consumers in the detailed recommendations at the end of this report for more detailed guidance related to selecting an ORM organization.

For ORM Organizations, in their service to consumers

1. Be upfront about what they are and what they do. For those businesses with ORM as a side business, it should be noted, especially when the other business is related to affiliate marketing or other significant marketing on the Internet.
2. Create a privacy policy and make it available online. Focus on the issues of privacy in ORM, not just a standard policy. If they are providing services directly to Canadians through clearly Canadian marketing or through a .ca website, such a Privacy Statement should be required and adhere to Canadian regulations.
3. Demonstrate better skills on SEO on their own websites, citing examples of what they do.
4. Get involved in Social Media to help educate consumers. Highlight areas of concern – at a minimum, with a blog with useful current material for consumers (see Reputation.com’s blog) and a Twitter account.

¹⁰ It is unlikely that you will reach the CEO of Reputation.com. If your problem is that big, you may want to consider a boutique shop that will provide individual customized attention.

5. Put a name, address (not a P.O. Box or UPS Store) and a face to a web site – follow the example of Reputation Hawk (Chris Martin), 9th sphere (Ezra Silverton), Reputation Defender/Reputation.com (Michael Fertik).
6. Review the list of questions that consumers are recommended to consider – in the Recommendation section of this report. Consider making this information available on their websites.
7. Provide products clearly aimed at consumers, particularly for basic personal information, and Facebook and YouTube issues.
8. Continue with efforts to establish and grow membership in the Online Reputation Management Association.¹¹ A Code of Ethics, not unlike the ORMA Code of Ethics,¹² and education within the industry is needed if consumers are to be certain of the service they will receive. It can help remove the lack of transparency in the industry.
9. Clearly delineate between the “removal of a Facebook pic,” the removal of information from a website the consumer does not own or control, and the moving down of information to the bottom of the first page of Google, or to the second page, or to the third in your promise of performance. Consider services, along the line of those of Reputation.com, which seeks to provide a baseline cleaning service for consumers – clearly marketed and designed for consumers.
10. As an industry, determine who owns Reputation Reviews (www.ireputationreviews.com) and arrange to remove or clarify the controversy and allegations over its ownership and content.

For Content Hosting Sites

1. Adhere to terms and conditions that they have posted on their site, if they have one. Create and post a Terms of Use or Terms & Conditions if they do not. Consider the nature of the information and reasonable need for anonymity in drafting such terms and conditions.
2. Review terms and conditions and contribution guidelines in light of current legislation.
3. Deal with lawyers’ requests consistently, and let people know your position on removal. Make a clear statement on contributor anonymity. State if it is allowed, and what will cause it to be unclocked.

For Search Sites

1. Make clear the process for search result removal and make it easy to find. Make it clear that the chance of search result removal is slim. Give clear indication of the factors for removal – trademark etc.
2. Make clear that the policy that the search engine has regarding presentation of information on their sites – effectively that they take little responsibility for the information, and that it is primarily the responsibility of the website that makes the information available on the Internet.
3. Assist users of their search engine to use their search engine to find information about themselves to monitor their online reputation.

For Regulators and Government

1. Consider developing a reputation online application that allows individuals to input their name and location and get a broad look at what information is on the Internet about them. In some cases it will demonstrate that while they have a “clean” reputation, others with the same name do not, and that this may present confusion to people searching on the Internet for them.
2. Get people to protect themselves. Guide them to an understanding and appreciation of the risks.
3. Explain to the public the laws of libel, slander and defamation. The Internet is turning individuals into publishers and they need to learn their legal responsibilities.

¹¹ <http://www.orm-association.org/>

¹² http://www.orm-association.org/mem_Code_of_Conduct.php

4. Encourage sites in Canada – particularly review sites – to take a reasonable approach to moderation, anonymity and value of information.
5. Make public through an awareness campaign the message that people need be aware of their online reputation. Make them aware that they have a responsibility to both be careful about what they put on the Internet and in how they manage what others may have put up. This should be a campaign to inform, not scare people. People need to consider the implications of an HR manager or hiring executive reviewing a Facebook picture or their tweets on Twitter and not necessarily seeing them with the same humour as their classmates, nor with the mild head shaking, but blind forgiveness of their mother or father.
6. Consider the European Commission’s themed campaign of “Think before you post!”¹³
7. Consider a campaign to work with universities, colleges and high schools to explain the implications. This is being done on an ad hoc basis, but a concerted effort across the country could be more effective and powerful. Governments sanction seatbelt or drinking and driving advertisements to save lives. Damaged reputations are ruining lives.
8. Make public a simple outline of what is acceptable to communicate anonymously and what is not.

For Consumer groups and educators

1. Create a website that will allow an individual to get an initial view of their online reputation. Furthermore, consider creating an application that will work on tablets and/or smart phones, given that the take-up of these devices is particularly high among those who are at higher risk for issues with their online reputation. This website and application would allow an individual to input their name and some other relevant information and determine what information is available about them on the Internet, and where. Also, it can identify if negative information about others with the same name as themselves is accessible.
2. Help consumers understand the relationship of privacy and reputation. For many, the issue of reputation is more important than the privacy issue. Those in the know understand the privacy versus reputation difference/tension, but to the average consumer these are not concepts they spend much time thinking about. To a consumer it may be a bigger issue when their reputation is besmirched than those instances of their privacy being violated.

¹³<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/10/22&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Introduction

Reputation Repair – The risks are high. Know before you buy.

Reputation repair. Preparing for it requires attention to detail. It's like preparing for a home renovation. Know what you need, know what you are buying, know the costs and the implications; and get the agreement to perform it in writing. The challenges of being an informed consumer for renovation or reputation repair are similar, except for one thing: the risk of a bad decision on reputation may be higher. The risk is one's reputation. For example, the risk may be getting turned down for a job application because of some inaccurate information found using Google by an HR recruiter. It may be embarrassing photos or information given unnecessarily to family members, acquaintances or colleagues.

Ideally, consumers should not place themselves in the position of requiring these services. Many such situations are self-generated or self-inflicted. Therefore, early attention to protecting, monitoring and managing one's online reputation is prudent and productive. Fixing a reputation issue online is difficult and often unsuccessful despite all efforts. And should one find themselves in such a position, they need to choose carefully the approach to repair and to whom they may trust this task. It is not often a transparent service. Tracing efforts to results may be difficult, especially at a time when one's focus is on the potential damage, and fear may cloud reason.

Background

Canadians are increasingly providing information to the Internet through social media, blogs, and Internet transactions. Even the details of what they are searching or visiting is captured and stored. Other users are accessing that information with more powerful search technologies. Accessibility is ubiquitous. The advent of the smartphone and the proliferation of broadband and Wi-Fi hotspots have seen to that. Underlying all the benefits of this free flow of information, there is a cost to privacy, and more importantly, if not managed properly, a significant potential of damage to one's reputation.

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are key issues for consumers in the management of their online reputation?
2. What information is misused and how?
3. What prompts consumers to seek such repair?
4. What organizations perform repair?
5. What services are provided?
6. What is the value to the consumer?
7. What, if any, are the problematic practices of these organizations and this industry?
8. What can consumers do to maintain and repair their online reputations?

Factors that led Consumers Council to conduct this research

Many Canadian consumers remain unaware of their online reputation, despite the media coverage and the exponential increase in personal information available online. ORM is less about privacy and online identity than it is about reputation. These terms are often mixed, overlapped or used interchangeably. The recent hyper focus on privacy, while clearly a relevant and compelling issue, has obscured somewhat the reputational risks resulting from the misuse of information gathered by others from the Internet.

Many do not know what information about them is available over the Internet, its accuracy and whether or how it is being used. There may be factual errors in this online information. Other people may thoughtlessly rely on this information and possibly misuse it.

Consumers, once aware, will want to fix, augment and manage their online reputation. Businesses already in the online reputation management field will continue to provide such services for individuals, possibly focusing more

on a mass-market consumer business model. The U.S organizations have more experience in the field, particularly because of the nature of some of the organizations like Intelius that collect and display personal information.¹⁴ U.S. organizations will freely expand their services to Canada. Canadian consumers have scant guidance in evaluating their needs or the services of these ORM organizations.

The provision of online management reputation and repair services, particularly to consumers and more specifically to non-high profile consumers, is a fledgling business. Most organizations in this industry are less than four years old. This nascent industry has sprung up in the last three or four years, after the establishment of this service for businesses. A number of the organizations in this industry have been called anything from shady to fly-by-night. A quick Google search of “online reputation management companies” reveals a variety of organizations, some of which we examine in this report.

There is an increasing need for consumers¹⁵ to manage, and in some cases repair, their online reputation. Significant numbers of consumers are not aware of their online presence. The industry of online reputation management is not one of great transparency. Considering the increasing need for a good online reputation, a lack of awareness on the part of consumers, and the unruly and largely unknown industry devoted to protecting reputations, the Consumers Council of Canada decided to conduct this research, a key piece of which is examining/evaluating some of the more visible, and ostensibly reputable, organizations providing such services to the average consumer.

¹⁴ The availability of such information is higher in the U.S. through organizations such as Intelius. Intelius, for a reasonably small fee can reveal details such as criminal records, lawsuits, judgments, liens, bankruptcies, property ownership, address history, phone numbers, relatives & associates, neighbors, marriage/divorce records. <http://www.intelius.com/background-check.html>

¹⁵ The use of the term consumer relates to individuals as consumers in their purchase of ORM services. Nevertheless, the term consumer is used broadly in this report to mean individual.

The Research

Research Methodology

Initial Research

Initial research involved a review of material available online and in print, and key informant discussions, on the subject of misuse of consumers' information, online reputation management and repair, to identify the issues and establish a general overview of the players, environment, drivers, scenarios and the industry.

Primary Research Efforts:

Literature Review and Online Research

A literature review was conducted to help better define the scope of the research and to develop a full picture of online reputation management and related issues. The review helped identify the range of issues related to the research topic and identify issues relevant to consumers. A broad and relevant description of online reputation management and the industry has been developed. Published reports, research papers, ORM websites, Internet sources, and media were examined.

Evaluation Grid Creation

The focus of the evaluation and analysis was consumer centric. The evaluation grid we used to evaluate the products and/or services was assembled from issues and criteria gleaned from the academic, online and other literature reviewed. The evaluation grid was assembled also with an emphasis on assisting consumers to act as effective marketplace participants, particularly with respect to consumption choices. Key informants were interviewed before and/or after the evaluation to assist in determining the criteria and in analyzing the results and developing the recommendations.

Organization Evaluation

The research evaluated representative products and or services made available to Canadian consumers to manage or repair their online reputation. Ten organizations were selected based on predetermined criteria.¹⁶ The evaluation was done on a non-invasive, non-intrusive basis. In many cases the efforts of the organizations themselves, with regard to their Search Engine Optimization and Search Engine Marketing techniques and website material, were examined as a way to get material directly from them objectively.

Public Interest Network of the Consumers Council of Canada (PIN)

The PIN was used to collect responses to a questionnaire concerning issues, awareness and recommendations.

Key Informants

Throughout this research a number of Key Informants were interviewed. Their views were solicited to help shape some research, highlight background and issues and subject matter, and provide some assistance about what might be appropriate recommendations. Their views were so well articulated that we decided to include extensively their comments verbatim throughout the report.

Some of the Key Informants have been given aliases (those with colours as names) because they offered personal opinions and not necessarily those of their employers. They are taking care to manage their online reputations.

¹⁶ Initially nine were selected. A Canadian organization was added when it came to light that it provided such services to the average consumer, despite that not being noted clearly on their website.

Who They Are

Dr. Nick Bontis – DeGroot School of Business, McMaster University, Author “Information Bombardment”

Dr. Bontis is an Associate Professor at the DeGroot School of Business at McMaster University and one of the world’s leading experts in intellectual capital and its impact on performance. He is Director of the Institute for Intellectual Capital Research, associate editor of The Journal of Intellectual Capital and author of *Information Bombardment: Rising Above the Digital Onslaught*.

Ms. Jane Dysart – Partner, Dysart & Jones

Ms. Dysart is a founding partner of Dysart & Jones. She is program director for several Information/Internet/Knowledge based conferences including Internet Librarian 2010, webcom Toronto 2010, KMWorld 2010, and Computers. She is past president of the Special Libraries Association and a member of San Jose State University School of Library and Information Science Advisory Council.

Mr. Joe Katzman – Editor-in-Chief, Defense Industry Daily

Mr. Katzman is the editor-in chief, Defense Industry Daily, with a varied and extensive background in social media, and information and knowledge management.

Mr. Chris Martin – Founder, Reputation Hawk

Mr. Martin is the founder of Reputation Hawk, one of the 10 organizations selected for our evaluation.

Mr. Art Pierce – Retired HR Executive, University Lecturer, Executive Recruiter

Mr. Pierce is retired. He is a former lecturer at a Ryerson University, senior HR executive, HR recruiter and, career consultant.

Mr. Jeff Quipp – CEO Search Engine People

Mr. Quipp is the CEO of Search Engine People, one of Canada’s largest and most successful Search Engine Optimization companies. Search Engine People has been listed several years running on the PROFIT 200 list of the Fastest-Growing Companies in Canada.¹⁷

Mr. Brian Sharwood – President, Homestars.com

Mr. Sharwood is President of Homestars.com, a Toronto-based review website for homeowners to review their contractors.

Mr. Ezra Silverton – President, 9th sphere

Mr. Silverton is founder and President of 9th sphere, one of the 10 organizations selected for our evaluation. 9th sphere is a web design and Internet marketing solutions provider.¹⁸

Mr. Tony Wilson – Franchise, Intellectual Property Lawyer, Author “Manage Your Online Reputation”

Mr. Wilson is a Vancouver franchise and intellectual property lawyer. Mr. Wilson is a regular columnist with The Globe and Mail, Lawyers Weekly. He has recently published the book *Manage Your Online Reputation: Don’t let angry clients, jealous lovers or ruthless competitors ruin your image*.

Dr. Pink – Information and Knowledge Expert

Dr. Pink is an information and knowledge expert, a university lecturer and Google critic.

Mr. Purple – Data Protection, Privacy Executive

Mr. Purple is a data protection and privacy executive, with long-time experience in the areas of information security and technology, privacy and data protection.

Mr. Green – Security Expert

Mr. Green is an information and technology security expert with a global organization.

Mr. Orange – Search/Information Executive

Mr. Orange is expert in the areas of search, information and knowledge.

¹⁷ <http://www.profitguide.com/article/6069--ceo-interview-jeff-quipp-search-engine-people-inc>

¹⁸ <http://www.9thsphere.com/ezra-silverton.html>

Mr. Blue – Consumer with a problem

Mr. Blue has an Internet image problem, which has overtaken his life for the past two years. For obvious reasons Mr. Blue has chosen to remain anonymous.

Ms. Brown – Facebook Trainer for Seniors

Ms. Brown works part time training seniors on Facebook, giving her an enlightened view at the intersection of our oldest generation and our newest social phenomenon.

Mr. Yellow – Lawyer

Mr. Yellow is a litigation lawyer with significant experience in Internet litigation and privacy.

Outcomes

As an outcome of this research consumers will gain an evaluation of the selected products/and or services, evaluative criteria against which to assess other existing or emerging products or services, and related recommendations on maintaining and/or repairing their online reputation. Choices for consumers are affected by the problem they have in the first place (e.g., how serious is the potential damage to reputation, what can be done by the repair organization, the price, as well as the consumer's perspective on the organization's ability). A review of organizations in the field will produce a strong baseline for development of evaluation criteria for consumers, with guidance on how to approach the need and use of these services.

Project Scope

The focus of this research is primarily on the average consumer, and less on the high profile consumers – professionals, executives and others who have more frequent, and complex demands for these services. This demand is evident in the market offerings by these organizations. Proper online reputation management for these individuals is not typically a \$100-a-month endeavour.

The primary focus is on reputation, not privacy, and not identity. There is a strong relationship among the three, but this report does not seek to evaluate protection of privacy, or issues relating to online identity theft.

The ORM industry is said to have many shady and fly-by-night organizations. It's not our intent to evaluate those organizations considered shady or fly-by-night, but to evaluate some that a consumer might reasonably use, and to assist the consumer with evaluative criteria that will enable them to work through to an appropriate online reputation management decision. As well, we believe that some of these fly-by-night organizations are not around long enough under the same name for consumers to benefit from publishing an evaluation of their service.

Testing organizations through actual repair of a Canadian consumer or consumers is not within scope of this research. It is not possible to have the same person be assisted simultaneously by 10 different organizations. Having different people present different issues would make it difficult to assess whether the work was effective. Real people would have had to be used, as it would not be possible to create a realistic, consistent scenario from scratch and make such information available through sites on the Internet outside the control of the research project. However, the more compelling reason is that the research project itself should not risk the reputation of Canadian consumers if there were difficulties with testing or evaluation of one of these organizations. Consequently non-intrusive and non-invasive testing was used to satisfy the research objective.

General Criteria for Selection of Organizations for Evaluation

The primary criterion was to find organizations that Canadian consumers would consider in obtaining online reputation management repair services. See the section of The Evaluation for more details.

The Environment, Trends and ORM Drivers

ORM is a complex research subject. As demonstrated in the Sources and Scenarios section there are myriad combinations of information, proponents and methods of making content available on the Internet and reasons to remove it from exposure. This is only exacerbated by the multitude of issues, factors and drivers. We have grouped the primary environment, trends and market drivers in four thematic categories.

Key Environmental Trends/Drivers

1. Availability and Provision of Information

More information is available by volume, types and sources as Web 2.0 provides a continuing flow of information. This is typically unfiltered, non-peer-reviewed information that will remain accessible, often without the necessary context, for the most part, into the foreseeable future. There is no "information bankruptcy"¹⁹ process to ever remove it, as there is for financial bankruptcy to clear a past problem.

2. Accessibility of Information: anywhere, anytime

Information is much more accessible courtesy of Google, Wi-Fi hotspots and mobile technology, particularly smartphones.

The ripping down of the privacy walls and diminishing respect for information in context (courtesy of Facebook, the anonymous blogger, and ISPs hiding behind Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act in the U.S.) have made more information more accessible – information that is often private and/or inappropriate. Mobile technology has allowed people to create and upload information to the Internet, perhaps at times when they are least able to consider the appropriateness of posting it.

3. Nature of Consumer Information And The Protection Afforded It

The nature of the information has changed. It is not as filtered or contextual as it was in the earlier Internet generation, and certainly not as contextual as other more mainstream media. Strongly filtered information is not necessarily better information, but it does mean that one may have to go mining to find the great information, and ensure that the inappropriate or untrue information is filtered along the way. Information is not protected, as privacy becomes an issue every day in the news, and yet so many consumers misunderstand this. Consumers' legal protections remain somewhat unclear, and vary among countries and among provinces in Canada.

4. Social Forces

Few social forces are stronger today than either Google or Facebook. Google is inculcated into so many day-to-day processes and decisions, and Facebook causes people to want and seek to belong. Put them together and they make a formidable pairing that can pressure people to contribute (sometimes inappropriately) and use (or misuse) information about themselves and others.

Availability and Provision of Information

At no time in our history has more information been available for our use, or misuse. The expansion continues unabated, unchecked, and unexpurgated in a largely unruly fashion. This generates opportunities for reputation enhancement or display, and greater risk for damage to that same reputation, of virtually any adult consumer in Canada.

Web 2.0

Web 2.0 and Social Media, are often seen as synonymous and are largely defined by the nature of their information: it is almost exclusively user generated. This has had a tremendous effect on the amount, immediacy, context, and

¹⁹ Response from an anonymous contributor of the Public Interest Network of the Consumers Council of Canada to the survey on Online Reputation Management

nature of information available. In different ways they affect the consumer and their reputation. While allowing for greater promotion of reputation, the amount, immediacy, context, and nature of information also share the same capability of increasing the risk to a consumer's reputation.

More Information

The more that information is available, the greater the chance to portray a more accurate picture of the consumer. It also allows for more information susceptible to privacy breaches, misinterpretation or misuse. The wealth of shared personal information also increases the probability of there being inappropriate information, regardless of its veracity. *"Now everybody has a printing press"*²⁰, says Joe Katzman, editor-in-chief of the Defense Industry Daily. And with that power comes many issues, particularly around protection of those with the printing press and those upon whom they comment or opine. One of the factors of the Internet that is often ignored is that it is largely free, from both an economic point of view and a freedom of information point of view. "Huge quantities of information are housed in databases accessible at no charge over the Internet, if one knows where to look."²¹

Immediacy of the information

Whereas traditional Web 1.0 information was typically distilled, cleansed and verified (to varying degrees) by more corporate and organizational entities, Web 2.0 information is often put up without a second thought, in the heat of the moment or with less than ethical motivation. In many cases there is not the second chance to think through postings of information.

Diminishment and Absence of Context

In discussions with key informants during this research project, there was a clear, dominant theme in the nature of misused information about consumers from the Internet. That was the theme of context. *"Anything out of context,"*²² is how the basis for misuse of information was described by Ezra Silverton the President of 9th sphere, the Canadian web design, search-engine-optimization, Internet-marketing and online reputation management organization.

Nature of information

Without the processes and procedures and restrictions generally placed on Web 1.0 information, a wider array of information can be posted. So not only is the amount of information increased, there are different types, some of which can be particularly damaging to reputation – unchecked personal opinion, for example. Web 1.0 was a combination of text, typically transplanted from brochure-ware, and images. Web 2.0 is so much more.

²⁰ Joe Katzman, Key Informant interview

²¹ Appel, Edward J. *Internet Searches for Vetting, Investigations, and Open-source Intelligence*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC, 2010.. p.xiv

²² Era Silverton, Key Informant interview

Web 2.0 Outline – Implications for Online Reputation

Category	Purpose	Examples	Reputation Implications
Search and keyword terms	Where consumers indicate INTENT	Google Insights for Search, Google Trends, Keyword Analysis Tools, Google Analytics	Search Engine Optimization, Internet Marketing, Search Engine Marketing, Online Reputation Management all have keywords (search terms) as a key component of their discipline. The prime point being that keywords are words used by users, and knowledge of them will give an advantage to any searcher. Consumers should know the keywords that represent that return search results for themselves.
Social networking sites	Where consumers CONVERSE	Facebook, LinkedIn	A social area that is not as secure as many of those involved believe, particularly concerning how those outside the network treat the information. ²³
Micro Blogging	Where consumers quickly voice OPINION “SUCCINCTLY”	Twitter, Tumblr	Tweets are designed as off-handed comments for the moment. However, they are not treated like that from a records management perspective. They live on with virtually no surrounding context, which for Tweets can be vital. Tweets do not stand alone meaningfully. Often they need the surrounding chain of Tweets and prompts for context.
Blogs	Where consumers voice OPINION	Wordpress, Blogspot,	Anonymous bloggers can be damaging to one’s reputation. Many court cases in this area relate to uncovering the anonymity of bloggers, and/or suing bloggers for defamatory comments. The courts have held in many instances that despite the anonymity and credibility issues of the Internet that defamation through a blog is very real.
Discussion Forums	Where consumers ASK AND ANSWER AND CONFLICT	Various – more identified by nature and structure than any particular product or technology	Guidelines around contributions to discussion forums can be less restrictive than for review sites. Arguments in heated debate abound in forums, and many individuals can cause further problems with inflamed responses.
Wikis	Where consumers COLLABORATE to organize and refer	Wikipedia	In limited instances, Wikipedia can be a useful place to help repair reputation. It has moderation and credibility.
Traditional Sites-www.	Where organizations lay out their carefully worded messages	There are a couple of hundred million of these	Traditional websites can pose difficulties in that they can contain information that may damage, but using them to help boost positive information about a consumer can be quite useful, particularly in generating links.
RSS (Really Simple Syndication)	Where consumers AGGREGATE THEIR READING	News organizations, and as a plugin for most blogging services	RSS is a very quick way to find out if you have a problem with a blogger. If sites exist that a consumer is concerned may damage their reputation, RSS will help find out about it as soon as possible.
Video and Podcast	Where users don’t have to read – let the technology do the work and engage.	YouTube, iTunes Podcasts	Videos go viral faster than almost anything else. Some of the most “famous” instances of online reputation damage are videos.
Photo	Where users share their vacation pictures – from a distance.	Flickr	Photos on Flickr and Facebook are favorites of HR hiring and recruiting managers.

²³ Avner Levin et al . *The Next Digital Divide: Online Social Network Privacy*, Ryerson University, Privacy and Cyber Crime Unit, March, 2008
http://www.ryerson.ca/tedrogersschool/privacy/Ryerson_Privacy_Institute_OSN_Report.pdf

Google's 300-Year Mission

Google is known for many things, but one of the more commonly known, and at times challenged is their statement *"You can make money without doing evil."*²⁴

Lesser known, but more impactful for consumers is their mission statement:

*Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.*²⁵

Google is deadly serious about this mission, but its founders will not be around to see it completed. When asked how long it would take Google to fulfill its mission, Eric Schmidt, their former CEO, stated: *"We did a math exercise, and the answer was 300 years."*²⁶

Jeff Quipp – CEO, Search Engine People

*"Google is going to continue to serve up whatever information they think best serves the users needs, whether it's negative information about the user or not."*²⁷

Google's mission will continue to have significant implications for consumers looking to manage, improve, conceal or repair their reputation online. Google has made significant headway, but consumers must realize that Google's efforts will continue more or less unabated, causing consumers to be aware of the affects on them and their reputation.

More People, More Organizations, Putting More up

80% of Canadians are using the Internet for personal purposes according to a 2009 survey on Canadian Internet Usage.²⁸ That's a 10% increase from two years prior. "Of those aged 45 or older, two-thirds (66%) went online during 2009, up from 56% in 2007. This age group, traditionally slower to adopt and use the Internet, accounted for 60% of all new Internet users since 2007."²⁹

PEW Research Center in the U.S. found in a survey *Older Adults and Social Media, August 2010*³⁰ that, for Americans, social networking use among those over 50 had doubled in the past year. Increasingly, although still at lower levels than their younger counterparts, they are stepping into the world of Facebook and Twitter.

In many cases, their entrance to Facebook comes at the request of their children. As one trainer of seniors on Facebook interviewed for this research told us: *"There could actually be a course for seniors called 'my child gave me a laptop because they can't be bothered calling and they want me on Facebook.' I could make my fortune running a course like that."*³¹

The older demographic had been the most reluctant to engage the Internet and particularly Social Media. Studies are now indicating that this is beginning to change. E-mail is declining as Facebook is increasing. Some view these two as connected, and that part of the reason for the change in the older demographic is because they need to get onto Facebook to connect with some people who don't have e-mail, often their adult children.

The Wayback Machine/Internet Archive

Who thought that a dog with a bowtie, and a little boy as his pet, would foretell the largest, permanent data archive in history? It was Mr. Peabody, and Sherman, of Rocky and Bullwinkle fame who developed the WABAC Machine in the late 1950's.³² This idea is now currently manifested in The Wayback Machine, part of a project of the Internet Archive that is *"building a digital library of Internet sites and other cultural artifacts in digital form."*³³ Most Internet

²⁴ <http://www.google.com/about/corporate/company/tenthings.html>. This is one of ten statements they made in 1999 and continue to hold through today.

²⁵ <http://www.google.com/about/corporate/company/>

²⁶ Stross, Randall E. *Planet Google: How One Company Is Transforming Our Lives*. London: Atlantic, 2009.. p. 200

²⁷ Jeff Quipp, Key Informant interview

²⁸ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/100510/dq100510a-eng.htm>

²⁹ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/100510/dq100510a-eng.htm>

³⁰ <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Older-Adults-and-Social-Media.aspx>

³¹ Ms. Brown – Facebook Trainer for Seniors, Key Informant interview

³² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WABAC_machine

³³ <http://www.archive.org/>

sites change over time, but regularly throughout the year the Internet Archive project saves copies of their websites to a permanent archive. More information is now being captured more often, with an expectation of it being kept longer. The Wayback Machine is becoming less relevant though, as it does not capture social media and other Web 2.0 information like it does traditional corporate website information.

Your Information is Accessible: Anywhere, Anytime

Not only is there more information from a wider group of demographics, more people in each demographic cohort, and a wider variety of media, there is now greater accessibility to this information. It can be accessed from more devices, from virtually anywhere on the planet through smartphone mobile technologies and in ways that different people want to see it. If you want to read it, it's available as usual. If you want to see it, then it's YouTube, video podcasts, or embedded video. If you want to hear it, then podcasts or other audio mechanisms are available. Even more important in furthering that accessibility is the synergistic combination of much more powerful, broad and deep search engine technologies with the rapidly increasing search skills of the average Internet user.

Search Technologies

Search technology improvements have allowed for consumers to find more of what they want when they want it. The corollary to this is that those looking for information about consumers are finding more about consumers in general and, more importantly, information about individual consumers. Following are search changes affecting what consumers can find:

- Search can more readily be personalized. Lead results in Google are stratified right on the results page.
- Search results can be filtered to focus on sites with images, customized time ranges, or results with varying reading levels.
- More search engines exist which search specialized areas of information – e.g., medical or scholarly.
- Search results can now be displayed in differing ways allowing users to synthesize more readily, as they can see the information the way they want.
- Search engines are allowing results to display along a timeline, thus allowing a user to sense trends.
- Search results can be customized to limited time ranges.
- Google now allows universal search.

And these are only a few of the changes that search engines, particularly Google, are making. All this gives the beginner searcher an easier way to narrow their searches, and a knowledgeable searcher considerable leverage into greater opportunities for synthesis and cross-reference at light speed.

Mobile

It has been argued that technology is too important to be strategic, and that it is really just a necessity. If you don't have technology, you can't play in business.³⁴ There is support for the argument that mobile technologies have provided a strategic game changer for business, particularly the rapid increase in smartphones and mobile Internet access for information and transaction processing. It is that powerful. Appropriate use of it can provide a competitive edge, or leverage into new services driven solely by technology. Conversely it can cause damage more quickly.

Simultaneously, mobile technology has produced a similarly sized effect on online reputation management for individuals. The provision of reputation boosting and damaging material has been strongly advanced through the photo and video-capture and upload capabilities of recent BlackBerrys, Android devices, and the iPhone. On release of the iPhone 3GS, the first iPhone with video capability, YouTube video uploads increased by 400% a day in the first few days.³⁵ And this is exacerbated by programs that automatically post photos as they are taken, assuming the setting is for automatic uploading. However, the decision to automatically upload all photos to Flickr may be taken at a time when one is in greater control of their faculties than later when the photos are actually

³⁴ Carr, Nicholas G. IT Doesn't Matter. *Harvard Business Review* (2003).

³⁵ http://youtube-global.blogspot.com/2009/06/mobile-uploads-to-youtube-increase_5122.html

taken. One has to wonder how many reputations have been damaged shortly after an embarrassing video has been uploaded to YouTube and a group gathers to watch the offending show on a mobile phone or tablet?

Jeff Quipp, CEO, Search Engine People

"It's the fact that we all have mobile devices now. And we can record and take pictures."³⁶

Voice

Web 2.0 has allowed the provision of material in more varied media than previously. The corollary of this is that information is now accessible in a greater variety of media. Users are not limited to text. They can access video, audio, and text to speech.

Aggregators of People Information/Search

The Internet in 2011, just like the world in 1492, is not flat. It has significant depth, which the search engines often cannot access. However, a new breed of search engine/aggregator has developed over the past few years – search engines/aggregators that can search on a name and gather information from deep Internet sources and consolidate it. Sites like Spokeo.com, pipl.com, 123people.com, and zoominfo.com. These sites are primarily aimed at U.S. audiences, particularly when refining an initial search. Nevertheless, they capture and display a considerable amount of information about non-U.S. citizens and should not be disregarded.

A search for an individual on any of these can bring back pictures, email addresses, business professional material, criminal record checks, phone numbers, related domains, web links, tag clouds, videos, news, documents, social network profiles, microblogs (typically Twitter), related people, and a list of people searching for your name on mylife.com. Not all the information relates to that individual, and is not always correct, but enough is accurate to give the searcher considerable information on which to base the next search. This information is all available individually, but these sites accumulate and synthesize. As one privacy, data protection and security executive put it: *"It's the ability to research and cross reference at light speed that creates the risk."³⁷*

Nature & Protection of Information

Anonymity/ Social Distance/Lack of Accountability

Anonymity is at the heart of the online reputation management issue for many consumers.

It allows people to easily misuse information without responsibility or accountability. As Michael Fertik CEO of Reputation Defender/Reputation.com suggests, anonymity brings out the coward in people.³⁸ In all of this the legal side of the Internet and responsibility for actions and identification of those involved is such that most people involved in the chain can take a "hands-off" view and say "It's "not my problem," including the ISPs, hosting sites and search engines, as well as the anonymous blogger – particularly in the U.S where many of the hosting sites are located.

It is anonymity that most "offends" those in the ORM business. Among the CEOs of SEO and ORM organizations we interviewed we found anonymity to be a primary, if not the primary, issue in prompting unwarranted damage to individuals on the Internet. They tied it directly to lack of accountability. They have seen firsthand the damage done to people's reputations through anonymous defamation.

Jeff Quipp – CEO, Search Engine People

"I don't think you should have complete anonymity. You have to be responsible for backing up comments."³⁹

Chris Martin – Founder, Reputation Hawk

"What to me is really scary is how easy it is to... just kind of sit back in your chair and anonymously post something on the Internet. It can take you 15 min. You don't have to be accountable at all. No accountability at all and you can ruin someone's life. It's insane."⁴⁰

³⁶ Jeff Quipp, Key Informant interview

³⁷ Mr. Purple – Data Protection, Privacy Executive, Key Informant interview

³⁸ Fertik, Michael, and David Thompson. Wild West 2.0: How to Protect and Restore Your Online Reputation on the Untamed Social Frontier. New York: American Management Association, 2010. Print.

³⁹ Jeff Quipp, Key Informant interview

Michael Fertik, CEO of Reputation Defender/Reputation.com puts most of the blame for the misuse of information and the resulting damage to reputations of individuals on the anonymity of individuals on the Internet. *"The power of online anonymity has turned reputation and privacy on their heads." "Online anonymity blows away social norms."*⁴¹

Art Pierce, who spent his career in marketing, HR, recruiting, career consulting and teaching business organization and marketing at a Canadian University has a telling view on social media that arises from an almost primal aversion that many of his students had over the years – the fear of rejection in face-to-face sales. He extrapolates that fear to why social media allows communications that may go further than they should. He said: *"It's that combination, the blend, the harmony of the verbal and nonverbal which lends conviction and momentum to your message. In social media there has been a flight from the risks of rejection inherent in face-to-face, to this capsule in which sticks and stones can't break our bones."*

Anonymity is not all bad, however. *"This anonymity can be liberating if it is used for good – to explore new ideas or identities."*⁴² It allows publication of information that would otherwise not be made available, but is of value. It must however, be made available in a place where it can remain anonymous, but still have credibility. Newspapers and the traditional media have dealt well with this, where reporters protect their sources and effectively act as intermediaries. It also allows users to search anonymously, without having to expose themselves.

Anonymity can be used well, as demonstrated by Homestars.com, a Toronto based Internet site designed to allow homeowners to comment on contractors. It is driving behaviours of honest and anonymous commentary and criticism, but it also enforces a reasonable degree of accountability through moderation and anonymity to the public, but not anonymity to the site owners and moderators. *"We do a lot of technical things in the background to try and catch out the fraudsters,"* says President Brian Sherwood.

Homestars.com has clear Contributions Guidelines and Terms of Use for their review site. They have a forum that has less strict guidelines. *"The forum tends to be more of an open conversation. We allow a lot broader comments in the forum than we will in the review,"* states Mr. Sharwood.

Some schools are actively discouraging the use of Wikipedia as a source for school papers, citing its lack of authority. Arguably, in today's efforts on search and research, Wikipedia is a model for the balance of anonymity and availability of information, and taking responsibility, suggests Saul Levmore in an essay *The Internet's Anonymity Problem*. He wrote: *"The product reflects both the wisdom of crowds as well as the hard work of more skilled labor than a conventional encyclopedia can possibly employ – even in a virtual edition where it, too, could provide subscribers with ongoing updates and improvements.... Any contribution or revision made to a Wikipedia entry is recorded on a separate, linked history page."*⁴³

In Wikipedia, anyone can contribute anonymously unless there is an issue of accuracy at stake. As well a series of experts, in the background, but clearly identified, can or may verify the changes. It gets the benefit of the anonymous entry without the real risk of a malicious or outlandish statement slipping through the cracks. And to cover themselves, if they need to, they can go to the source of contribution on the separate history page.⁴⁴

Clearly, anonymity is at the core of this issue – for good and bad. The law is uncertain around it (see section on Legal), and Internet posters demonstrate some of the lower human characteristics. As they hide their identities to attack, others hide behind anonymity to explore in privacy, free from exposure. And others use anonymity to proffer ideas of note or worthy of discussion without the danger of needless personal exposure.

Striking that fine balance between anonymity and accountability will go a long way to resolving some of the reputation issues that consumers are enduring on the Internet.

⁴⁰ Chris Martin, Key Informant interview

⁴¹ Fertik, Michael, and Thompson, David. *Wild West 2.0: How to Protect and Restore Your Online Reputation on the Untamed Social Frontier*. New York: American Management Association, 2010. p. 63

⁴²Fertik, Michael, and Thompson, David. P. 75

⁴³Levmore, Saul X., and Craven Nussbaum, Martha. *The Offensive Internet: Speech, Privacy, and Reputation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2010. p. 59, p60

⁴⁴ As a way to create cheap fast reference material that might not appear in better formal reference sources, Wikipedia is at least a method to do so. But it's also full of seriously bad and manipulated content that it's method of checking and peer review fails to deal with, and especially it is not responsive on a timely basis.

Bing vs. Google

Bing and Google, clearly the two most prominent search engines,⁴⁵ have different approaches to search results and relevancy. What may appear high in a list of Google search results may not be visible on the first one or two pages of Bing search results. And vice versa. This was evident in our testing of key search engine ranking for terms for the various organizations. Not all search engines produce the same results, so any attempt at repairing reputations will have to take into account more than just Google. There are some key differences between Bing and Google that will have implications for search engine results. Just because something is pushed to the second page of Google does not mean that it will be pushed to the second page of Bing and Yahoo.

Recent research shows Bing closing the considerable gap between it and Google.⁴⁶ Chitika research indicates that Yahoo and Bing climbed a combined .5% from June 2010 to August 2010. More importantly they note that Microsoft has aimed itself at the online market for their search and that is typically a more informed audience. A more informed audience might be more able to elicit context from search results and misuse them less, unintentionally. A more informed audience may gravitate to Bing in the belief that they will get “better” search results when looking for people information. It is important to pay attention to Bing when fixing or managing one’s reputation. While Google does command 80% of the search queries by users, the number of those queries that are solely for navigational purposes is significant.

No Grandfathering, Life Cycle of Information

Once information is accessible on the Internet, particularly when it has been there long enough to be caught in a permanent archive or several individuals’ computers, it will never go away, regardless of any court order, or effort to remove it. It will always be there.

The Internet is short on document and content management⁴⁷ for information. Individual databases made available through the Internet, particularly those that require login, can be more carefully controlled, moderated or be given a life cycle. Much of the rest of the information on the Internet is just dumped on the pile, with search and indexing technologies relied on to do an archaeological dig should there be a need to uncover and sift it out.

Twitter Contradiction/Conflict

Twitter, clearly one of the top three or four social media “mechanisms” was designed as a quick way to make an offhand comment, or a quick statement about “the moment.” This assumption, and the way in which Twitter has evolved, is an inherent contradiction. These passing comments do not pass. They stick. They can be found. As Jane Dysart, the Chair of KMWorld Conference and other conferences dealing with information, libraries and technologies puts it regarding Twitter: *“If you’re relying on Google [for Twitter results], it’s current stuff. However, there are collections of Twitter material on the Internet. There are other ways to get at it.”* As well, unlike offhand spoken comments, a Tweet can be there for a long time. Even if a user removes a Tweet, it may have been re-tweeted and then becomes a record of the person who re-tweeted.

The risk is greater where the fundamental model differs from the human model of conversation and information dissemination and gathering. In Twitter, an offhand comment, uttered without much thought or care, or even malice, can be effectively tattooed on one’s back. And to further the metaphor, it will be no less difficult to remove, or to maintain an ongoing process to keep it concealed. Of course, the location of the tattoo is a key factor in the ability to keep it concealed. The longer-term question is, like tattoos, will such comments and those who uttered them be judged differently in 10 years than they are today?

ISP Distancing

Blogs, some websites, discussion forums, wikis, user groups and similar agencies for web sites and other Internet information have not typically been forced to reveal the sources of blogs and their identities, particularly those in the U.S. In a fashion similar to that in the U.S., those in Canada have to varying degrees been allowed to continue without much accountability for the information they purvey. See section on Legal for discussion on Canadian courts’ views on the balance of conflicting rights: that of freedom of expression and protection from defamation.

⁴⁵ Bing also powers Yahoo search, which is why results from these two search engines are virtually identical.

⁴⁶ <http://www.bighitmedia.co.uk/bing-catching-up-on-google/>

⁴⁷ Systems that allow tracking of document versions, and lifecycle of documents, including when to remove or delete.

Privacy – Good and Bad for Reputation

Art Pierce – Retired HR Executive, University Lecturer

"Privacy is the right to retain to yourself or your organization those elements which you for one reason or another do not wish to share with others. Reputation is the perception, flawed or otherwise, of our past successes, failures, attempts, personality and you name it. What are the stories about us? That's reputation. What are the myths in the best sense of the word?"⁴⁸

The Internet affects the issue of an individual's online reputation in several ways, and enough to cause the CEO of one of Canada's leading SEO organizations, Search Engine People, Jeff Quipp to suggest that, *"in the future there will be a name change business."*⁴⁹ This is a sentiment echoed by the former CEO of Google, Eric Schmidt, in an interview with the Wall Street Journal.⁵⁰ *"He predicts, apparently seriously, that every young person one day will be entitled automatically to change his or her name on reaching adulthood in order to disown youthful hijinks stored on their friends' social media sites."*

It is often private information that an individual would like to see concealed or removed from the Internet. As Ezra Silverton stated: *"From the context of public or private online, if you are talking about online reputation management, there is no privacy online. Absolutely anybody who doesn't want to make something public about themselves – it's not going to work. You have to be willing to release information about yourself."*⁵¹ He also suggests that privacy is less of an issue for reputation but more of one for identity theft. *"From the point of view of privacy itself, more people are concerned about credit card information that they don't want to make public. And that can be distinguished from an online reputation management perspective."*⁵²

Privacy and reputation

Reputation and privacy share a strange relationship. Typically in order to improve one's reputation online, one has to give up some privacy. As well, in this equation, someone else giving up their privacy, (e.g., giving someone else a reference) can increase another's reputation. However, giving up some privacy can also damage one's reputation. Privacy has a strong, but convoluted, effect on reputation.

Nick Bontis – McMaster University

"Reputation and privacy go hand-in-hand. It's like an elastic band. You stretch the elastic. On the one hand you're building your online reputation, on the other hand we're trying to protect our privacy, but as I pull with my right hand to get more reputation I get more tension on my left. What I really want is to pull both as much as I can. If I pull both as much as I can guess what happens to my Elastic band? It explodes. On one side pulling for my reputation and on the other side pulling against somebody's privacy. I am pulling it because I have to build the reputation and brand in the coverage for my reputation; on the other hand I am also destroying privacy at the same time. One might suggest that the question a consumer should ask himself or herself when managing their online reputation is: "What is the tensile strength of my online privacy reputation spectrum?"⁵³

Even the Supreme Court of Canada has a view on the distinction of reputation and privacy. In the landmark Supreme Court of Canada case, *Grant v. Torstar Corp.* 2009 SCC 61:

"Related to the protection of reputation is a concern for personal privacy. This Court has recognized that protection of personal privacy is 'intimately related' to the protection of reputation. While in other contexts privacy protection has been recognized as 'essential for the well-being of the individual' and 'an essential component of what it means to be "free"', it does not figure prominently in defamation jurisprudence. One reason for this is that defamation law is concerned with providing recourse against false injurious statements, while the protection of privacy typically focuses on keeping true information from the public gaze."⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Art Pierce, Key Informant interview

⁴⁹ Jeff Quipp, Key Informant interview

⁵⁰ Jenkins, Holman W. Google and the Search for the Future, *The Wall Street Journal*, August 14, 2010.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704901104575423294099527212.html>

⁵¹ Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

⁵² Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

⁵³ Nick Bontis, Key Informant interview

⁵⁴ *Grant v. Torstar Corp.*, 2009 SCC 61, Paragraph [59]

From a practical perspective, reputation and privacy are closely related. From a legal, and perhaps more theoretical view, they are clearly distinct.

Privacy and Publicity

The line has become blurred between privacy and reputation. The focus on privacy on Facebook and other social networking sites has deflected attention from the issue of reputation.

Mr. Yellow – Lawyer

*"I don't know that people are a lot more sensitive than they used to be about privacy. There's a lot in the press about it. We now have people in offices that do nothing but the privacy issues. I don't know if the average user of Facebook is more privacy sensitive than he or she used to be. There are certainly lots of people who put pictures of themselves up at drunk University parties."*⁵⁵

Ms. Brown – Facebook Trainer for Seniors

*"I can tell you from the training I do that that it's everybody's concern. Privacy. The first thing we do is lock it down. As soon as we set up the account we lock it down. They are concerned that anybody in the world can see their private information, their pictures, anything they put out there. I have a very clear process for locking down the privacy settings for people on Facebook."*⁵⁶

Tony Wilson – Author, "Manage Your Online Reputation"

*"Rethink your privacy settings. I think that is a good thing. But that doesn't stop the kids from having 875 friends, doing stupid things and having you getting out from the circle of trust. How do you have a circle of trust with 875 friends?"*⁵⁷

Nick Bontis – McMaster University

*"Privacy doesn't become an issue until it's breached."*⁵⁸

Privacy Policies

Many of our Key Informants and PIN respondents said privacy statements are typically unclear and consequently confuse consumers of social networking systems about their choices.

Privacy policies have become an issue. It is not an unreasonable assumption to believe that the increasing complexity and loosening of Facebook's privacy policy has had an affect on this.

Tony Wilson – Author, "Manage Your Online Reputation"

*"Facebook exists not to be private. The whole point of it is to be public. The whole thing works on the basis that everybody shares everything and everything is public."*⁵⁹

A clear focus has been brought to privacy, in some cases making it more difficult to understand, as privacy options and statements expand dramatically in size and complexity. Privacy gets the respect that reputation does not, clearly indicating a key difference between the two: privacy is clearly more definable (as it is by law or regulation).

Mr. Green – Security Expert

*"The privacy policies are so long, you almost need an executive summary." "Privacy policies are almost never read. We both know that."*⁶⁰

Mr. Yellow – Lawyer

*"My view is that it's like every other consumer transaction – there is a balance to be struck between granularity and comprehension."*⁶¹

Tony Wilson – Author, "Manage Your Online Reputation"

"All I know is that they are not read. They are only read when somebody goofs up and they say 'oh my God can I get this thing off Facebook' or 'can I get this thing off of YouTube.' Then they look at the privacy statement or the terms of

⁵⁵ Mr. Yellow, Key Informant interview

⁵⁶ Ms. Brown, Key Informant interview

⁵⁷ Tony Wilson, Key Informant interview

⁵⁸ Nick Bontis, Key Informant interview

⁵⁹ Tony Wilson, Key Informant interview

⁶⁰ Mr. Green, Key Informant interview

⁶¹ Mr. Yellow – Lawyer, Key Informant interview

use, and they try to figure out what to do about some post that's up there, once it's up there. I don't think anybody really looks at that stuff before they get on. They just get on and make assumptions.⁶²

Individuals are concerned about privacy, but seem to not truly understand it's nature or implications. Long, byzantine online privacy policies in small type without charts or other aids to assist in understanding, do not contribute to comprehension.

Social Media – the Great Equalizer

Social media has enabled individuals to find their individual and collective voices. Information flow is no longer asymmetrical. It is not solely the 'organization' packaging and propagating their views on media they control, influence or direct.

Social media has brought about an unwieldy, yet powerful, symmetry. And with that symmetry comes a fairness and equity in information exchange, availability and usefulness that has heretofore not existed. An outcome of this, though, is that individuals comment not only on organizations but also on individuals. These comments are generally made without moderation, peer review or intermediation, and sadly, quite often with little thought. This difference in the nature of information and the way that it is conveyed is as simple as are the two results: much more good information, and much more bad information. The effectiveness of the effort made to filter the bad, without losing the good will be a key measure of the benefit of social media as an equalizer.

The Legal Situation and Implications

Mr. Yellow – Lawyer

*"I think that the state of the law at the moment is not entirely settled across the country, but that is okay. That happens. Privacy is a relatively new field. We still have real estate cases going to the Supreme Court of Canada on narrow points that haven't been settled."*⁶³

The U.S and Section 230 of the Communication Decency Act

In 1996 the United States enacted the Communications Decency Act (CDA). Ostensibly, it was designed to protect those providing information on the nascent (in 1996) phenomenon known as the Internet. Some of the CDA was repealed, but not Section 230, which provides immunity to third-party providers of information created by others. This includes Internet Service Providers (ISP), discussion forum administrators, website hosting organizations, etc.

While it addresses essentially only one issue, that of third party hosting by U.S organizations, the protections afforded by Section 230 of the CDA are powerful. Defamation, libel and negligence have all been protected under this statute. The statute states that "[n]o provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider." It has also engendered an industry of various consumer complaint sites where both the anonymous author and the identified (but protected) hosting organization can proceed jointly with impunity. The relevance to Canadians is that many of these complaint sites and other sites containing reputation-damaging material reside in the U.S and are protected under Section 230.

Protection in Canada From Defamatory Remarks on the Internet

Defamation on the Internet is like defamation in any other media. It's illegal. However, on the Internet there are complicating factors of anonymity and questions around the credibility of the Internet as a medium. Whereas in the traditional media, a newspaper for instance, if someone is defamed and is able to prove it, they have an individual or organization to sue. On the Internet it is not that simple. Particularly with defamatory comments, they are frequently made anonymously. If there is no one to sue for defamation, as no one can be identified, then the plaintiff can make a case, but against whom would be the judgment? Once again, the issue of anonymity demonstrates its seminal involvement in the issue of protecting reputations of consumers on the Internet.

Nevertheless there exist several clear court decisions finding for the plaintiff in defamation cases on Internet posts. Canada's courts appear to be willing to find and hold blogs and other social media liable for defamation.

⁶² Tony Wilson, Key Informant interview

⁶³ Mr. Yellow – Lawyer, Key Informant interview

General Observations of the Canadian Courts' Decisions Relating to Defamation

It's a fine and tricky balance – the rights of Internet users to free speech, often through anonymity, with the rights of individuals to protection from defamation. The Canadian courts and statutes, in typically Canadian fashion, have steered clear of the sledgehammer approach of Section 230 of the Communication Decency Act in the U.S.

While the “the state of the law at the moment is not entirely settled across the country,”⁶⁴ there are some observations that can be made that are of relevance to Canadian consumers regarding their online reputations and defamation.

We have listed these observations below with the citations of the relevant court decisions supporting them. Following these are short outlines and excerpts from some of the decisions:

Defamation laws apply to social media, blogs and other material on the Internet (Barrick Gold Corp. v. Lopehandia, 2004 12938 (ON CA), Vigna v. Levant, 2010 ONSC 6308, Canadian National Railway Co. v. Google Inc., 2010 ONSC 3121, Hunter Dickinson Inc. v. Butler 2010 BCSC 939, A.B. V. Bragg Communications Inc. 2010 NSSC 215)

The courts have resolved the basic issue. Defamatory remarks on the Internet are subject to the defamation laws. These cases related to blog postings, except for A.B. v Bragg in which the medium was Facebook.

A new defence for publishers against charges of defamation has been established by the Supreme Court of Canada – that of “responsible communication on matters of public interest.” This defence applies to blogs and other new online media. (Grant v. Torstar, 2009 SCC 61)

In Grant v. Torstar the court established that a publisher who “acted responsibly in attempting to verify the information on a matter of public interest represents a reasonable and proportionate response to the need to protect reputation while sustaining the public exchange of information that is vital to modern Canadian society,”⁶⁵ and accordingly was able to claim a “responsible communication on matters of public interest” defence.

It was noted in the decision that the defence should be referred to as responsible communication, not responsible journalism, recognizing the broader inclusion of blogs and similar new media. The decision stated: “the traditional media are rapidly being complemented by new ways of communicating on matters of public interest, many of them online, which do not involve journalists. These new disseminators of news and information should, absent good reasons for exclusion, be subject to the same laws as established media outlets.”⁶⁶

“A review of recent defamation case law suggests that many actions now concern blog postings and other online media which are potentially both more ephemeral and more ubiquitous than traditional print media. While established journalistic standards provide a useful guide by which to evaluate the conduct of journalists and non-journalists alike, the applicable standards will necessarily evolve to keep pace with the norms of new communications media.”⁶⁷

The “responsible communication on matters of public interest” only applies if the publisher meets certain conditions in attempting to verify the facts.⁶⁸ Will the average blogger act “responsibly in attempting to verify the information”?⁶⁹ That remains uncertain, but the implications for bloggers are clear – If you want to be treated like a journalist, act like one.

Freedom of Expression under section 2(b) of the Canadian Charter of Rights must be respected, and balanced in dealing with identifying anonymous bloggers. Plaintiffs should present a prima facie case of defamation before they can be allowed to identify anonymous authors on the Internet. (Warman v. Wilkins-Fournier, 2010 ONSC 2826, York University v. Bell Canada Enterprise, 2009 ONSC 46447, Mosher v. Coast Publishing Ltd, 2010 NSSC 153)

In referring to Warman v. Wilkinson-Fournier and related cases, they were summed up by a lawyer, familiar with privacy and Internet law, “They all say people aren't allowed to hide behind anonymity and do wrong. The only question is how do you prevent plaintiffs from going on a fishing trip? All these cases are trying to do the same thing. They use different words that they're trying to balance.”⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Mr. Yellow – Lawyer, Key Informant interview

⁶⁵ Grant v. Torstar, 2009 SCC 61

⁶⁶ Grant v. Torstar Paragraph 96

⁶⁷ Grant v. Torstar Paragraph 97

⁶⁸ Defamation Law Blog <http://defamationlawblog.wordpress.com/2010/01/25/grant-v-torstar-and-the-defence-of-responsible-communication-implications-for-bloggers-and-users-of-other-online-media/>

⁶⁹ Grant v. Torstar

⁷⁰ Mr. Yellow – Lawyer, Key Informant interview

York University v. Bell Canada Enterprises, in this regard, related to who might give notice to an anonymous defendant. Its greater relevance to consumers and ORM dealt with the right to privacy reasonably expected by an anonymous blogger, and the relevance of an ISP's Terms of Use, which was not the main point of the decision. See below.

In Mosher v. Coast Publishing, the test for revealing anonymous bloggers was considerably less strident. It was in stark contrast to Warman v. Wilkinson-Fournier, but was void of any detailed analysis akin to that in the Warman case.

The nature of the Internet may add to the possibility of defamation or to the credibility of statements. Anonymous blogging is credible enough to be defamatory and in some court decisions anonymity was believed to further add credibility to the veracity of the information. (Barrick Gold Corp. v. Lopehandia, 2004 12938 ONCA, Vaquero Energy c. Weir 2004 ABQB 68, AR 191)

The traditional view on libel has been that anonymous libel is not as damaging as libel with an identified author, because the credibility is typically tied to the credibility of the author.⁷¹ However two seven-year-old decisions have continued the view that *"the anonymity of the statements increased the risk that they would be believed."*⁷² Courts had discounted libel awards for cases of *"printed statements published in circumstances that undermine their credibility, one might have expected the same treatment with respect to Internet speech, which often tends towards the inaccurate, unreasoned, and sensationalistic."*⁷³

In Vaquero Energy v. Weir the decision stated, *"To take an example, if a defamatory article is published about someone in a newspaper with a well-known political bias, a reader can take that into account. Because an e-mail is anonymous, a reader is not readily able to discount comments that are made. There is a greater risk that the defamatory remarks are believed. That aggravates the defamation."*⁷⁴

*"Is there something about defamation on the Internet – 'cyber libel', as it is sometimes called – that distinguishes it, for purposes of damages, from defamation in another medium? My answer to that question is 'Yes'."*⁷⁵

The global nature of the Internet will not necessarily stop actions from outside Canada being litigated here if they are directed at Canadians (Black V. Breeden 2010 ONCA 547)

*"There is no unfairness to hold the defendants accountable for the accuracy of statements that were widely disseminated over the Internet and specifically directed to Canadian media. Some activities by their very nature involve a sufficient risk of harm to parties outside the forum in which they originate that any unfairness in assuming jurisdiction is mitigated or eliminated."*⁷⁶ Interestingly, support for this decision was found in Barrick v. Lopehandia, where a local defendant was found in lieu of there being no international defendant available to sue.

The Terms of Use and conditions stated on a website are relevant and contribute to whether a blogger or contributor can expect protection of their privacy/anonymity. (York University v. Bell Canada Enterprise, 2009 ONSC 46447)

In York University v. Bell Canada Enterprises the decision noted: *"Internet providers have service agreements with their customers, which the customers consent to by accessing and using the service. The service agreements limit the customers' expectations of privacy."*⁷⁷ The agreement of the ISP clearly indicated that such defamatory behaviour was against the terms of the agreement.

Accordingly, it was held: *"The Internet service customer(s) who published the communications could not have a reasonable expectation of privacy in relation to the use of the Internet for the purpose of publishing defamatory statements."*⁷⁸

⁷¹ Nied, Matthew Damage Awards in Internet Defamation Cases: Reassessing Assumptions About the Credibility of Online Speech Alberta Law Review October 2010

⁷² Barrick Gold Corp. v. Lopehandia, 2004 12938 (ON CA)

⁷³ Nied, Matthew

⁷⁴ Vaquero Energy c. Weir 2004 ABQB 68, AR 191, Paragraph 17

⁷⁵ Barrick Gold Corp. v. Lopehandia, 2004 12938 (ON CA), Paragraph 28

⁷⁶ Black V. Breeden, 2010 ONCA 547, Paragraph 65

⁷⁷ York University v. Bell Canada Enterprises, 2009 46447 (ON SC), Paragraph 32

⁷⁸ York University v. Bell Canada Enterprises, 2009 46447 (ON SC), Paragraph 39

Legal Decisions Outlined

Barrick Gold Corp. v. Lopehandia, 2004 12938 (ON CA)

The court found that comments made on a blog were defamatory, and while it could not be determined where the blog was written, Yahoo, which was registered in Ontario, could be restrained from publishing such defamatory comments. *“There is no way to determine from where his postings originate. They could as easily be initiated in an Internet café in downtown Toronto or anywhere else in the world, as in his offices in Vancouver. Given the manner in which the Internet works, it is not possible to know whether the posting of one of Mr. Lopehandia’s messages on one of the bulletin boards in question, or the receipt of that message by someone accessing the bulletin board, traveled by way of a server in Ontario to or from the message board. It may have, however. The highly transmissible nature of the tortious misconduct at issue here is a factor to be addressed in considering whether a permanent injunction should be granted. The courts are faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, they can throw up their collective hands in despair, taking the view that enforcement against such ephemeral transmissions around the world is ineffective, and concluding therefore that only the jurisdiction where the originator of the communication may happen to be found can enjoin the offending conduct. On the other hand, they can at least protect against the impugned conduct re-occurring in their own jurisdiction.”*⁷⁹

Vigna v. Levant, 2010 ONSC 6308

A blogger was ordered to pay for defamatory comments made on his blog. The court clearly held that the laws of defamation can and will apply to blogs. Interestingly, the court also held that the defence of “responsible communication on matters of public interest” didn’t apply to articles that were written by the defendant and subsequently posted on the defendant’s blog. It would appear that bloggers will have to be diligent in verifying information in order to avail themselves of that defence.

Canadian National Railway Co. v. Google Inc., 2010 ONSC 3121

In this action against Google, not as a search engine, but as a provider of a blog infrastructure (Blogspot), Google was ordered to remove a blog that contained defamatory comments from their own infrastructure. The court found that the defendants did not intend to justify their blog and that Google was prepared to take down the blog, but required a court order to do so (ostensibly to limit their own accountability for that action).

This is interesting more for the fact that Google seemed willing to pull the material down, but wanted an order to do it. It portends for their general view that the only material that Google will pull down is where there is a clear reason, preferably legal and binding (e.g., trademark violations, child pornography, dictatorial governments, and defamation).

Hunter Dickinson Inc. v. Butler 2010 BCSC 939

An injunction was granted, permanently, restraining Butler from publishing defamatory comments on his blog. He was restrained from “disseminating, posting on the Internet or publishing further defamatory statements.”

Grant v. Torstar, 2009 SCC 61

The Toronto Star was sued for defamation for comments made in a story they published. In looking to broaden “the defences available to public communicators, such as the press, in reporting matters of fact”⁸⁰ the court proposed an analytical framework based on two points:

1. “In the modern context, it is argued, the traditional rule has a chilling effect that unjustifiably limits reporting facts, and strikes a balance too heavily weighted in favour of protection of reputation. While the law should provide redress for baseless attacks on reputation, defamation lawsuits, real or threatened, should not be a weapon by which the wealthy and privileged stifle the information and debate essential to a free society.”⁸¹
2. “Many foreign common law jurisdictions have modified the law of defamation to give more protection to the press, in recognition of the fact that the traditional rules inappropriately chill free speech. While different countries have taken different approaches, the trend is clear. Recent

⁷⁹Barrick Gold Corp. v. Lopehandia, 2004 12938 (ON CA), Paragraph 75

⁸⁰ Grant v. Torstar, Paragraph 38

⁸¹ Grant v. Torstar, Paragraph 39

Canadian cases, most notably the decision of the Ontario Court of Appeal in Quan⁸², have affirmed this trend. The time has arrived, it is argued, for this Court to follow suit.”⁸³

The court stated *“The law of defamation should be modified to provide greater protection for communications on matters of public interest.” “A defence that would allow publishers to escape liability if they can establish that they acted responsibly in attempting to verify the information on a matter of public interest represents a reasonable and proportionate response to the need to protect reputation while sustaining the public exchange of information that is vital to modern Canadian society.”*⁸⁴

*“Canadian law recognizes that the right to free expression does not confer a license to ruin reputations.”*⁸⁵

Warman v. Wilkins-Fournier, 2010 ONSC 2826

The issue was a balance of the rights to free speech and anonymity and the right to protection from defamation. In a published summary of the case, a lawyer from McMillan LLP outlined the considerations that the judge put forth as what should be considered by courts when balancing these two rights. ⁸⁶

1. Whether the unknown alleged wrongdoer could have a reasonable expectation of anonymity in particular circumstances;
2. Whether the plaintiff has established a prima facie case against the unknown alleged wrongdoer and is acting in good faith;
3. Whether the plaintiff has taken reasonable steps to identify the anonymous party and has been unable to do so; and
4. Whether the public interests favouring disclosure outweigh the legitimate interests of freedom of expression and right to privacy of the persons sought to be identified if the disclosure is ordered.⁸⁷

A.B. V. Bragg Communications Inc. 2010 NSSC 215

An ISP received an application to disclose a user who had allegedly created a fake Facebook page that was defamatory to the plaintiff. The court required the disclosure of the name because the statements were found to be defamatory and there was no other way to identify the author of the statements. It also indicated that the anonymous user did not have a reasonable expectation of anonymity and that the public interest favoured disclosure.

York University v. Bell Canada Enterprises, 2009 46447 (ON SC)

The first paragraph of the decision, in granting an order to seek disclosure of anonymous third parties, is the most telling in relation to online reputation management and consumers and goes to the thinking of one particular court at this time.

*“The Internet is the most revolutionary communications tool since the printing press. It is extraordinarily accessible and powerful. It is available to anyone who has a computer and an account with a service provider. The user has the ability to roam the Internet with anonymity to read and write just about anything he or she chooses. As is always the case, however, technological advancement breeds new legal questions. Can the Internet be used with impunity to spray libelous electronic graffiti in cyberspace? How absolute is the user’s anonymity? Will the court compel the Internet provider to disclose a customer’s name? In this case, I answered “yes” to the last question and ordered two Internet service providers to disclose the names of their customer(s) to the plaintiff. This endorsement explains the reasons for my decision.”*⁸⁸

A key point of the York University v. Bell Canada Enterprises decision related to whether plaintiffs would be required to give notice to anonymous defendants

⁸² In *Cusson v. Quan*, 2007 ONCA 771 “which recognized a new defence of responsible journalism” as cited in *Grant v. Torstar* 2009 SCC 61

⁸³ *Grant v. Torstar*, Paragraph 40

⁸⁴ *Grant v. Torstar*, Paragraph 85

⁸⁵ *Grant v. Torstar*, Paragraph 58

⁸⁶ Clarke, Hilary and Yang, Tina, Student-at-Law, “Can you keep a secret?”, *McMillan Litigation Bulletin*, September 2010 by, http://www.mcmillan.ca/Files/110320_Keep_a_Secret_0910.pdf

⁸⁷ Clarke, Hilary and Yang, Tina

⁸⁸ *York University v. Bell Enterprises Canada*, Paragraph 1

However, in a point more relevant to consumers and ORM, Canada's online legal magazine *slaw.ca* noted that "*York University v. Bell Canada Enterprises reinforces the notion that the terms of service of an individual's ISP can be a key factor in determining whether an individual has a reasonable expectation of privacy in their Internet usage.*"⁸⁹

This case demonstrates the importance of having a clear and appropriate Terms of Use and Conditions noted on the website of an ISP or other host of third party information. For consumers, it means that careful attention to Terms of Use on ISP or other hosting sites may be a key leverage or negotiating point in having information removed.

Mosher v. Coast Publishing Ltd, 2010 NSSC 153

Two representatives of the Halifax Fire Department were seeking to identify anonymous individuals commenting on a story in a Coast Publication alleging racism on the part of the plaintiffs. The court allowed the plaintiffs to proceed to their next step of identification and suing for defamation, noting the following: "The court does not condone the conduct of anonymous Internet users who make defamatory comments and they like other people have to be accountable for their actions. So, this is an appropriate circumstance where your clients should have the right to seek the identity of those persons so you can take the appropriate action with respect to the alleged defamatory acts."⁹⁰ This case was, and remains, in clear contrast to *Warman v. Wilkinson-Fournier*.

In Summary

Individuals have a right to freedom of expression under the Charter of Rights. Individuals have a right to protection from defamation under statute. Blogs are credible media and clearly fall under media considered to have the potential to defame others. Publishing organizations have a new protection under the responsible communication defence, but they must meet clear terms around public interest and evidence that they "*acted responsibly in attempting to verify the information.*"⁹¹ Anonymous bloggers have protection, but not where a plaintiff can make a prima facie case of defamation, or where the Terms of Use of an ISP or hosting site clearly indicate a lack of expectation of privacy. And the global nature of the Internet won't necessarily stop the courts from finding a local defendant.

Social Forces

Google – Making Consumers Lazy, Stupid, Impatient?

Mr. Green – Security Expert

*"I think society has come to the point where we don't know anything about search engines anymore, all we know about is Google."*⁹²

When it comes to search, we believe the security expert is correct. Google commands up to 80% of the search market. There is some softness in this number due to the number of people who will use Google to navigate, rather than search, but even if those navigating represent a significant portion of the 80%, it is unlikely they would come close to closing the gap.

The ease with which an individual can use Google to find an answer that is good enough can cause them to stop with that answer. Otherwise they may have investigated further had they put more time into the effort. The view that Google is making people 'stupid,' has been challenged recently. As to whether it's making people impatient, we can only cite one executive at a professional services firm talking about searching Google. He said: "If I don't see it on the first couple of results on Google, then I don't look further." One has to wonder why he searched Google in the first place.

See Section Recent Relevant Research dealing with the PEW Research Center on "Does Google Make Us Stupid"⁹³ – a series of questions posed to self-subscribed individuals involved in the business, and ostensibly quite

⁸⁹Cameron, Alex, *York University-v-Bell Canada Enterprises Observations and Implications For Future Norwich- Jurisprudence*, *Slaw.ca* September, 15, 2009 www.slaw.ca/2009/09/15/york-university-v-bell-canada-enterprises-observations-and-implications-for-future-norwich-jurisprudence/

⁹⁰ *Mosher v. Coast Publishing Ltd., 2010 NSSC 153, Paragraph 8*

⁹¹ *Grant v. Torstar, Paragraph 85*

⁹² *Mr. Green – Security Expert, Key Informant interview*

knowledgeable on Internet and search. Loosely based on Nicholas Carr's *The Atlantic* article "Is Google Making us Stupid", Summer 2008⁹⁴ the PEW Research Center tested Carr's basic premise that the Internet shifts "the emphasis of our intelligence, away from what might be called meditative or contemplative intelligence and more toward what might be called a utilitarian intelligence. The price of the thing among lots of bits of information is a loss of depth in our thinking."⁹⁵

The responses were varied, but clearly informed, diverse and largely objective. Oddly enough, these are the three criteria (informed, diverse and objective) considered necessary for a reasonable or objective "Wisdom of the Crowds,"⁹⁶ a concept cited by Nicholas Carr. The essence of the responses were:

- While some skills may diminish, others will improve and refine.
- It's up to the users how tools such as Google are used, as well as the resulting time-savings.
- There is a view that it is making people intellectually lazy, particularly in the classroom.
- Just because a simple answer can be achieved through Google, does not mean that people ask only simple questions. Users can construct complex queries that will deliver more intelligent, appropriate and relevant results.
- Access to all this information does not necessarily make us able to filter it and judge it, as would perhaps peer-reviewed material.
- And to sum much of it up in one statement, the more you think about the material in your search query the better the result. If you choose to be lazy, stupid and/or impatient it will show in the results. If you choose to bring your attention, time and effort, as well as your intelligence, the results will show.

Google has become an icon and cultural phenomenon. It has changed the way we search and make decisions. It may reasonably be argued that Google is simple and that people only access the first three listings. However, while it may be true for some, it needn't be so. People misuse Google by choice. And that choice, like other areas of information misuse usually results from ignorance, carelessness or malice. See section on Misuse.

In some ways the Internet, and particularly Google, primarily changes the speed at which one searches and the volume of information searched. However, one other way it has changed is in the removal of the personal touch – not unlike the social distancing experienced in social media. One expert in the area of search and information explained how the nature of the personal introduction has changed: "And if you want to know if you can trust this person, you either went to a friend and do a 'friend of a friend' kind of thing where there used to be letters of introduction saying that the bearer of this letter is someone you could trust and they are good people. That token of trust exchanged person-to-person. Now our reputation is based on what comes up in a Google result – easily digestible glitzy type information is going to be weighted more heavily than stuff that is denser and harder to consume."⁹⁷

The risk of assuming that people do not go past the first page, or even the first three or four results in Google can lead to misinformed decision making. While many people may go through only the first few lines, many try more, and this has a significant effect on reputation management. Whether someone digs deeper depends on the richness and uniqueness of the results, which may normally diminish in usefulness at three pages. But if the content is interesting, the searcher will keep looking.

Joe Katzman disagrees that few people explore past the results on the first or subsequent pages of Google search results. "That doesn't track with my behaviour or the behaviour of a lot of people I know. They actually do flip through two or three pages, putting yourself down on the fourth page is probably so cost prohibitive, then it's not a viable service. [Referring to ORM organizations] They will sell you a security blanket. Does it actually keep you safe? Not unless you're very good with a towel."⁹⁸

⁹³ Quitney, Janna Rainie, Lee. Elon University, Does Google Make Us Stupid?, *Pew Internet & American Life Project*, February, 19, 2010 <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1499/google-does-it-make-us-stupid-experts-stakeholders-mostly-say-no>

⁹⁴ Carr, Nicholas. "Is Google Making us Stupid", *The Atlantic Monthly*, July, 2008, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/6868/>

⁹⁵ Quitney, Janna Rainie, Lee, Elon University, Does Google Make Us Stupid?,

⁹⁶ Surowiecki, James. *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies, and Nations*. New York: Doubleday, 2004.

⁹⁷ Mr. Orange – Search/Information Executive, Key Informant interview

⁹⁸ Joe Katzman, Key Informant interview

Mr. Yellow – Lawyer

*"Googling people to find out about them is an extension of the old way of asking around. I think the scope does matter, in the sense that a business that goes and asks two or three people is quite different than querying 1 billion people on the Internet."*⁹⁹

Mr. Orange – Search/Information Executive

*"What's changed is you can now get masses of information that is not just unfiltered, but is largely unverified. When you expand beyond traditional sources you need to know what you are doing, or just realize you are taking a risk."*¹⁰⁰

Mr. Blue – Consumer with an Internet Problem

"It is put up there with not enough elaboration on what the issues were and what the case was – to elaborate on it further." This remark is from an individual currently having a serious reputation problem on the Internet. Much of the information is true he says, but it lacks context. And it refers to the past. The context of surrounding circumstances is often lost in the Internet in search results, and the currency of the information may not indicate what is happening now. As one potential client said to him after they had Googled him, *"You're obviously innocent until proven guilty, but we would rather not work with you at this point."*¹⁰¹ This is a clear example of 'no sense of a need to invest in knowing the truth'.

Two experts suggest an absolutely clean reputation may not create a good reputation, because it may be considered implausible. The ability to demonstrate problem solving and redress of complaints can be valued features of a good reputation. But, does the average Google user bring this level of sophistication, contextualization and effort to their searches?

Art Pierce – Retired HR Executive, University Lecturer

*"I was never happy until I found a negative reference, however good the person was. We're only human."*¹⁰²

The president of Homestars indicates that those contractors who own up to past issues and demonstrate what they are doing now can be taking a positive step. *"We have companies that have bad reviews and they are starting in a hole. And they comment on the review – 'I know we've been poor, but we're working back from a negative situation.' We spend a lot of time convincing companies about bad responses. My wife won't hire a company that doesn't have at least one bad response."*¹⁰³

Are people developing the skills to craft a search query and assess search results? It is not that a person's past is different today than before the Internet, it is just that we now know about it. Are people judging today's actions based on standards of several years ago? Are people unwilling to risk judgment in making an HR decision, for example, and instead just pick the cleaner candidate, rather than the one who might more appropriately fit the position? The "cleaner" candidate enjoys the appearance of being risk free, but might not have other redeeming qualities or simply offer the risk of the unknown.

Nick Bontis, author of *"Information Bombardment: Rising Above the Digital Onslaught,"* thinks that distraction of the known will become less prevalent. *"The sophistication level with which we validate or invalidate the criticism will rise as well. I see this in my students and I see this in my children. They are smarter now to know what the source of information is, where it came from, who it's attributed to, and whether there is evidence to justify. I think the kids in school today are way better at it now than we ever were. I only learned about that late into my 20s and early 30s, when I was doing my PhD. And now kids 10, 11, 12 years old doing projects for school are being taught this idea that if you're going to go to Wikipedia, make sure that you write the citation down and make sure it's a legitimate citation and not one of these rants. That, I think, is going to get better. That is the sophistication of how we can judge the attribution of the source."*

*"People will also get smarter knowing that somebody cuts somebody up or criticizes them or leaves a comment, and that if it's anonymous it will become completely discounted. If it's directly offered with my name or my userid or my IP address or login, I think it's going to carry more weight."*¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Mr. Yellow – Lawyer, Key Informant interview

¹⁰⁰ Mr. Orange – Search/Information Executive, Key Informant interview

¹⁰¹ Mr. Blue – Consumer with an Internet Problem, Key Informant interview

¹⁰² Art Pierce, Key Informant interview

¹⁰³ Brian Sharwood, Key Informant interview

¹⁰⁴ Nick Bontis, Key Informant interview

Studies on Internet users and how they determine credibility of web sites

How individuals search the Internet, assess and analyze the results and determine credibility of websites is important to online reputation. Following are research studies that found Internet users do not analyze search results and websites well, they don't do as good a job at assessing credibility as they think they do, that anonymity does not affect an individual's view of a blogger, but sloppy websites and poorly worded articles do cause a negative view of a writer.

*Understanding How Internet Users Make Sense of Credibility: A Review of the State of Our Knowledge and Recommendations for Theory, Policy, and Practice*¹⁰⁵

In summarizing the research to date Ms. Metzger noted: *"The Internet has made the need to critically evaluate information more important than ever before while, at the same time, it has shifted the burden of skills credibility assessment and quality control off of professional gatekeepers and onto individual information seekers. Developing the skills to evaluate Web-based information, then, is crucial for Internet users. That said, there is evidence that many people are unprepared for this responsibility, and may have trouble determining how and when to assess the credibility of online information."*¹⁰⁶

*Overall, respondents in every study reported performing each of the nine evaluation behaviors¹⁰⁷ only "rarely" to "occasionally." Users evaluated Web sites' currency, comprehensiveness, and objectivity most often (although still only occasionally), whereas checking the author's identity, qualifications, and contact information were evaluated least often by the respondents across samples. Looking for other sources or recommendations, and considering the goals of the author of the information fell in the middle. In general, Internet users scored highest on the actions that are easiest to perform and that require their opinion (e.g., considering whether a site's information is current and complete) and lowest on the recommendations that are more time consuming and that require effort to perform (e.g., verifying the qualifications or credentials of the author), even if the effort is fairly minimal (i.e., checking to see if contact information is provided). These data are interesting in many ways, but the most worrisome finding is that the strategy least practiced (i.e., verifying the author's qualifications) is perhaps the most important for establishing credibility.*¹⁰⁸

How Do People Evaluate a Web Site's Credibility? Results from a Large Study B.J. Fogg, Ph.D., Cathy Soohoo, David Danielson, Leslie Marable, Julianne Stanford and Ellen R. Tauber¹⁰⁹

*This study "found that when people assessed a real Web site's credibility they did not use rigorous criteria... when evaluating credibility (e.g., they almost never referred to a site's privacy policy.) We found a mismatch, as in other areas of life, between what people say is important and what they actually do."*¹¹⁰

*The Impact of Anonymity on Weblog Credibility*¹¹¹

This research encompassed two studies.

*"The first study presented respondents with a blog entry in one of three conditions: the blogger was fully identifiable with the photograph, or only the age and sex of the blogger were revealed, and where only an alias was given for the blogger. Multi-item constructs were used to measure the credibility of the blog and the blogger. No differences were found."*¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ Metzger Miriam J. *Understanding How Internet Users Make Sense of Credibility: A Review of the State of Our Knowledge and Recommendations for Theory, Policy, and Practice*, Paper prepared for the Internet Credibility and the User Symposium, sponsored by the American Library Association's Office for Information Technology Policy, Seattle, WA, April 11-13, 2005

¹⁰⁶ Metzger Miriam J.

¹⁰⁷ Specifically, they were asked how often they check to see if the information is up-to-date (currency), consider whether the views represented on a site are facts or opinions (objectivity), consider the author's goals/objectives for posting the information (objectivity), check to see that the information is complete and comprehensive (coverage), seek out other sources to validate the information on a site (accuracy), check to see who the author of the web site is (authority), verify the author's qualifications or credentials (authority), check to see whether the contact information for the author or organization is provided on the site (authority), and look for an official "stamp of approval" or a recommendation from someone they know (authority).

¹⁰⁸ Metzger Miriam J p. 5

¹⁰⁹ Fogg, B.J., et al. *How Do People Evaluate a Web Site's Credibility? Results from a Large Study*

¹¹⁰ Fogg, B.J., et al.

¹¹¹ Chesney, Thomas. Su, Daniel K. S. *The Impact of anonymity on Weblog Credibility*, , 2009, International Centre for Behavioural Business Research, Nottingham University, Business School

¹¹² Chesney, Thomas. Su, Daniel K. S.

The second study “examined whether this was due to the presentation of the blog entry. Results showed the well presented blog’s writer was perceived as being more credible than the writer of the badly presented blog, but there was no difference in the credibility of the blog itself.”¹¹³

The resulting learning is that anonymity does not have a significant effect on a reader’s view on credibility, but neat presentation and good Grade Three “penmanship” is still important.

So does Google make us lazy, stupid and impatient? No. It allows us to be – but at our peril. It allows a reasonable person to exercise judgment. It is their decision to exercise it. Google provides tools for a reasonable person to find context and assess it. People may choose not to do that. However, these tools and results may not be immediately apparent. Google can be far more efficient at delivering red herrings and misinformation, requiring a user to invest yet more time evaluating content, thus viewing more online advertising, which may be good for Google but not the consumer. What if Google were to always start with highly qualified source material? Typically Google searches rank “free” source material ahead of content that might cost a user money, often because it’s of higher quality and less popular because of the cost.

Google Results – Popular or Truthful?

Google does not release their formula for calculating search results. It is held as secretly as the Coca-Cola and KFC formulas. They give some indicators and others are obvious. However, not knowing the way in which the results are calculated does not help the average user with the context for information found. And it has been made clear during this research that the primary reason for misuse of a consumer’s information is based on the context of that information – regardless of whether the misuse is intentional.

The concern that some critics of Google voice, that Google always has the answer results not because users are skilled with their search queries but because they accept the result, often without question. In other words, it’s not that Google makes people stupid by making it easy to get the right answer. It is that people may not make an adequate effort to seek the right answer. Google makes it very clear that “Good enough” is not good enough. Do people have the skills to assess the quality, relevance and the currency of their answers? That remains unanswered. However, give that to a statistician and he or she might conclude: most of the time ‘no.’ Human reason is highly fallible.

Mr. Ezra Silvertown – President, 9th sphere

“We have seen through our research that popularity doesn’t necessarily mean accuracy. I think that is one of the challenges that Google and their algorithm, and the other search engines are running into, is that they are based on popularity, not necessarily based on factuality. They are trying to make it true as much as possible, using equations, using mathematical systems. That’s a feat that they continue to improve on for sure.”¹¹⁴

“I may follow my competitor, on Twitter, but it doesn’t mean I am a supporter of them. It just means that I want to monitor them. That is one thing that can’t really be separated from the whole concept of popularity factor.”

“Look at Charlie Sheen. One would argue that he is popular. But the number of people that would stand by him for what he believes in may be smaller.”¹¹⁵

Google as Key Step in Everyday Processes

Possibly Google’s strongest effect today is its bearing on so many standard ‘transactions’ and processes for consumers and individuals. In so many transactions, one of the first steps is to Google the other person.

PEW Research Center¹¹⁶ states that reputation monitoring through search engines continues to increase, and that more than 50% of Internet users search online for information about themselves. Not surprisingly, they also search online for friends or current or ex-acquaintances.

Looking for employment, the prospective recruit Googles the company, and the HR manager Googles prospective recruits. Among U.S. recruiters, 70 percent have rejected candidates based on their online reputation – and yet only

¹¹³ Chesney, Thomas. Su, Daniel K. S.

¹¹⁴ Ezra Silvertown, Key Informant interview

¹¹⁵ Ezra Silvertown, Key Informant interview

¹¹⁶ Madden, Mary, Smith, Aaron. Reputation Management and Social Media. *Pew Internet & American Life Project*, May 26, 2010
<http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Reputation-Management.aspx>

7 percent of Americans believe that their online reputation can affect their job search, according to a 2010 study by Microsoft and Cross-Tab Market Research.¹¹⁷

A question that arises from these efforts to research or vet candidates online is the underlying ethics of it. Clearly the hiring managers of the “older generation” are examining the ostensibly, and expectedly, private discussions and postings in social networks of the “younger generation.” This was a clear finding in the research conducted by Avner Levin et al, *The Next Digital Divide: Online Social Network Privacy*, Ted Rogers School of Management, Ryerson University, Privacy and Cyber Crime Institute.¹¹⁸ A second finding of the report was that “Organizations do not have policies, practices or guidelines in place that explicitly govern the use of online social networks by their employees or by the organizations themselves for marketing and for human resources purposes.”¹¹⁹

Edward J. Appel may have put it best in his recent book, *Internet Searches for Vetting, Investigations, and Open-source Intelligence*:

*“In the absence of policies or procedures (or adherence to them), a person in authority may selectively conduct Internet searches on some, but not all, individuals of interest. Search methods may vary. Analysis of search results may be disciplined and effective, or not. Depending on the searcher, the search itself and analysis of the results may be incomplete, ineffective, and inaccurate. Information gleaned may be correct or incorrect. The subject of the search may be aware of it, or not. Casual searching can therefore raise issues of fairness, competence, proper handling and analysis of data, secure storage, privacy protection, redress, and perhaps other questions.”*¹²⁰

Looking to change dentists, get someone in to renovate your house, check out a new school, or just see how your kids’ current teachers are doing – Google them.

Looking to date somebody, or perhaps your kids are looking to date somebody – Google them.

Looking to meet with someone for any reason, a quick search on Google for them can give the individual important information – to help make them feel more comfortable, or perhaps to give them an advantage if negotiation is involved. The attitude is that “it wouldn’t hurt,” but too often this does not take into account the possibility that the results may be wrong, out of context, or perhaps relate to the wrong person.

And perhaps, even more importantly, the way in which Google results are handled is relevant. How willing are people to now accept the teacher with the one problem identified on ratemyteacher.com even though it may not be true? How about the renovator, who had a couple of vocal, annoyed clients, and perhaps their satisfied clients were less vocal about their satisfaction?

Decisions are being made around Google results on factors that are very important to consumers. Do the users of that information have what is necessary to use the information in the appropriate context?

The Impact and Social Pressure of Facebook

One has only to review the transcripts of the Key Informant interviews and review the Consumers Council of Canada Public Interest Network questionnaire results to understand the magnitude and nature of Facebook as a social force. Facebook has become the place to be, even if one does not want to be there. People feel compelled to be there to be part of the social environment, to belong. It’s an irresistible, in some cases compulsive, social phenomenon.

PIN Survey Response

“About once a month I check my Facebook profile to see that I’m only giving access to friends and nothing more.”

Ms. Brown, Facebook Trainer for Seniors

“Their kids give them a laptop at Christmas and said, ‘If you want to know what I’m doing get a Facebook account because I post to it all the time.’ It seems that there are a lot of kids who are not setting up e-mail accounts; they are

¹¹⁷ *Online Reputation in a Connected World*, Microsoft - Cross-Tab for Data Privacy Day, 2010

http://www.marketingtecnologico.com/ad2006/adminsc1/app/marketingtecnologico/uploads/Estudos/dpd_online%20reputation%20research_overview.pdf

¹¹⁸ Avner Levin et al

¹¹⁹ Avner Levin et al

¹²⁰ Appel, Edward J. p.12

just setting up Facebook accounts. They have their private messaging and everything they need and they don't want to go different places. The parents are now having to rely upon going to Facebook to find out what the kids are doing."¹²¹

Nick Bontis – McMaster University

"You are trying to develop your reputation on Facebook and Twitter and any other means that you can."¹²²

Joe Katzman – Defense Industry Daily

"You and I both know that a lot of recruiters and human resources people are now going through Facebook and going to social media sites. If they find you are tagged, like tagging in complex systems, as a troublemaker, difficult or mendacious, how does that silently affect your job prospects for the rest of your life, as human resources people go trolling through this stuff, and however nice your references are, then you are probably too much trouble for the organization, and we will find somebody who won't make waves. And what if this is attached to you undeservedly?"¹²³

Jane Dysart – Dysart & Jones

"I do have friends who intentionally spell their name wrong when they set up their Facebook."¹²⁴

Anonymous

"My wife thinks I don't like her because I don't have pictures of her up on Facebook."¹²⁵

Tony Wilson – Author, "Manage Your Online Reputation"

"Facebook exists not to be private. The whole point of it is to be public. Zuckerberg doesn't believe in privacy. He said that to Canada's Privacy Commissioner."¹²⁶

Ms. Brown, Facebook Trainer for Seniors

"There could actually be a course for seniors called 'my child gave me a laptop because they can't be bothered calling and they want me on Facebook.' I could make my fortune running a course like that."¹²⁷

Art Pierce – Retired HR Executive, University Lecturer

"It's like Valentine's Day used to be when you were in grade 5. Who got the most valentines after they were all added up?"¹²⁸

"I think there's also an element of falling in behind the leader of the pack, of people who are on Facebook and go back and forth with each other. It's a greater social network in which there is a pecking order."

"Is there a knee-jerk acceptance of the authority of the medium in which it comes on the part of the people who are abused by it. Back to Marshall McLuhan's maxim 'the medium is the message'."

"Equating Facebook to an old statement somebody said after a harrowing experience: "It was real, just like in the movies."

"Information is only valuable if it is credible. How credible is information that they put on Facebook?"

"People expose more about themselves to belong."¹²⁹

And Facebook is not alone in this venture. LinkedIn has just reached 100-million members, which arguably pales in comparison to the 600 million or so on Facebook, but they have a more limited audience. People not on LinkedIn will start to be left out if they have less than 150 connections or do not belong to enough groups. The social pressures are immense. And once people are on these networks the next step is pressure to participate and that is when, particularly in Facebook, the mistakes are made or the overexposures happen.

¹²¹ Ms. Brown – Facebook Trainer for Seniors, Key Informant interview

¹²² Nick Bontis, Key Informant interview

¹²³ Joe Katzman, Key Informant interview

¹²⁴ Jane Dysart, Key Informant interview

¹²⁵ Anonymous

¹²⁶ Tony Wilson, Key Informant interview

¹²⁷ Ms. Brown – Facebook Trainer for Seniors, Key Informant interview

¹²⁸ Art Pierce, Key Informant interview

¹²⁹ Art Pierce, Key Informant interview

Awareness

Is the average consumer aware of their online reputation? Are they aware of its implications, and potential for misuse? Have they checked out their name on a search engine to see what is returned?

The continuing, rapid and dramatic change in the demographics of Internet users is a clear factor in the increasing importance of online reputation for consumers. It raises the question as to whether the newer, older users of social networking are aware of the risks.

There is a view among many that the youth of today don't realize the implications of their drunken Facebook picture, other than to increase their credibility among their friends. That's the case, at least, in the short term.

"I think people are coming to the realization that once information has been given away it cannot be retrieved. Youth don't seem to care, or are not aware of the risks they are taking," said one security expert, adding: *"I suspect the less well-educated are less cognizant of the risks that they are taking by putting information out there."*¹³⁰

Ms. Brown – Facebook Trainer for Seniors

Regarding kids on Facebook: *"I think because they are naïve enough to believe anything that somebody other than their parents have told them."*

A contractor with a reputation problem on the Internet was not aware of his online reputation until he lost a contract for which he had already received a down payment. *"I wasn't aware that I had this information on the Internet. I just went around doing my business. I had a couple of potential clients who then sent me a note back to say, 'By the way, are you aware that you have some information on the Internet. You're obviously innocent until proven guilty, but we would rather not work with you at this point.'"*¹³¹

Prevailing opinion among those in the business was that most people do not Google their names, or are not aware of their online reputation.

Chris Martin – Founder, Reputation Hawk

*"My best guess it's a smaller segment of the overall population. I think in 10 years it may be entirely different. Who knows, maybe in two or three years it'll be entirely different. That's just my opinion on it."*¹³²

Jeff Quipp – CEO Search Engine People

*I think a lot of people are starting to Google their own names. But the older generation, I don't think so. The younger generation are. The mid-levels, it depends on their degree of education."*¹³³

Mr. Purple – Data Protection, Privacy Executive

*"You don't see any real action taking place until you get a problem that is very visible. Unfortunately you need an incident to occur before you can get traction on some of these issues. The Canadians have not really had an issue, thus far. Because we haven't had those issues from a business point of view that affects individuals, people are a little less concerned about their privacy. And we don't have the big lawsuits up here so people are less concerned about that here. Canadians are also a lot less paranoid. They are complacent. They don't think that their personal information is going to in a negative way affect them. We are a complacent bunch of people, versus the Americans...."*¹³⁴

Tony Wilson

*"A friend of mine who glibly says, 'People are stupid, and you can't fix stupid.' I would like to think that people coming out of the womb as babies are stupid, but they get trained and educated to be not so stupid. And I think with constant reminders and constant education the people that ought not to make these sorts of mistakes will not make these sorts of mistakes. I think that the key here is education on the consequences of being stupid. And thinking before you post."*¹³⁵

There are varying degrees of awareness of one's online reputation. The studies and surveys have been assessing different groups, so any definitive answer would be difficult to state, other than there is both significant awareness

¹³⁰ Mr. Green – Security Expert, Key Informant interview

¹³¹ Mr. Blue – Consumer with an Internet Problem, Key Informant interview

¹³² Chris Martin, Key Informant interview

¹³³ Jeff Quipp, Key Informant interview

¹³⁴ Mr. Purple -Data Protection, Privacy Executive, Key Informant Interview

¹³⁵ Tony Wilson, Key Informant interview

and significant unawareness of individuals' online reputation. The primary point is that this is not going away. Enough people see it as an issue, especially when factoring in privacy, that one's reputation online can affect one's life in a meaningful way.

Those more involved in the Internet are more inclined to deal with such issues. However, it is uncertain whether they are generally successful in their efforts to ensure their online reputation is free from blemish.

Awareness, in a small way, can be seen through the number of people who read Terms of Use, and Contribution Guidelines. Homestars.com President Brian Sharwood allowed us a peek into the Google Analytics for his service's Terms of Use and Contribution Guideline visits. The visits were negligible, although "five times as many people read the contribution guidelines as read the terms of use. Many of those will be companies reading the terms of use to see whether they can catch us and say 'Hey those people can't say that'."¹³⁶

*Research Directing Addressing Awareness*¹³⁷

*ENISA Position Paper on Security and Privacy in Web 2.0 2008*¹³⁸

The European Network and Information Security Agency (ENISA) is the European Union's "response to these cyber security issues of the European Union. A survey was conducted of 1,500 users from 3 European Countries to collect information on attitudes to Web2.0 security issues."¹³⁹

Concerns around online reputational issues were lower than those around privacy, marketing using personal data, and identity theft.

The reputational issues were "Embarrassing personal data being seen by strangers," "Someone using my blog entries and opinions against me," and "Discrimination by someone judging me wrongly from my online profiles" were concerns, but only the 6th, 7th and 8th in a list of eight concerns.¹⁴⁰

The top three concerns were theft or misuse of personal data by the service provider, information being used for marketing purposes, and identity theft.¹⁴¹

*PEW Research Center – Reputation Management and Social Media, May 2010*¹⁴²

PEW conducts regular studies into the effects of the Internet. A key survey in May 2010, was Reputation Management and Social Media, a tracking survey of 2,253 American adults on use of the Internet. The tracking was conducted in the fall of 2009.

- Online reputation monitoring via search engines has increased to 57% from 47% in 2006.
- 44% of online adults have searched for information about someone whose services or advice they seek in a professional capacity.
- 8% of online users have asked someone to remove information about them on line.
- An increasing number of people are removing comments from their social media sites and remove their names from photos on other sites.
- 12% of employed people say they need to market themselves online as part of their job.
- 4% of adults online have had bad experiences because inaccurate or embarrassing information was posted about them. This number remains unchanged from 2006.¹⁴³

TD Insurance/Angus Reid Strategies Survey – Awareness of libel, October 2009

TD Insurance and Angus Reid Strategies conducted a survey, the results of which demonstrated a remarkable lack of awareness regarding libelous liability for comments posted online. 1,001 adults were polled. They found

¹³⁶ Brian Sharwood, Key Informant interview

¹³⁷ Some of this material on awareness research is included in more detail later in this report in the section on Recent Relevant Research

¹³⁸ Hogben, Giles Editor *Enisa Position Paper on Security and Privacy in Web 2.0* <http://www.enisa.europa.eu/act/it/oar/web2sec/report>

¹³⁹ Hogben, Giles

¹⁴⁰ Hogben, Giles

¹⁴¹ Hogben, Giles

¹⁴² Madden, Mary, Smith, Aaron

¹⁴³ Madden, Mary, Smith, Aaron

regarding awareness that 27% of respondents “believe they aren’t legally accountable for their online comments.”¹⁴⁴

*Yahoo Survey on Privacy – June 2010*¹⁴⁵

A survey of 2,000 U.S. Internet users conducted to gain insight into consumers’ behaviours and perceptions around online safety found that 50% of people do not know that information online will remain forever.¹⁴⁶

*Ted Rogers School of Management – Privacy and Cyber Crime Institute 2008*¹⁴⁷

Survey of 2,000 young Canadians involved in online socializing included several findings, but the most relevant is that the view of privacy by the primarily younger generation using online social networks is different than that of the largely older generation that uses information gleaned in these sites freely without much in the way of policies or procedures or guidelines. The younger involved group has a view that there is “privacy within the network” even though their privacy is easily and often breached by the older generation, particularly in marketing or HR.

¹⁴⁴ TD Bank Group Press Release, October 6, 2009 <http://www.newswire.ca/en/releases/archive/October2009/06/c4177.html>

¹⁴⁵ Yahoo Yodel Anecdotal, Corporate Blog, June 10, 2010 <http://ycorpblog.com/2010/06/10/internet-safety/>

¹⁴⁶ Yahoo Yodel Anecdotal, Corporate Blog, June 10, 2010

¹⁴⁷ Levin, Avner et al.

Sources & Scenarios

Misuse

Misuse of information is a broad term – not surprisingly, given the amount of personal information available on the Internet. Some points to note in defining misuse:

- Virtually any type of information on the Internet can be misused in a way that can affect an individual's online reputation.
- Information can be misused by being posted when it shouldn't
- Information can be misused by being used when it shouldn't, or in a way that it shouldn't.
- Information can be misused when put up by the individual themselves, or by someone else.
- It can be misused through carelessness, ignorance or malice.

The following chart outlines a framework of six ways in which information can be misused and some basic remedies for each. It can be carelessly, ignorantly or maliciously posted to the Internet. It can be carelessly, ignorantly or maliciously downloaded from the Internet. A key point in this, particularly for consumers, is that misuse is not generally malicious, although the most egregious cases tend to have a degree of malice.

Personal Information Misuse

Category	Poster	Remedies	Downloader	Remedies
Ignorant, unknowing, unaware, uninformed, lack of knowledge, oblivious	Many individuals posting information to the Internet, particularly in a social network like Facebook, are unaware that information posted can remain forever, and can be accessed by people outside the network.	Education Better Moderation of Discussion Forums Website/smart phone application created by government agency or consumer protection group to assist individuals in determining what has been made available about them online	Despite the widespread use of Google, many are not aware of the issues of context.	Education around better, more intelligent searching
Careless, thoughtless, unmindful, unthinking, unconcerned, lazy, impatient	This is probably the largest category generating inappropriate or potentially misused information. See something, take a picture, and upload it. Forget about it. Until somebody sees it. Without the context.	Education Better Moderation of Discussion Forums Designated online driver	Google makes it easy. Using Google gives people 80% of the benefit with 20% of the effort.	HR policies of organizations to assist in the assessment of recruits through Google. This allows it being the only avenue of research. Require documentation of others. Require investigation of anything negative found on Google. Require substantiation. Encourage Google not to change the results, but to comment on context on their home page.
Malicious, vengeful, hateful, spiteful, mischievous	Fake Facebook pages, entering somebody else's Facebook site with their password and changing it dramatically	Education Law enforcement Removal of cloak of anonymity where an individual cannot reasonably hide behind it.	People looking for negative information to use will find it.	Enforcement Guidance to ISPs, Discussion Board administrators, blog administrators re rights and responsibilities

The Key Informants interviewed came from a variety of businesses, disciplines and backgrounds, but they all had in common an understanding of how information may be used, and can be abused. The key theme coming from discussions with key informants was that, as Ezra Silverton put it misuse is *“anything out of context.”*¹⁴⁸

Professor Bontis summarizes succinctly in a history lesson on the use of information, and its abuse and misuse, from the time of its misuse from scarcity and accessibility to those of wealth and education, to now where abundance allows for mischaracterization of information rather than withholding:

“The first thing I can really think of is one of the precursor assumptions that allowed you to abuse information for personal gain. The first thing that comes to mind is literacy. If you go back historically, literacy was not a given. We assume it's a given now in the developed world.

“When it came to earning power as a politician or aristocrat a lot of that had to do with the fact that you counted on everybody else to be ignorant and they could not read. So they were getting their information from secondhand gossip and rumour – the socialization process around the campfire. With regards to documents and Constitution very few people especially the commoners, could make heads nor tails of what was going on regarding the taxes. This became even more evident in ancient Rome. As soon as you left the gates of the city, nobody had a clue. The only way you could defend yourself was through brawn. You were one of two things. You were strong because you had an army or you had some unbelievable piece of real estate that made you rich.

“Fast-forward to medieval times, to 1400 1500 and you have the Gutenberg press. The whole point of the press was this is the first time we have codification of information in true scalable format. Who takes advantage of this first? Interestingly enough, it's the monks. Instead of just preaching to 20 or 30 or 40 people in the church, and that was the limit of the scalability of your congressional audience, now you have the opportunity to publish all these books which is what they did and started forwarding them around the world and in doing so you also increase literacy rates.

*“So go forward 500 years from the Gutenberg press and now we find ourselves in the Internet age, where we have an absolute super penetration of codification mechanisms and virtual 100% literacy rates. Here we have now the abuse of information. For the first 2,500 years of civilization, information and the reputation built from it and the rules built from it was abused because of selectivity. Because it was a very small sample of people who had access to scrolls or access to the ancient library in Alexandria. Now, you have the opposite problem. Where you have information in complete abundance and codification mechanisms in complete abundance. People are not abusing it because of scarcity, people are abusing because of the ease with which anyone can codify it. The ease with which anybody can publish on the web and develop a reputation either for themselves or a fictional person that is not them. Accompanying that of course is being able to sabotage somebody else's reputation because you now have instantaneous access to being able to publish something that you are going to say about somebody else.”*¹⁴⁹

Dr. Pink – Information and Knowledge Expert

*“The key characteristic of misuse is deliberately out of context. I think you have to look at intent. Misuse of information tends to be largely contextual. It tends to deal with motives. To deal a lot with what people want to gain from it or what they want to achieve from it. Now it can be misused anonymously. It can be misused by people you don't know. It can be misused by people you do know.”*¹⁵⁰

“You can misuse information without intent, as it were, accidentally. It could be true insofar as the statement itself is a direct quote, but it's just a direct quote that was taken out of context.

“It can be a situation where people were given this information in confidence and then decided to use it otherwise. The Internet is a huge social bargain at the moment. And I think it will probably stay a social bargain given the disparate nature of it. As a result of being this sort of social bargain you have a situation where you depend extensively on everybody acting in a certain way with certain intentions and acting with certain decorum. That may have been possible in the late 1980s. It's definitely not the case today.

“When you have unmediated information you are going to get this kind of situation. Because you can frame the issue the way you choose to frame it. Framing the issue, and framing it for your audience in a way that they choose to see the audience is very important and very critical. It's an important part of the Internet, in understanding the Internet as a medium. You are disseminating a point of view, not truth or justice or anything else. You can make the argument

¹⁴⁸ Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

¹⁴⁹ Nick Bontis, Key Informant interview

¹⁵⁰ Dr. Pink – Information and Knowledge Expert, Key Informant interview

that you have a higher truth or a higher ideal – rather lofty ambitions – but they still turn out to frame the discussion in the way that you want it framed.”¹⁵¹

Jane Dysart – Dysart & Jones

“If they’re looking to find something to misuse they will find it.”¹⁵²

“I would think that the fast tweets are the easiest to make a boo-boo and then correct and be taken out of context. Usually if you are doing a blog post your thinking about it and adding some words in context around it. ... the Facebook updates or tweets, ... those things that you are doing quickly, are more likely to be taken out of context.”¹⁵³

Art Pierce – Retired HR Executive, University Lecturer

“The important thing is context. What do they need to know and more importantly what do they need to know in this context. People are exposing information with no concept of the context in which people need to know.”¹⁵⁴

Mr. Yellow, Toronto Lawyer

“It varies. Sometimes it’s wrong. Sometimes the characterization is heavy-handed. There is a nugget of truth to what is said, but completely blown out of proportion. But there’s not really anything you can do about that from a legal point of view. But you can still try and get it pushed further down the list.”¹⁵⁵

Mr. Green, Security Expert

“Supporting prejudgments? Absolutely.”¹⁵⁶

The combination of fast and widely available network connections, and mobile devices with rich capabilities, video or picture capture combined with social media is creating many more opportunities for there to be much more rich information captured.

Who’s Making This Information Available?

What sites and organizations make available inappropriate information, or the information that is susceptible to misuse?

There are essentially two types of sites that purvey such information, one quite innocently, the other in many cases knowingly and complicity.

The first are the search engines. Primarily Google and Bing.¹⁵⁷ Search engines see themselves as independent, and make available information based on the user’s search queries and the search engine’s formula, which is constantly under refinement. They take no responsibility for the results, and, aside from such extreme cases as child pornography and trademark infringement; they are loath to restrict their search results. There are a multitude of search engines other than Google and Bing. Some are aggregators, which collect results from more than one search engine at a time. Some are specialty search engines in that they search certain types of information (e.g., images, documents etc.). Some search deeper into the Internet. Some search specific sources.

The second is “every other site on the Internet,” broken down into two categories – one, social media and, two, the more traditional websites. The more relevant for this research is the social media and all the processes, information, technologies and sites that it entails. Social media is often considered to be synonymous with Web 2.0, which can be most simply defined as User Generated Content (UGC).

These sites include:

1. Social networks: primarily Facebook
2. People aggregators
 - www.pipl.com
 - www.spokeo.com

¹⁵¹ Dr. Pink – Information and Knowledge Expert, Key Informant interview

¹⁵² Jane Dysart, Key Informant interview

¹⁵³ Jane Dysart, Key Informant interview

¹⁵⁴ Art Pierce, Key Informant interview

¹⁵⁵ Mr. Purple – Data Protection, Privacy Executive

¹⁵⁶ Mr. Green – Security Expert, Key Informant interview

¹⁵⁷ Yahoo, for all intents and purposes, is now from a search perspective the same as Bing. It is powered by Microsoft’s Bing. The search results for the same query if not identical, are virtually so.

- www.linkedin.com
 - www.123people.com
 - www.mylife.com
 - www.pandia.com
 - www.zoominfo.com
3. Microblogs: Twitter and Tumblr
 4. Blogs
 5. Review sites: ratemyteacher.com, etc.
 6. Discussion forums
 7. Video sites: primarily YouTube and Vimeo
 8. Photo sites
 9. News and traditional media sites
 10. Selling sites, Craigslist and Kijiji
 11. Consumer and complaint websites – although these are typically oriented towards businesses, they can also be used against individuals owning small businesses and others clearly identifiable with an organization

What Information is Made Available?

The information that drives the consumer to want to repair their reputation by removing or concealing that information can be anything. It is the fear of damage to an online reputation, and misuse of such information doesn't have to be logical. People can be irrational and may think they have a reputational problem when they don't. It can be information that an individual would like to see private, although they have no right to require privacy for that information. For instance, it is not uncommon for individuals to want to conceal or remove information about "youthful indiscretions," including criminal activity. It may be 10 years in the past, and have no effect on an individual today, but given the propensity to use Google to research candidates during the hiring process, concealment of such information, which may clearly be irrelevant, is necessary.

Information that may be made available, and be subject to misuse, can include:

- Photographs
- Videos
- Audio
- Blog posts or blog comments
- Twitter tweets
- Discussion forum entries
- Traditional media stories
- Quotations
- References to oneself on a social network site, particularly in a photograph
- Document
- Official/public record (e.g., criminal record)

What Causes this Information to Surface or Prompt the Desire to Repair?

The nature and scope of information that can be misused, inappropriately placed on the Internet, or made available much to the embarrassment of an individual, is limited only to the scope of information on the Internet. In May 2010, PEW Research released a survey "Reputation Management and Social Media" showing levels of awareness, action and issue with online reputations amongst 2,000 Americans across all demographics:

- 8% of online users have asked someone to remove information about them on line.
- An increasing number of people are removing comments from their social media sites and remove their names from photos on other sites.
- 12% of employed people say they need to market themselves online as part of their job.

- 4% of adults online have had bad experiences because inaccurate or embarrassing information was posted about them. This number remains unchanged from 2006.¹⁵⁸

A key factor in the desire to remove material from the Internet is that information of this nature (embarrassing, salacious, etc.) is popular with people. It's why People magazine and other magazines with social information about people prosper.

Popularity, while not the sole criterion for relevancy in search results, is a primary determinant of where a search results places. Is it in the first three results on the first page, or tucked away on the bottom of the third page? The number of sites that link to this page and the number of times it is clicked on by searchers are strong determinants of where a page shows in Google search results. Given peoples' natural interest in gossip, malicious and salacious material, it is no surprise that these items are often clicked on, bringing them regularly to the top of Google search results.

As one expert in the field of ORM, Chris Martin of Reputation Hawk explains, *"When you go into the algorithms, Google is constantly changing how they rank these sites. One of the obvious ones is usage data. It's a lot of people Googling something, and they click on it, and it gives that website a boost. So when you Google something and you see so-and-so was convicted of so-and-so or anything negative, we naturally have a tendency to move toward that kind of juicy negative gossip, whatever you want to call it, so people click on that. It baffles a lot of people when they think that they have all this information, which is good – we help out the Boys Club of America, and we gave these donations, why is this one little thing at pissedconsumer.com number two under our name. It's because people click on it."*¹⁵⁹

Google and Bing's decision to push these popular pages to the top of their search results has prompted the demand for online reputation management. The environmental factors mentioned in the previous section (availability of information, accessibility, information without context and the social needs to search and "to belong" tapped into by Google and Facebook) have accelerated the need to manage reputation online.

In many cases when people search for their own name, the search results return mostly information about others with the same name. 62% of the respondents in the PEW Reputation Management and Social Media research in May 2010 stated that most of the first page results on Google were about someone else.¹⁶⁰ If that information is negative, some readers may not realize it is about someone other than who they are searching.

In discussion with Key Informants, the terms youthful, drunk, party, photo and getting a job came up to suggest a clear theme, particularly. Some of the direct quotations are below:

Art Pierce – Retired HR Executive, University Lecturer

"The unthinkable has been preserved."

"What happens in Vegas, no longer stays in Vegas."

"It used to be the guy who makes a colossal schmuck of himself at the Christmas party. Nobody films it, and after a while it goes away. But now with this electronic stuff at our disposal it has become incontrovertible proof that doesn't die and doesn't go away. It's like: "What you do with an old nuclear plant?""

"There was an element of "there but for the grace of God, go I. Now all you have to say is 'I was smart enough not to commit this to any type of medium. Before you got lucky, now you got smart.'"¹⁶¹

Ezra Silverton – President, 9th sphere

"When they were a teenager maybe they had criminal issues, but they later have been excused of them, they did their time and they are trying to get into the corporate world, but when you do a search for their name it brings up something they did when they were really young."

"You definitely see the younger generation more open about who they are and what they do online."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Madden, Mary, Smith, Aaron

¹⁵⁹ Chris Martin, Key Informant interview

¹⁶⁰ Madden, Mary, Smith, Aaron

¹⁶¹ Art Pierce, Key Informant interview

¹⁶² Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

Chris Martin – Founder, Reputation Hawk

"We've done some research on this. Good Google names and bad Google names. If you Google my name, Chris Martin, you get the lead singer of Coldplay. When you have a really unique name, and something negative comes out for somebody else, it can be devastating."

"I would say from an individual perspective a lot of it is mistakes from their youth. That's probably a big one. Consumer wise, definitely that."

"If someone gets accused of something, that will show up really high on his or her search results."

"On the consumer side what is really tough is you get an e-mail and you read the story and you say, 'man, this is really just wrong.' Every once in a while I'll just take one of those on."

"We had this case where a college kid, made some kind of mistake, got drunk and got into a fight at a party and got onto the Internet. Top of search results. Could not get this removed. He wanted to get into the workforce. He was an engineer. He wouldn't have had a chance at getting a job because a lot of these HR managers, the first thing they do is they Googled him. Evidently that's what they do. A campaign like that would cost you \$700 U.S. a month. In this situation most people couldn't do that, but because his father had money he was able to go in and shape the search results and he was extremely happy and the father was extremely happy. It just basically takes money to do all the work that is needed to get it done."

"People want to be more public online because they want to be more popular and they want to open themselves up to any possibility of being discovered."¹⁶³

Jeff Quipp – CEO, Search Engine People

"If a kid is drunk at a party and they take a video of it and put it up on YouTube, that is there for the indefinite future. Whereas when we were kids, it wasn't the case. Somebody would laugh about it for a couple days and then it would be gone."

"Let's say, somebody doesn't like you as an individual. There are sites now, where they can go and comment on you, and if they know anything about search engine optimization, they can get that page rank. So there are sites like ratemyboss.com, ratemyteacher that target individuals. There are a number of sites that target individuals that are springing up."¹⁶⁴

Mr. Orange – Search/Information Executive

"You can make one mistake in your youth and it follows you. In olden times it was lost when you moved away from town. Between time and space you could leave the youthful discretion behind you. And now, you type in the guy's name and return and it could be an early hit."¹⁶⁵

Ezra Silverton – President, 9th sphere

"Aside from a single indiscretion, there could've been a mistake made. There was a newspaper report on something and the next day they publish a tiny retraction. Google is going to turn up the main story and all the links to it, but they're not going to turn up the correction."¹⁶⁶

Joe Katzman – Defense Industry Daily

"When there is a widespread latent perception about an issue, it can be triggered by a crystallizing event. And that's when things go viral and become very dangerous to a reputation in that all the trouble that's been stored up suddenly crystallizes."¹⁶⁷

Mr. Blue – Consumer with an Internet Problem

"Would I use those services? Yes, if I could afford it. Every road I go down I get blocked. So yes I would like to find someone who could help me. Of course, I would. I would like to get back to some integrity about who I am."

"I am just managing to survive, because my name unfortunately – my integrity is lost, my name is out there."

"But my ex is not willing to negotiate, and the Internet is preventing me from getting any additional business. And I'm relying on somebody who finds my name somehow other than on the Internet."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Chris Martin, Key Informant interview

¹⁶⁴ Jeff Quipp, Key Informant interview

¹⁶⁵ Mr. Orange – Search/Information Executive, Key Informant interview

¹⁶⁶ Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

¹⁶⁷ Joe Katzman, Key Informant interview

Mr. Green – Security Expert

*“When you have 950 friends you may have misjudged some of those people. You are exposed.”*¹⁶⁹

Tony Wilson

*“Teens are the worst offenders, they should have a designated driver online with them.”*¹⁷⁰

Brian Sharwood – President, Homestars.com

*“Usually we see individuals especially on forums or blogs where there has been dispute about who they are, what they've done. Usually their first reaction is to dispute. They go in there writing rebuttals and rebuttals and rebuttals and every time they go in there it makes it worse and worse. That's usually the biggest mistake.”*¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ Mr. Blue – Consumer with an Internet Problem

¹⁶⁹ Mr. Green – Security Expert, Key Informant interview

¹⁷⁰ Tony Wilson, Key Informant interview

¹⁷¹ Brian Sharwood, Key Informant interview

ORM – An Overview

What is Personal Online Reputation Management?

Wikipedia says, “Online reputation management (or monitoring) is the practice of monitoring the Internet reputation of a person, brand or business, with the goal of suppressing negative mentions entirely, or pushing them lower on search engine results pages to decrease their visibility. (It is) the act of monitoring, addressing or mitigating SERPs (search engine result pages) or mentions in online media and Web sphere content. ORM primarily involves tracking what is written about a client on the Internet, then utilizing sophisticated online and offline techniques in promoting positive and neutral content, while at the same time pushing down those links the sponsor (in most cases business or individuals) may not want to show when their name is searched.”¹⁷²

Wikipedia, often criticized for its common view, and lack of scholarly pedigree, has an accurate view of ORM, despite the redundancy in its definition, caused no doubt by multiple contributors and editors.

Ezra Silvertown – President, 9th sphere

“We will look at ORM as a promotional tool, more than some kind of rebuttal tool. We want our clients to be more proactive than reactive. We want people to think of ORM as a resume to highlight your achievements, not to look for items you are trying to hide or dispute against.”¹⁷³

“So what we do, so even though we attempt to do that (attempt to have the material removed), if it is not successful our first attempt is to take all the positive aspects of that individual or the company and get those attributes online. What we’re trying to do in that situation is to push up to the search results all the positive kind of reinforcement factors, and that will push down all the negative factors further into the search results.”¹⁷⁴

Chris Martin – Founder, Reputation Hawk

ORM is “mainly suppression and/or building their web presence... Removal is pretty much throwing the dice...”¹⁷⁵

What are the key components of ORM?¹⁷⁶

There are a multitude of terms for the categories of ORM, as well as many terms for the practices within those categories. Essentially, ORM is a three-piece deal: Monitor (Maintain), Fix (Repair) and Protect (Promote)

Monitor and Assess and Plan. Key tactics include:

- Check search engines for name
- Check relevant websites for personal references or information
- Set up RSS feeds, Google Alerts or other feeds for quick identification
- Purchase monitoring service, or implement a simple free system
- Gather information, assess potential risks, and develop a plan to continue to monitor, fix and protect as necessary

Fix, if necessary. Key tactics include:

- Decide whether to remove or conceal
- Legal letter to ISP or site owner
- Request to remove
- Explanation on offending website to mitigate damage
- Engage in “professional” debate
- Sue, if necessary
- Create or enhance websites with positive information, using standard SEO techniques to move positive information ahead of negative information. Typically concealment consists of creating new

¹⁷² Wikipedia – Online Reputation Management, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Online_reputation_management

¹⁷³ Ezra Silvertown, Key Informant interview

¹⁷⁴ Ezra Silvertown, Key Informant interview

¹⁷⁵ Chris Martin – ORM Organization questionnaire

¹⁷⁶ A considerably more detailed approach to ORM for individuals is contained in the Recommendation section.

material, boosting existing material, and encouraging material of others that has a positive affect on your search results.

Protect

- Claim your name on Twitter, Facebook ...
- Consider:
 - Engaging in various social media conversations
 - Starting a blog
 - Continuing to monitor
 - Writing key statements about oneself and strategically making these available on the Internet.

While ORM can be fairly straightforward and systematic, there are some parts of it that can often be done better by an organization or an individual with experience in the area. This would include the more complex search engine optimization tactics. In some situations where there are particularly negative reviews or comments, or personal acrimony, an intermediary can help keep the emotional responses to a reasonable level. It certainly applies where defamation is involved, where an initial consideration would be to consult a lawyer.

The search engines, particularly the larger ones (notably Bing and Google), do not enter into relationships with organizations allowing them special access to modification of search results for their individual clients.

Is ORM the same as Search Engine Optimization?

Firstly, what is SEO?

Like so many terms today (e.g., strategy, change management, mission) there are a multitude of definitions available. At its most raw, SEO is the practice of improving search engine results for a website. More specifically it improves website visibility to those who are using search terms that demonstrate a need for the particular website. For example, there is no benefit in an automobile company's website showing on the first page of Google search results when someone queries "wooden desks," but there is considerable benefit when a consumer searches for "safest automobile," "most economical minivan" or "used cars with the best resale value." It is not just about placing well on search engine results. It is about placing well for search terms that matter.

Key components to SEO include:

- Site structure and HTML coding
- Content
- Keywords
- Links from other sites
- Website speed – pages and websites that are slow to load rank lower in search engine results

SEO is a key component of ORM. We evaluated ORM repair organizations on their visible capability for SEO, but SEO is only a component.

Here's what one expert in the area says:

Mr. Ezra Silverton – President, 9th sphere

"There are a lot of similar tactics, but because you are dealing with other people's websites you have to alter those tactics because you are helping those other sites move their content up. But there are some fundamental SEO tactics: relevance of content, how recent are the links, link building, URL structure, history, the age of the material, the credibility of the site, the list goes on and on.

"The way I look at it, SEO is more related to a website whether it be a company or an individual's. Basically increasing the ranking of your website. Whereas ORM is typically not your website that you are optimizing, it is usually other websites that you are optimizing. There are elements that overlap; there are tactics that overlap. In that respect, yes, a lot of the tactics are similar. It's just how they are done that is different. Link building and content writing and profile creation and social media interaction. And all those things you do in both. It's just how you do it that is different."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

The ORM Industry

ORM began with organizations on the Internet providing services to businesses, or businesses doing it themselves. As individuals started to get “libelled” or embarrassed, or “not hired,” particularly with the advent of Web 2.0, it also translated to individuals. The providing organizations had the skills and experience and tools – a new market was born.

Chris Martin – Founder, Reputation Hawk

“Three years ago when you Googled on reputation management there were a handful of us. There was some major publicity from Time and Newsweek. And some of these like the ones you just mentioned [ed., referring to what might be less than reputable organizations in the business] they branded under 20 or 30 different names. A lot of times they just diversify in case they get negative publicity.”¹⁷⁸

Many fly-by-night organizations came into the marketplace. There were few barriers to entry for the business. This was particularly true for businesses serving individuals. Individuals were generally not able to evaluate to the same degree an organization providing these services.

The ORM industry's history has been short and marked by controversy. We believe this is primarily because of four factors:

- People who need this service, need it quickly, and are fearful of the damage that has already occurred, and more importantly about the potential for future damage.
- The methods of service and their success are not transparent to or measurable by the consumer. It is difficult to tie the results to the efforts made. As well, services are typically provided online and can be impersonal. This is particularly difficult for a consumer in a very personal and necessarily intimate relationship. Removal and repair are referred to by the industry synonymously, even when the service may only be to move references to information to the second page of Google search results.
- The cost of entry for an industry participant can appear to be minimal. And services can be provided, ironically, almost anonymously. As the infamous New Yorker cartoon states, “On the Internet, nobody knows you are a dog.”¹⁷⁹
- Internet service providers of all kinds operate global businesses and are not necessarily subject to regulations and laws of or like those in Canada. In many cases it may be difficult or impossible for consumers to determine what jurisdiction's laws apply to a service provider's operations. There is minimal control/regulation on the provision, use, and removal of this information on the Internet. In this environment sometimes less than reputable organizations are able to provide services that may not provide what would reasonably be expected.

Joe Katzman – Defense Industry Daily

“You put yourself at risk. The ones [the ORM organizations] who are the most at risk of doing damage or not respecting privacy of information are very likely the ones that would incur argument, as they have fewer skills in the area.”

“Where are the problems coming from? One is the lack of transparency, because what you do to fix a reputational problem online is not itself transparent. Only the results show.”

“The larger issue for me, is that you have some well-established firms doing this as a canned service that they have done a fair amount of time developing. They are going to play within the lines. But the techniques for doing this, which are the techniques for search engine optimization, are widely out there and the technical gear required to execute it is trivial and widely available. Yes, you have these packaged services. You are also going to have a lot of people who can do this out of their bedroom or their basement.”¹⁸⁰

Ezra Silverton – President, 9th sphere

“In our industry we have a huge range of businesses from individuals working in their basement to large agencies. Our industry is one of those where there are few barriers to entry. So anyone with a computer and Internet access can

¹⁷⁸ Chris Martin, Key ORM Organization Questionnaire

¹⁷⁹ Published in The New Yorker 7/5/1993 by Peter Steiner

¹⁸⁰ Joe Katzman, Key Informant interview

really start up. I think that's why we see such a wide range of startups and companies in our realm. It's easy to start. And sometimes people with little knowledge can, to the prospects who don't know, be in danger of that. The same is true in the construction industry. Somebody can do some handyman work in a house and then all of a sudden consider themselves a contractor and do plumbing and electrical work and the next thing you know your house is on fire."¹⁸¹

Jeff Quipp, CEO Search Engine People

"Even business-to-business there are a lot of companies in our industry that price it to get the business, but don't price it to get the job. And in this case where they are, for \$50 a month or so that consumers can afford for the most part, you're pricing to get the business, you're not pricing to get job.

"We've got companies like that in our industry that do SEO for 50 bucks a month. And what they do is they play off definitions. They don't actually do the jobs; they play with definitions. We're going to get you ranking. For certain terms. For a hundred terms. They are so obscure. They are not the competitive terms. They are so obscure that nobody ever searches for them. But they can go back to the business and say we got you ranking for these hundreds terms.

"People want to believe, so I guess they are easy to take advantage of because of that. If they're not charging enough money, then they are scamming you."¹⁸²

Dr. Pink – Information and Knowledge Expert

"I am sure that there is an effort to try and put some credibility in the business at least among some people, but ... it is a risk-free pursuit for them, as indeed it is a risk-free pursuit for those people putting this information out there, the previous information to begin with. They don't have a great deal of risk, so we have created a situation where responsibility and action tend to be divested from one another.

"To set up in these kinds of business you don't really need to make any kind of investment. You can operate from the back of a Mac's milk if you choose to do so.

"In the case of reputation management there is no risk to people managing the reputation. They [the ORM organizations] don't have a downside. Wherever you have a transaction taking place where you have one partner who doesn't really have any kind of downside to it, it is not one that should necessarily put a great deal of confidence in the minds of the people using the service. There is no sort of leverage that you have here. You are on your own. They do for you what they do for you and that is that."¹⁸³

The Online Reputation Management Association (ORMA)¹⁸⁴

The ORMA is an organization designed to start setting standards of conduct for the reputation management industry as part of the search engine optimization and Internet marketing field. It has a Board of Directors led by an individual from reputation.com, but references are to Reputation Defender and it does not appear very active. It appears to be a beginning to education and ethics in the field, and may have that effect going forward.

Who uses it and why?

- Businesses
- High profile individuals
- Typical consumer

Online reputation management may be of interest to anyone who has a stake in their reputation, particularly where that reputation is demonstrated through the Internet. Businesses and high profile individuals tend to use the service of an ORM organization as their brand or reputation is typically more entrenched online than the average individual who may go to fix a problem rather than to promote an online image proactively.

SEO is a component of reputation management, which for organizations and high profile individuals historically has been the mainstay of the PR Firm. Effectively, the Internet with all its power has put the average consumer into the position previously reserved for the rich and famous, perks and perils included.

¹⁸¹ Ezra Silvertown, Key Informant interview

¹⁸² Jeff Quipp, Key Informant interview

¹⁸³ Dr. Pink – Information and Knowledge Expert, Key Informant interview

¹⁸⁴ Online Reputation Management Association website, <http://www.orm-association.org/>

What options do consumers have, aside from hiring an ORM organization?

- Get a high school student to help – this is not as unusual as it sounds. A lawyer intimately familiar with privacy and Internet law suggested this as an option. Combine this with the advice of Chris Martin of Reputation Hawk (prepare a series of positive statements and messages about yourself, and arrange to get them posted in credible places on the Internet).
- Research on the web and do it oneself. Start with the Reputation.com website.
- Hire a lawyer – expensive, and typically only when defamation or other serious reputation issues are at stake.
- Ignore it; it may go away. This is a common approach, given the lack of awareness amongst a large percentage of the populace.

Benefits and Effectiveness of the Service

The benefits are simple:

- *Removal of offending information from the Internet.* The offending site removes the information, a search engine removes its reference to it, but typically this is for cached information and only speeds up what would already be a removal. Rare is the time that search engines remove results from their pages over which an individual has no demonstrated authority and control.
- *Concealment, to varying degrees, in search engine results on the Internet.* Efforts can be made to move information references to the bottom of Google's first page of search results. Efforts can be made to move information to the second or the third page of search results. Movement to each succeeding page is considerably more difficult. It can be concealed when some search terms are used, but not others.. The best concealment is when information is moved down on search results pages when a wide array of search terms is used.
- *A clear awareness of what information is out there* about the consumer, and ideally a plan to ensure that their reputation is protected going forward. That plan will vary considerably depending on the needs of the individual consumer.
- *A more positive reputation online*, particularly for those who rely heavily on their online reputation. This would include high-profile individuals, professionals – those whose personal name is tied very closely to their business, politicians, and celebrities.
- *Proper counselling on how not to have information about oneself made available* on the Internet in the first place. This will vary depending on situation.
- *Proper counselling on searching for one's own name* and applying appropriate context in searching for others.
- *Improvement of resume* on line.

The effectiveness of ORM services can be less clear. It depends on the answers to various questions:

- *Is it true?* The more truth to reputation damaging information, the tougher it will be to remove or conceal.
- *Where is the Internet location of the material?* Dealing with a site administrator or having information removed are more difficult if the information is stored on a server outside Canada. The laws are different. Language may be an issue. Cultural differences may affect whether information will be removed and how one would go about doing it. There is much to consider:
 - the perspective of the consumer trying to repair their reputation.
 - the perspective of the expected audience.
 - the ability of the service provider or administrator to grasp these perspectives and consider the different contexts, sometimes for a narrow audience but sometimes for a global one.
- *What are the Terms of Use for the organization holding the information?* If the information falls outside the terms of service or terms of use for the organization holding the information, an individual will have a higher probability of having it removed. In one of the landmark defamation cases, the Supreme Court of Canada allowed a plaintiff to pursue an anonymous author partially because the terms of the ISP's privacy policy did not give the anonymous contributor a reasonable expectation of privacy.

- *Is the provider of the information identifiable?* It's easier to deal with somebody for whom you have a name or an identity.
- *What is the state of the law in the jurisdiction of the consumer? What is the state of the law in the jurisdiction of the provider of the information, and the ISP or the website presenting the information?* Knowing the laws of the relevant jurisdictions is paramount in determining direction to take. If the information is hosted in the U.S on a site that is a third party to the content contributor, section 230 of the Communications Decency Act provides significant protection, even in cases of defamation to the ISP or hosting organization.

Ezra Silverton – President, 9th sphere

*"There are some sites that we know that if you contact [them] things get worse. Those are sites typically in the realm of reviews."*¹⁸⁵

*"There is a better chance of information 100% factually not true being removed."*¹⁸⁶

*"It's definitely a harder fight to pull a photo of an individual than copyrighted material." "Trademarks¹⁸⁷ are effective."*¹⁸⁸

*"Once it's being posted online, whether its officially been deleted or not is a whole other question. And this was the issue with Facebook. Because Facebook was claiming that 'yes' it is deleted from public view, but Facebook does not delete it in their own files internally. The chances of those ever being removed are slim."*¹⁸⁹

Chris Martin – Founder, Reputation Hawk

"We deal more with the high end consumer. Probably not so much by choice. It's just the process that's involved. What we typically specialize in is shaping the search results so that you are basically suppressing unwanted publicity."

*"Well, this is a difficult area because the service provided to typical individuals has to be low cost <\$100/Month. There is only so much you can do with that budget level. Another major issue is that Google and most other search engines have duplicate content algorithms. So, if they want to dominate their top 40 they can't simply set up 40 quick sites like LinkedIn and paste the same information over and over. No matter what, someone has to write a lot of unique content for the individual, which can be tricky..... All in all it just takes a lot of work. **If I were an individual with low income and time (which is most) and I wanted to dominate my search results, I would write a professional article about myself and spin 100 versions of it. I would then hire a company to post those as new profiles on sites.** This will provide a buffer in the search results but will not suppress any fair to major negative press."*¹⁹⁰

Dr. Pink – Information and Knowledge Expert

"First of all, the enterprise itself of reputation management is a sort of "Labour of Sisyphus."¹⁹¹ As you patch one piece of reputation, another piece could be in in tatters, and it may be the nature of the Internet enterprise that there really isn't a beginning or an end, partially because of information replication, and partly because of reconfiguration of information over and over again, and partially because there's no equivalent of peer review. So, you can patch it and then patch it an endless number of times.

"As long as you don't have it mediated and peer reviewed, this is going to be a people problem.

"If those who manage reputations were to be particularly honest and frank about it, what they need to say is that we can patch this up for you amongst certain audiences, but on the other hand, there are people who are prepared to believe what they are prepared to believe, and they will find this information no matter what it is that you might do from a reputation patching point of view."¹⁹²

¹⁸⁵ Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

¹⁸⁶ Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

¹⁸⁷ References are easier to have removed in the instances of trademark infraction.

¹⁸⁸ Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

¹⁸⁹ Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

¹⁹⁰ Chris Martin – ORM Organization Questionnaire response

¹⁹¹ As a punishment from the gods for his trickery, Sisyphus was made to roll a huge boulder up a steep hill, but before he could reach the top of the hill, the rock would always roll back down, forcing him to begin again. Odyssey, xi.593 Accordingly, pointless or interminable activities are often described as Sisyphian. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sisyphus#cite_note-4

¹⁹² Dr. Pink – Information and Knowledge Expert, Key Informant interview

Mr. Yellow – Lawyer

"I can tell you that I have never referred anybody to one of these reputation cleanup services. I am one of the people who sometimes says go hire a kid who will put up some websites and manipulate the search engine results so the bad stuff ends up being on the second or third page."¹⁹³

Mr. Yellow – Lawyer

In response to question, "Do you think some of them will be more inclined to take something down depending on who asks?"

"Absolutely. I have no idea about people who do it as a business. My experience has been that certain businesses if they get a letter from me, that is, from a lawyer, they react to it. And in some cases, you are better off going through if it's got an established practice or policy with a process attached to it, you are better off doing that. Yes writing a letter sometimes does some good. But there is no one answer to any of this because, and I tell this to people all the time, if I write a letter to a certain kind of blog operator, it does no good if my letter will be posted on the Internet."¹⁹⁴

Ezra Silverton – President, 9th sphere

"It's very, very rare to get the website owner to remove the content."¹⁹⁵

Joe Katzman – Defense Industry Daily

"It's probably an exponential curve to get it to the third page."¹⁹⁶

What does it cost?

"Principle is costly to pursue."¹⁹⁷

"It depends," is often referred to as the stereotypical accountant answer. It applies here. A simple Facebook page issue, or a quick letter to a review site can be a one-time thing. Trying to move down in the search results a prior conviction or a vindictive and popular blogger's rant can takes months, a year or continue in perpetuity.

The base costs can range from a one-time \$100 fee for a quick removal (rare) to a realistic \$100 to \$1,000 a month for a **minimum** of three months. Some organizations have plans for individuals of \$100 a year for a very basic service, to \$100 a month for a recommended twelve-month term. So, 'yes,' the cost 'depends,' which is a key reason that no agreement should be signed with an ORM organization until it is clear what the problem is, what will be done to fix it, what is expected to change, what *will* change, and what *will* happen if one or neither of these turn out.

A serious effort to remove or conceal material that affects your reputation online can be addressed by Reputation.com with their Reputation Defender program –which has three tiers: \$3,000, \$5,000 and \$10,000 which includes increasing numbers of professional online biographies, promotion on third party websites and personalized websites. Other organizations providing a similar service will charge similar fees.

It does not have to be expensive for smaller problems, but if one has negative information affecting their career or social standing, don't go cheap. Failure can cost a consumer more than money.

¹⁹³ Mr. Yellow – Lawyer, Key Informant interview

¹⁹⁴ Mr. Yellow – Lawyer, Key Informant interview

¹⁹⁵ Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

¹⁹⁶ Joe Katzman, Key Informant interview

¹⁹⁷ Mr. Yellow – Lawyer, Key Informant interview

Recent Relevant Research

Overview of the Research – Online Reputation Management

Privacy, reputation and identity theft are high profile Internet issues. There is a clear indication in this research that reputation in general is an issue and that it will affect consumers in their capability to effect reasonable consumption choices. This is particularly so, given the availability and accessibility of information about individuals, and the increased activity of checking out someone before entering into a “transaction” with them, be it employment, dating, marriage, renting an apartment, buying or selling a large asset or property.

In some ways the more immediate issue is the nature of the industry purporting to repair one’s online reputation. It is a largely unregulated, unruly environment in which service providers often provide ill-defined services and promises. Too many of these organizations appear to have no physical presence, demonstrate unusual relationships, and some even have an online presence that is so poorly designed, badly developed and vague as to demonstrate a weak understanding of the principles they purport to use to repair their customers’ reputations. Our research was focused on what we initially considered the more reputable of these organizations.

The issue of online/digital reputation for individuals has become increasingly salient. It appears, however, that this growth is fuelled mostly by attention paid by individuals with high dependence on the Internet for their reputation (professionals, celebrities, and other public figures) and for the younger generation who make available a photo or video on some social networking site, which they later regret and look to remove, out of fear that it may negatively affect their employment prospects. Privacy concerns centre around social networking sites, particularly Facebook.

Mainstream, traditional media also has a role in this, through its “coverage” of social media, exploiting prurient interests for commercial advantage and using the need to explain social media as an excuse to do so. People are seeing how their moment of fame can become something humiliating and unexpected. Privacy violations online are typically impersonal and detached. People may not give a second thought to the real person. It’s like gossip about something that doesn’t really matter. It may be meaningless. But magnify the foible on network television or reference it in newspapers and magazines, and the whole thing changes, and the damage is done – disproportionately and unnecessarily.

The problem stems from the ease of anonymous, casual cruelty or uninformed thoughtlessness about another’s interests. What’s going on offends our notion of justice that says one has a right to face one’s accuser. In media, the notion of protecting anonymous sources was based on protecting the powerless from the powerful, and, in essence, doing so on something of a peer-reviewed basis. An entity was prepared to pledge its wealth and reputation to protect a known innocent from potential risk. But this is not at all the scenario in most of the cases of online reputation problems.

Much of the primary research on individual digital/online reputation indicates that the problems are those that affect employment opportunities. As well, people are more commonly using the Internet to check out their potential partners in about anything they do. PEW Research Center in their recent research on reputation management found that 44% of online adults have searched for information about someone whose services or advice they seek in a professional capacity.¹⁹⁸

The issue with Google and its effect on Internet users was a big topic in 2010, following on the heels of Nicholas Carr’s book *The Shallows*,¹⁹⁹ commenting on the question: “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” The nature of unfiltered information and people’s willingness to rely on it without deep thought has new and serious implications for how information is used, misused and relied upon.

There is a recurring theme in the research – that those less involved in social media and social networking are less likely to know about their online information or be willing to repair it, but also have less of a need. The gap that arises is the availability of information about people who know little about, or seldom access the Internet, but nevertheless may still have an online reputation. Some people may believe that if they do not put any information up, they won’t have to worry about an online reputation problem. They take a risk, as one can clearly have an

¹⁹⁸ Madden, Mary, Smith, Aaron

¹⁹⁹ Carr, Nicholas G. *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2010.

online reputation because of what others put on the Internet, not just what they put on the Internet about themselves.

Following is a sampling of the more recent and/or relevant research in the area of online reputation for individuals:

*Enisa (Europe) Position Paper on Security and Privacy in Web 2.0 2008*²⁰⁰

The European Network and Information Security Agency (ENISA) is the European Union's "response to these cyber security issues of the European Union. A survey was conducted of 1500 users from 3 European Countries to collect information on attitudes to Web2.0 security issues. The main body of the report describes in detail these risks and others, based around a set of architectural patterns characterizing the Web 2.0 paradigm shift."²⁰¹

Sample of 1,500 respondents, most of whom were Web 2.0 involved.

- "Embarrassing personal data being seen by strangers," "Someone using my blog entries and opinions against me," and "Discrimination by someone judging me wrongly from my online profiles" were concerns, but only the 6th, 7th and 8th in a list of eight concerns.
- Several questions relating to their view on use of their online information.
 - A clear response that "people give away too much information about themselves".
 - Moderate satisfaction with responses from social media sites when asking to have information removed.²⁰²

The top three concerns were theft or misuse of personal data by the service provider, information being used for marketing purposes, and identity theft.²⁰³

Implications:

Interestingly, there was a moderate degree of satisfaction with social media sites' responsiveness to requests to remove information. The primary concerns are focused more on privacy issues and identity theft. There is some awareness of the issue of misuse of information, but clearly it is not the predominant thought or concern.

*Microsoft Cross-Tab Marketing Services – Data Privacy Day: Perceptions Study January 2010 (Consumers/Recruiters) (notes from study)*²⁰⁴

Survey respondents were concerned about having their online reputations abused to steal their identities, target them for scams, or become a victim of defamation, harassment or bullying.

- The impact to online reputations by content created via mobile devices is an area of concern for consumers.
- Consumers take steps to keep a divide between personal and professional identities.
- Most respondents use measures to protect and manage their online reputation.
- Most of those surveyed do not believe that there has been any positive or negative impact on their chances of getting a job or getting admission in a college, because of their online reputation.
- In the prior six months the most common activities in checking one's online reputation was doing a search for oneself and adjusting privacy settings to restrict their online presence.
- In the U.S almost half of the respondents said that the responsibility for protecting online information was the responsibility of the individual.
- Consumers apply both proactive and reactive methods of reputation management.
- Respondents are divided about their ability to manage their online reputation and on ownership of issues.

²⁰⁰ Hogben, Giles

²⁰¹ Hogben, Giles

²⁰² Hogben, Giles

²⁰³ Hogben, Giles

²⁰⁴ Microsoft – Data Privacy Day: Perceptions Study January 2010 (Consumers//Recruiters) (notes from study)

Syracuse University provides graduates with a Six-Month Do it Yourself Online Management Reputation Course²⁰⁵

Syracuse University has responded to an identifiable need for many of their students to spruce up their online reputation before entering the job market.

Relevance:

A proactive approach like this is a helpful one, and may inspire others to emulate it.

The recognition by a university of the importance of online reputation to its graduate's prospects of being hired and its investment in providing this kind of training suggests the need for a good online reputation is an important one. In this case the significance for getting a job is highlighted. Syracuse University's course is delivered by "Brand Yourself."²⁰⁶ This is a more proactive way to repair than much of the after-the-fact processes of the current reputation repair organizations.²⁰⁷

PEW Research Center, Reputation Management and Social Media. Internet & American Life Project, May 26, 2010²⁰⁸

Over 2,200 U.S individuals were surveyed over time late in 2009.

- "Search engines and social media sites play a central role in building one's reputation online, and many users are learning and refining their approach as they go – changing privacy settings on profiles, customizing who can see certain updates and deleting unwanted information about them that appears online."
- Share of adults stating they have created their own online social networking profile increased to 46% from 20% in 2006.
- Online reputation monitoring via search engines has increased to 57% from 47% in 2006.
- 44% of online adults have searched for information about someone whose services or advice they seek in a professional capacity.
- 8% of online users have asked someone to remove information about them on line.
- An increasing number of people are removing comments from their social media sites and remove their names from photos on other sites.
- 12% of employed people say they need to market themselves online as part of their job.
- 4% of adults online have had bad experiences because inaccurate or embarrassing information was posted about them. This number remains unchanged from 2006.²⁰⁹

Yahoo Survey on Privacy – June 2010²¹⁰

The focus was on parents managing their children's online reputation, however they did have some general findings.

- Found that many people search their own name – 50% at least twice a year, 20% monthly.
- Found that 50% of people do not know that information online may remain forever.

Ted Rogers School of Management – Privacy and Cyber Crime Institute 2008²¹¹

Survey of 2,000 young Canadians involved in online socializing. Several findings, but the most relevant is that the view of privacy by primarily young people using online social networks is different than that of the largely older people in organizations who use information gleaned in these sites freely without much in the way of policies or procedures or guidelines. The younger involved group has a view of "privacy within the network" which is easily and often breached, particularly in marketing or HR situations by organizations.

²⁰⁵ Syracuse.com, May 6, 2010 http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2010/05/syracuse_university_offers_gra.html

²⁰⁶ <http://brand-yourself.com/>

²⁰⁷ Lynch, Brendon. *Online Reputation in a Connected World*, Privacy Strategy Microsoft Corporation Data Privacy Day, January 28, 2010

²⁰⁸ Madden, Mary, Smith, Aaron

²⁰⁹ Madden, Mary, Smith, Asron

²¹⁰ <http://ycorpblog.com/2010/06/10/internet-safety/>

²¹¹ Levin, Avner et al

The report resulted in strong recommendations to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada and to organizations regarding the ways in which this information should, and should not, be used.

Consumer Reports "Social Insecurity – What millions of online users don't know can hurt them," June 2010²¹²

- Two thirds of U.S. households use Facebook and MySpace – a considerable increase over even just one year ago.
- Survey of 2,000 households indicated a serious risk of exposing sensitive personal information, including to consumer scams.

"We're just at the beginning of seeing what the implications are for so much information being posted on social networks," says Nicole Ozer, the technology and civil liberties policy director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California, who was quoted in the report.

PEW Research – Older Adults and Social Media, August 2010²¹³

This was a study of more than 2,000 Americans over 18, based on daily tracking of Internet usage.

- Social networking use among Internet users ages 50 and older has nearly doubled – from 22% to 42% over the past year.
- Half (47%) of Internet users ages 50-64 and one-in-four (26%) users ages 65 and older now use social networking sites.
- One-in-ten (11%) online adults ages 50-64 and one-in-twenty (5%) online adults ages 65 and older now say they use Twitter or another service to share updates about themselves or see updates about others.
- Email and online news are still more appealing to older users, but social media sites attract many repeat visitors.²¹⁴

Implications: The older generation is catching up. Social networking is a strong draw.

PEW Research, New Media, Old Media – How Blogs and Social Media Agendas Relate and Differ from Traditional Press, May, 2010²¹⁵

For a year, Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism tracked blogs and social media, specifically those that linked to and discussed news stories. They did the same for seven months of Twitter tweets. They identified clear trends:

- Bloggers were more inclined toward stories that were emotional or "concerned individual or group rights or triggered ideological passion."²¹⁶
- Twitter was less likely to share an agenda with the mainstream press, than were blogs or social media. And even "blogs and social media share the same lead story with traditional media in just 13 of 49 weeks studied."
- Longevity of stories was dramatically different between traditional media and social media. Traditional media stories remained the top story in 50% of the cases one week later, whereas none of blogs, Twitter or social media was higher than 13%. Only one in 20 stories on Twitter remained a top story one week later.

Implications: The emotionality of blogs can be dangerous for reputation issues, although social media stories were shorter lived. This shorter life helps reputation where the stories are negative, but where individuals are using social media to help improve their reputation, it means more diligent efforts are required.

²¹² Social insecurity: What millions of online users don't know can hurt them. *Consumer Reports Magazine*, June, 2010
<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/magazine-archive/2010/june/electronics-computers/social-insecurity/overview/index.htm>

²¹³Madden, Mary Older Adults and Social Media. *Pew Internet & American Life Project*, August 27, 2010
<http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Older-Adults-and-Social-Media.aspx>

²¹⁴ Madden, Mary, Smith, Aaron

²¹⁵ New Media, Old Media: How Blogs and Social Media Agendas Relate and Differ from the Traditional Press, May 24, 2010 *Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism* <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1602/new-media-review-differences-from-traditional-press>

²¹⁶ New Media, Old Media: How Blogs and Social Media Agendas Relate and Differ from Traditional

PEW Research Center, *Does Google Make us Stupid?*, February 2010²¹⁷

Loosely based on Nicholas Carr's *The Atlantic* article "Is Google Making Us Stupid," Summer 2008.²¹⁸ Participants were asked to consider the future of the Internet-connected world between now and 2020. It was an opt-in self-selecting survey.

Carr had argued that "What the Net does is shift the emphasis of our intelligence, away from what might be called a meditative or contemplative intelligence and more toward what might be called a utilitarian intelligence. The price of zipping among lots of bits of information is a loss of depth in our thinking."

The responses included the following:

Stephen Downes, National Research Council, Canada

*"It's a mistake to treat intelligence as an undifferentiated whole. No doubt we will become worse at doing some things ('more stupid') requiring rote memory of information that is now available though Google. But with this capacity freed, we may (and probably will) be capable of more advanced integration and evaluation of information ('more intelligent')."*²¹⁹

Larry Press, California State University, Dominguez Hills

*"We become adept at using useful tools, and hence perfect new skills. Other skills may diminish. I agree with Carr that we may on the average become less patient, less willing to read through a long, linear text, but we may also become more adept at dealing with multiple factors.... Note that I said 'less patient,' which is not the same as 'lower IQ.' I suspect that emotional and personality changes will probably be more marked than 'intelligence' changes."*²²⁰

Andy Oram, editor and blogger, O'Reilly Media

*"The question is all about people's choices. If we value introspection as a road to insight, if we believe that long experience with issues contributes to good judgment on those issues, if we (in short) want knowledge that search engines don't give us, we'll maintain our depth of thinking and Google will only enhance it. There is a trend, of course, toward instant analysis and knee-jerk responses to events that degrades a lot of writing and discussion. We can't blame search engines for that.... What search engines do is provide more information, which we can use, either to become dilettantes (Carr's worry) or to bolster our knowledge around the edges and do fact checking while we rely mostly on information we've gained in more robust ways for our core analyses. Google frees the time we used to spend pulling together the last 10% of facts we need to complete our research. I read Carr's article when *The Atlantic* first published it, but I used a web search to pull it back up and review it before writing this response. Google is my friend."*²²¹

David Ellis, York University, Toronto

*"Google isn't making us stupid – but it is making many of us intellectually lazy. This has already become a big problem in university classrooms. For my undergrad majors in Communication Studies, Google may take over the hard work involved in finding good source material for written assignments. Unless pushed in the right direction, students will opt for the top 10 or 15 hits as their research strategy. And it's the students most in need of research training who are the least likely to avail themselves of more sophisticated tools like Google Scholar. Like other major technologies, Google's search functionality won't push the human intellect in one predetermined direction. It will reinforce certain dispositions in the end-user: stronger intellects will use Google as a creative tool, while others will let Google do the thinking for them."*²²²

Peter Griffiths, former Head of Information at the Home Office within the Office of the Chief Information Officer, United Kingdom

"To be more precise, unthinking use of the Internet, and in particular untutored use of Google, has the ability to make us stupid, but that is not a foregone conclusion. More and more of us experience attention deficit, like Bruce Friedman in the Nicholas Carr article, but that alone does not stop us making good choices provided that the 'factoids' of information are sound that we use to make our decisions. The potential for stupidity comes where we rely on Google

²¹⁷ Quitney Anderson, Janna Rainie, Lee

²¹⁸ Carr, Nicholas. *Is Google Making Us Stupid*

²¹⁹ Quitney Anderson, Janna Rainie, Lee

²²⁰ Quitney Anderson, Janna Rainie, Lee

²²¹ Quitney Anderson, Janna Rainie, Lee

²²² Quitney Anderson, Janna Rainie, Lee

(or Yahoo, or Bing, or any engine) to provide relevant information in response to poorly constructed queries, frequently one-word queries, and then base decisions or conclusions on those returned items.”²²³

Robert Lunn, consultant, FocalPoint Analytics

“Google is a data access tool. Not all of that data is useful or correct. I suspect the amount of misleading data is increasing faster than the amount of correct data. There should also be a distinction made between data and information. Data is meaningless in the absence of an organizing context. That means that different people looking at the same data are likely to come to different conclusions. There is a big difference with what a world-class artist can do with a paintbrush as opposed to a monkey. In other words, the value of Google will depend on what the user brings to the game. The value of data is highly dependent on the quality of the question being asked.”²²⁴

Gene Spafford, Purdue University CERIAS, Association for Computing Machinery, U.S. Public Policy Council

“Access to more information isn’t enough – the information needs to be correct, timely, and presented in a manner that enables the reader to learn from it. The current network is full of inaccurate, misleading, and biased information that often crowds out the valid information. People have not learned that ‘popular’ or ‘available’ information is not necessarily valid.”²²⁵

Glen Edens, former senior vice president and director at Sun Microsystems Laboratories, chief scientist Hewlett Packard

“The problem with Google that is lurking just under the clean design home page is the ‘tragedy of the commons’: the link quality seems to go down every year. The link quality may actually not be going down but the signal to noise is getting worse as commercial schemes lead to more and more junk links.”²²⁶

Marist College Institute for Public Opinion

The Marist survey on privacy looking at Americans views on privacy on Facebook and MySpace showed that the older generations are more concerned about privacy, and women are more concerned about privacy than men. Of the 1,004 people responding to the survey 50% were either concerned or very concerned about privacy on social networking sites.²²⁷ The director of the Marist College Institute for Public Opinion attributed these results partially to recent changes in Facebook privacy policies. ²²⁸

Canadian Internet Use Survey²²⁹

This study was conducted by Statistics Canada and a similar survey was conducted two years prior. Relevant findings included:

- Of Canadians over 16 years of age, 80% used the Internet for personal reasons – a 10% increase from two years prior.
- One third of respondents indicated they were very concerned about online privacy.

²²³ Quitney Anderson, Janna Rainie, Lee

²²⁴ Quitney Anderson, Janna Rainie, Lee

²²⁵ Quitney Anderson, Janna Rainie, Lee

²²⁶ Quitney Anderson, Janna Rainie, Lee

²²⁷ Half of Social Networkers Online Concerned About Privacy, *Marist Poll*, July 14, 2010

<http://maristpoll.marist.edu/index.php?s=social+networkers+worried+about+privacy>

²²⁸ Lippman, Daniel. Half of social networkers worried about privacy: poll, July 15, 2010 *Reuters Canada*

<http://ca.reuters.com/article/technologyNews/idCATRE66E41820100715>

²²⁹ The Daily, Monday, May 10, 2010. Canadian Internet Use Survey

The Evaluation Plan

General Criteria for Selection of Organizations for Evaluation

The primary criterion was to find organizations that Canadian consumers would consider in obtaining online reputation management repair services. As well:

- Organizations that provide services, demonstrably, solely outside of Canada are not in scope. Organizations, however, did not need to reside in Canada in order to be considered.
- A street address for the organization being tested was preferable, although one organization in our testing does not have a street address.
- Organizations that provide services strictly to businesses are not in scope.
- Organizations must have a credible website, and business presence, to be included.

The Organizations Evaluated

Defend My Name Digital Broadcast Network LLC Robert Russo (online contact form or available online chat)	Reputation Friendly (online contact form) No street address Location Charlotte, North Carolina
EbadPress (appears to be out of business) ²³⁰ Adviatech Corp. Christopher Kazor	Reputation Hawk Chris Martin, Founder chris@reputationhawk.com
Remove It Now, LLC Tyronne Jacques renamed to RemoveSlander.com support@removeitnow.com	Reputation Professor eBusiness Architects, LLC David Daniels reputationprofessor@gmail.com , sales@gadook.com
Reputation Armor William Clay (online contact form), Address – Salem Virginia UPS Store	Reputation Repair Experts Robert Walsh (online contact form)
Reputation Defender, Inc./Reputation.com Michael Fertik, CEO info@reputationdefender.com	9th sphere ²³¹ Etalco Ltd. Ezra Silverton, President Info@9thsphere.com

During the course of this project, eBadPress went out of business. The website www.ebadpress.com remains, as does the website for the parent company Adviatech. However, the website for eBadPress remains effectively non-functional.

Objectives

The testing objectives are:

- Establish the credibility of each ORM company
- Determine what each company does to repair consumer's online reputations and the method of repair.

²³⁰ During the course of this project eBadPress appeared to go out of business. The website www.ebadpress.com remains, as does the website for the parent company Adviatech. However, the website for eBadPress remains effectively non-functional.

²³¹ 9th sphere was not included in our initial testing because information on their website regarding online reputation management did not suggest that it was the service they provided to the consumer. Given 9th sphere's reputation in the web design and Internet marketing industry in Canada, and Mr. Ezra Silverton's involvement in the industry, we decided to ask him to be a Key Informant. It was at that time that we were told that 9th sphere did perform the services. We then decided to add them to the list of organizations for evaluation.

- Determine the extent of expertise in the areas of search strategy and search engine optimization as it relates to the skills required to repair online reputations.
- Review customer experiences and criticisms of each company to determine the credibility of the skills and methods of online reputation repair.

Procedures

For each ORM organization an evaluation grid was be completed.

To complete the evaluation grid, the following procedures were used:

- Online research
- Questionnaire
- Direct discussion/interview

Online research

For each ORM company the following online research was conducted:

- Review company website
- Review domain information
- Review social media/networking presence
- Review technical capabilities (search engine optimization)
- The online research was conducted using the following tools:
 - a browser to review websites and website code
 - online services including:
 - directories
 - search engines
 - keyword, search engine optimization and domain tools
 - social media and consumer complaint sites
 - a desktop deep search application
 - a data collection tool to manage the research findings

A questionnaire was developed and distributed to each ORM company.

Questionnaire

We developed and distributed a questionnaire to each ORM company. The request was sent through e-mail if one was available on their website. Otherwise, it was sent through their contact form. The questionnaires were identical for all companies. Along with each questionnaire request we indicated our purpose for sending the questionnaire and requested a follow up discussion to be conducted by telephone. Second requests were sent for the organizations that did not respond initially.

Of the 10 organizations tested, only two (Reputation Hawk and 9th sphere) responded to the questionnaire, and granted an interview. In both cases the interview was with the head and founder of the organization.

See Appendix VI

Interviews

For each questionnaire completed we requested a follow up interview with a representative from the ORM company. The interviews were structured to be similar in nature across all companies but were also targeted based on responses to the questionnaire and the findings from the online research. The discussions were used to verify the information researched and provided.

Evaluation Grid

The purpose of this Evaluation Grid is to allow aggregation and review of these Online Reputation Management organizations, and the services they provide, with nonintrusive, and non-invasive testing. This is the primary section of testing/evaluation and covers the primary testing objectives.

The focus of the evaluation and analysis is consumer centric and the Evaluation Grid used to evaluate the products and/or services was assembled from issues and criteria gleaned from academic, online and other literature reviewed. The Evaluation Grid was assembled with an emphasis on assisting consumers to act as effective marketplace participants, particularly with respect to consumption choices. Key informants were interviewed before and/or after the evaluation to assist in determining the criteria and in analyzing the results and developing the recommendations.

This Evaluation Grid was designed to evaluate in ways that may for the average consumer be difficult to carry out. We did this in order to get more detailed information. However, the recommendations contain a summary grid focused more on consumers and their ability to make choices regarding ORM organizations

This Evaluation Grid is augmented by a questionnaire submitted to all organizations tested, and by interviews (where granted) with a representative of that organization.

Explanations are added below as necessary for greater clarification.

Evaluation Grid

Evaluation	Explanation
Business Information	The ORM industry has been accused of being less than reputable, particularly in the service of individuals. The terms shady, fly-by-night and lack of integrity are among those bandied about. This first set of evaluation items is to establish the basics of any business – who they are, how long they have been in business, where they are located, and whether they have made efforts to get accredited in the discipline. Are they a verifiable organization? Knowing that an organization has been in business for a while, assumes the responsibilities of a public company or has a clear place of business other than on the Internet can be clear indicators that the business is not a fly-by-night organization
Company Name	
Service Website Address	Do they have a separate site for ORM? Website address, perhaps a subdomain, dealing specifically with ORM Repair. Often this is the home page of the organization, particularly where ORM Repair is their primary or only service.
Website Address	
Company Address	Do they have physical premises discernable as a business?
City	
Province/State	
Postal Code/Zip Code	
Country	
Phone Number	
Owners/Officers	Is there a face to the organization?
Email Address(es)	Are they easily and directly accessible?
Public or Private Company	Public companies have greater reporting and regulatory requirements, making it easier to gather useful information about them.
Date of Start of Business	Typically, organizations in business longer are more established.
Date of Start of Reputation Repair	Indicates whether ORM Repair was their first service, and to some degree their experience in the area.
Google Maps Address Verification	Is there a physical location behind their stated address?
Discernible Size of Company	As the cartoon in the <i>The New Yorker</i> noted, “On the Internet, no one knows you’re a dog.” Organizations need not be large to perform good services, but knowing the size of the organization is useful when their public face can easily imply they are larger than they really are. The barriers to entry for this type of service can be very low: a website, a browser and an Internet connection.
Business Directories	

Evaluation	Explanation
Best of the Web	The Internet's oldest search directory, starting in 1994. Has several directories under the Best of the Web banner. Businesses pay \$150 annually, or \$400 for life.
Bloomberg Businessweek	Contains listings of public and private companies.
Google Business Directory	Just requires submission of website by owner. Categories based on OpenID, a large public directory. Useful to give the scope of a category.
Local Business Directory	Are they available in local Canadian directories?
Open Directory	"The Open Directory Project is the largest, most comprehensive human-edited directory of the Web. It is constructed and maintained by a vast, global community of volunteer editors." A partnership with AOL. http://www.dmoz.org/docs/en/about.html
Superpages	.com is the U.S. service. In Canada superpages.ca is Yellow Pages (see below). Unique in that it backs organizations in its listing with a SuperGuarantee TM
Yahoo Directory	"The first large scale directory of the Internet. Lists sites categorized by topic and location." http://dir.yahoo.com/
Yellow Pages .ca and .com	Focus is primarily on local services given the requirement for a location for any search.
Canada	
Canadian Business Directory	Canadian directory of business listings. Free listings for businesses. Searched with location requirement.
Business Credentials	
Better Business Bureau Accreditation	U.S. BBB – "If a business has been accredited by the BBB, it means BBB has determined that the business meets <u>accreditation standards</u> which include a commitment to make a good faith effort to resolve any consumer complaints. BBB accredited businesses pay a fee for accreditation review/monitoring and for support of BBB services to the public." http://www.bbb.org/us/Business-Accreditation/
Google Qualifications	Google has several accreditations dealing with Google AdWords and Google Analytics. These accreditations, particularly the Google AdWords accreditation, demonstrate a commitment to an understanding of a discipline that can be key to SEO. Not having this accreditation is not seen as a negative, but having it demonstrates effort and commitment.
Microsoft adExcellence Member	Similar to the Google Advertising accreditations, the Microsoft adExcellence accreditation indicates a commitment to skills that are a key part of SEO – specifically the use of keywords and pay-per-click ads.
SEMPO	Search Engine Marketing Professional Organization; An organization allowing corporate and individual memberships for those involved in Search Engine Marketing, requiring skills very similar to much of what is done in ORM Repair.
TrustLink	A Better Business Bureau program that helps consumers evaluate businesses. Businesses can join for free, and it helps promote their business. Enables consistent organization and consumer provided material to be made available to consumers through a trusted organization, the Better Business Bureau. Allows for consumer/customer reviews.
Truste	"The leading Internet privacy services and seal provider since 1997, TRUSTe privacy seals help thousands of businesses promote online safety and trust, and guide consumers to Web sites that protect their privacy online. Companies can choose from privacy certification and compliance services that include the Web

Evaluation	Explanation
	<p>Privacy Seal, the EU Safe Harbor Privacy Seal as outlined by the U.S. Department of Commerce and the European Union, and the COPPA Kid's Seal Program, which has been approved by the Federal Trade Commission as an authorized safe harbor under the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act. Companies in need of an online privacy policy can also use the TRUSTe Privacy Policy Generator to create a professional privacy policy customized to their Web site. By displaying the TRUSTe privacy seal, Web sites can build trust with their customers and increase sales and registrations." www.truste.com</p> <p>Given the nature of personal information that may be gathered during ORM Repair work, the Truste certification indicates an organization that clearly outlines their Privacy Policy.</p>
Canada	
Canadian Marketing Association	Indicates acceptance and adherence to the Canadian Marketing Association's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.
Domain Information	Site Details (Degree of professionalism, and longevity). Some companies in this industry operate under different names. At times, domain name information can give an indication of this. The age of the domain and the length of renewal, as well, show a commitment to the endeavour.
Domain Registrant Contact	Contact details for individual/company who registered the domain
Domain Telephone	Phone of individual/company who registered the domain
Registered Email	Email of the individual/company who registered the domain
Registered By	Name of individual who registered the domain name
Registrar	What company the domain registration is with
Domain Created	
Domain Expiry	
Domain Updated	
General Top Level Domains	Related top level domains (for other countries, also good SEO)
Number of sites hosted on IP	Sites on dedicated servers can indicate a more established company
Website Details	Much of the effort to repair an individual's reputation involves strong SEO skills. Does the organization use strong SEO skills in their own sites?
Technical	
Build Technology	Understanding of development capabilities
Site Displays in Top Browsers	Do they show properly in all browsers? An organization's website should show properly in all the major browsers (Chrome, Internet Explorer 7-9, Firefox, Safari. Opera) on multiple operating systems (Windows, OS X, Linux)
W3C HTML Validation	Understanding of development capabilities
H1/H2/H3 Headers	
Img Alt Tags	Graphics alt.text tag
Web Analytics	Web analytics demonstrates a good grounding for SEO
sitemap.xml	Good SEO practice
Error page	Good website practice
Meta Tags	Metadata
description	Specific details for metadata, gives an indication of how the organization sees itself
keywords	Specific details for metadata, , gives an indication of how the organization sees

Evaluation	Explanation
	itself and how consumers search for them
Content	
Conversion Form	Google values sites with Conversion forms.
Privacy Policy	Google values websites with Privacy Policies.
Terms of Use	Google values sites with Terms of Use.
Copyright Date	Often an indication of the year the site was last updated
Level of Grammar	Is the grammar aimed at the appropriate audience? Should not be aimed at post-graduate level.
Site Usage	
Traffic Ranking	Where does the site fall in the traffic rankings of websites? Do many people visit it?
History	
Internet Archive Wayback Machine	Do they have a presence on the Internet Wayback Machine? How many pages? How many versions, given that each version stored is intended to represent a significant change in the site's design or content.
SEO Capabilities	
Website Grader Ranking One	SEO Website Grader – an available tool to give a simple overview of a sites SEO capability based on an evaluation of several million websites
Website Grader Ranking Two	See above
Search Engine Results	Search engine results for following terms: online reputation management, online reputation repair, remove blog post, remove google search listing, remove negative search results, remove ripoff report, reputation management, reputation repair, remove youtube video, remove facebook photo and remove flickr photo
Social Media Presence	
Blog	Blog/Active blog
Number of Posts	Additional blog information
First Blog Post	Additional blog information
Last Blog Post	Last blog post
Twitter	Twitter
Number of Tweets	Additional blog information
Last Tweet	Additional blog information
Number of Following/Followers/Listed	Followers in social media
Facebook	Facebook
Number of People Likes	Additional blog information
YouTube	Additional blog information
Number of Videos	Additional YouTube information
Total Number of Video Views	Additional YouTube information
Last Video Post	Additional YouTube information
Number of Channel Subscribers	Followers in social media
LinkedIn	LinkedIn
Number of Employees on LinkedIn	Additional LinkedIn information

Evaluation	Explanation
Number of Followers	Followers in social media
Podcasts	Podcast
White paper publication	White papers, or similar documents and research demonstrate thought leadership in the industry.
Media References	
Online Media	Demonstration of good SEO.
Traditional Media (Print/Radio/TV)	Typically traditional media seeks the advice of the more credible and reputable organizations.
Relationships	
Related Companies	Other business pursuits/Conflict of interest/Related Companies. Do they provide business services from other companies? Important to know the focus of their business efforts. Are they involved in Affiliate Marketing?
Related Websites	Relationship to people sites (e.g., Spokeo), or similar ORM sites? Are they connected to any of the sites that make negative information available? Close relationships with sites that contain damaging material can indicate astute business practice, or unethical practices. Our expectation is more the former.
Canada	
References to Business in Canada	Do they indicate a reference to Canada in their published material?
Aware of Differences in Canada	Are they aware of differences in Canada regarding availability and legal issues surrounding information and its removal in Canada?
Act in a legal capacity in Canada	Can they act as legal advisor in Canada?
Content Testing	
Method of Repair	How do they manage to repair an individual's reputation? Are they clear about it on their website, indicating that true removal is rare, and that moving down information in search results listings, essentially concealment, is the common method?
Definition of Repair	Particularly for search engine results pages, how is removal/repair defined (remove or "push off first page, or subsequent pages in search engine results")? For non-search engine sites, removal or mitigation (explanation, modification) are typically the only options.
How is repair processed?	How do they manage the process?
Define which search terms?	Do they define for which search terms (and whether broad or exact or phrase)?
Define the number of search pages removed from?	Is it just the first page of Google/Bing or several pages, given that 'removal' is typically just concealment?
Do they find information or only repair what is requested?	Ideally an organization will look for material other than just what was identified by the client.
One-time fix or continuing monitoring and repair?	How long is anything pushed down?/What happens if it reappears?
How long does repair take?	Additional repair information
Can information be removed anonymously?	
What happens if content reappears?	Additional repair information
Do they use legal counsel?	Do they use legal counsel?

Evaluation	Explanation
Client Details – Privacy	
What is done with private client information?	What do they do with personal information once they have finished the work?
How do they guarantee privacy?	How do they guarantee the privacy of data they collect from you?
Remove Information	What do they remove, repair or move? Aside from trademark or copyright infringements, changes in information that has been cached, or defamation/libel search engines will almost never remove references. Can be checked by consumer, but all information may be difficult to find without contact.
Search	
Google	
Bing	
Yahoo	Yahoo (uses Bing as the basis or search results)
Social Networking	Social Networking Photo Video Types (with and without owner's/host's permission)
Facebook	
Twitter	
YouTube	
MySpace	
Flickr	
LinkedIn	
Other Sources	
Blogs	Additional source of potential bad information
Blog Comments	Additional source of potential bad information
Discussion Forums	
Other	Can they remove “press” articles?
Client Counseling	
Demonstrate understanding of requests	Do they demonstrate an understanding of the problem/client request?
General advice to clients	What general advice do they give to ensure the individual does not get involved in reputation management problems again?
Explain implications/expectations	Do they explain the impact of what information is there and the implications of trying to remove and expectation of success (time and probability and method)?
Recommendations for self-repair	Do they assist the consumer in crafting a strategy?
Assisted repair vs. self repair	What can a user do that they cannot? And vice-versa?
Information that cannot be removed	
Warnings about the industry	
Monitoring	
What is monitored?	What do they monitor?/Where do they monitor?
Frequency of monitoring	On what periodic basis?
Price and Guarantees	Price and Promise and Guarantees. Can be checked by consumer, but all information may be difficult to find without contact.
Fees	Fees – once, periodic, upfront or on success? Estimated fee?
Estimates	Additional price/guarantee details

Evaluation	Explanation
Free consultation	Additional price/guarantee details
Method of payment	How is payment made (e.g., credit card, PayPal, on account)
Payment due	What happens if they do not remove material, if fee is paid up front?
Guarantee	For how long is the removal guaranteed? What is guaranteed?
Testimonials and/or References	Additional price/guarantee details
Complaint Sites (see note below)	This is a primary source for consumers when checking for services of an organization. It is also the source of the reason many consumers go to such organizations, in that complaints or other inappropriate information is on the Internet about them. The complaints on the Internet about these organizations may be less than reliable for at least two reasons. These organizations can be good at removing complaints about themselves, and it appears that at least one organization has set up a false complaint site. Complaint sites references/Consumer groups references. Can be checked by consumer, but results are often false and/or malicious. The BBB is typically not subject to this same concern. These sites can give a view of the quality of the service, particularly if they respond to reviews. But this is unfiltered information, and can be like panning for gold for consumers. Tough to find, but valuable.
Better Business Bureau	Complaint site – see above. Can check out businesses. Consumers can file complaints. Good information may be tough to find, but valuable if successfully sifted out.
CompanyNameSucks.com	Complaint site – consumers can “Write a quick company review about a bad business without registering or giving your name!” www.companynamesucks.com
ComplaintNow	Complaint site – “voice your complaints. Get attention from businesses for your complaints. Read other complaints. Comment on them. Help others to solve their problems. See how good a business is doing; handling the complaints.” www.complaintnow.com
Complaints Board	Complaint site – “Made by the people for the people. The most trusted and popular complaints website” www.complaintsboard.com
Consumer Affairs.com	Complaint site – “ConsumerAffairs.com is a private, non-governmental entity that empowers consumers by providing a forum for their complaints and a means for them to be contacted by lawyers if their complaints have legal merit. Your complaints and comments may be published, shared with the news media and reviewed by attorneys at no cost to you.” https://www.consumeraffairs.com/php/a_report.php Consumeraffairs.com makes money through the provision of a reputation management service to organizations by providing them with information about complaints about them.
iReputationReviews.com	Complaint site – Interesting site – possibly not an objective complaint site. Allegations on other complaint sites suggest it has been set up by one of the ORM repair organizations. www.ireputationreviews.com
iRipoff	Complaint site – for consumer complaints. www.ripoff.com
My3Cents	Complaint site – for consumer complaints www.my3cents.com
Pissed Consumer	Complaint site – for consumer complaints www.pissedconsumer.com
RipOff Report	Complaint site – perhaps the most well-known and damaging of the consumer complaint sites. www.ripoffreport.com
Scam.com	Complaint site – another consumer complaint site, aimed more at scams than regular consumer issues with legitimate businesses. www.scam.com
ScamFound	Complaint site – another consumer complaint site, aimed more at scams than regular consumer issues with legitimate businesses. www.scamfound.com

Evaluation	Explanation
The Consumerist	Complaint site – typical complaint site for consumers http://consumerist.com
The Squeaky Wheel	Complaint site – www.thesqueakywheel.com/WeAreTheBest.html

Complaint Sites

We conducted an extensive review of complaint sites to determine what valid complaints and testimonials may be out there about these organizations. What we found was chaos. We decided to not include any of the postings from these sites in the report, given the scathing nature and inconsistencies. Following are some examples of the unusual results in the complaint sites:

- at least one individual, and because of the varying user names there could have been more, suggested that one of the complaint sites had been set up by one of the reputation companies and false reviews were being posted, and some reviews were being removed.
- Some reviews, almost verbatim and scathingly negative, were posted to more than one company.
- Some reviews followed a pattern that might indicate they were not true reviews.
- The protection of complaint sites under Section 230 of the Communicating Decency Act contributes in some ways to a lack of credibility of these sites. There is no expectation that anonymity can be unclocked, and individuals are allowed to carry on maliciously.

We would encourage any consumer to review these sites and draw their own conclusion. We think that would be a valuable input into any decision as to which reputation company they might use.

We limited our examination, and publishing in this report, to only the Better Business Bureau results, of which there were two – one for each of Reputation Defender/Reputation.com and one for Reputation Armor.

Summary of Evaluation of ORM Organizations

Defend My Name www.defendmyname.com

Completed Questionnaire?	No
Granted Interview?	No
Type of Business	Discernible business, related to Internet marketing companies and services. Reputation management may not be the primary function of this group of companies, it appears.
Business Credentials	Minimal presence in business directories. None apparent.
Website Comments	Professional website. Has links to news organizations, but no indication of why and no link to articles about the company.
Demonstrated SEO capability	Website demonstrates strong search engine optimization capabilities.
SEO Keywords and Search Engine Rankings	Shows strongly for relevant keywords. Search engine rankings are strong for online reputation management terms.
Social Media Presence	Weak social media presence. No blog.
ORM Repair - how they explain it.	Well described repair process.
Accessible - access to someone with adequate expertise for consumer problem?	Does not appear to be accessible to the typical consumer.
Privacy	No privacy policy or explanation of how they deal with client information. They do have a Terms of Service and explicit and relevant Ethics Policy http://www.defendmyname.com/terms-of-service.html
Pricing and Guarantees	Custom pricing. Guarantee not stated.
Canada Relevance	No mention of Canadian services or understanding.
Comments	During the course of the research the focus of this company appears to move more to serving businesses than consumers. One testimonial, ostensibly objective, coming from separate site is from a related party of Defend My Name.

Remove It Now (Remove Slander) www.removeitnow.com, www.removeslander.com

Completed Questionnaire?	No
Granted Interview?	No
Type of Business	New company in 2010. Remove it Now provided a book to assist people in repairing their own reputation. During the course of testing they added the capability of providing a similar service for consumers, and changed the name to Remove Slander.
Business Credentials	Credible company with verifiable address.
Website Comments	Professional website for their market.
Demonstrated SEO capability	Reasonable search engine optimization capabilities.
SEO Keywords and Search Engine Rankings	Keywords for the Remove It Now site are appropriate, although limited. Keywords for the Remove Slander site have definite focus on removal of felony convictions and slander.
Social Media Presence	Social media presence is limited to Reputation Radio on blogtalkradio.
ORM Repair – how they explain it.	Comprehensive explanation contained in their book. Not for the complex ORM issue, but a good start for the basics in one place. Material included could be gleaned from various sources on the Internet, but this is made available and packaged in a consumer ready fashion.
Accessible – access to someone with adequate expertise for consumer problem?	Given the nature of their service, sales of this book, limited accessibility is not relevant.
Privacy	Not applicable
Pricing and Guarantees	\$99, but is often on sale for considerably less.
Canada Relevance	Nothing noted.
Comments	Much of what is in the book can be gleaned from websites on the Internet. Nevertheless, as it goes on sale regularly, it is a good resource for the do it yourselfer

eBadPress www.ebadpress.com

Completed Questionnaire	No
Granted interview	No
Type of Business	Attached to an Internet marketing company/search engine optimization company, but the business closed website to ORM offerings during our evaluation.
Business Credentials	N/A
Website Comments	N/A
Demonstrated SEO capability	N/A
SEO Keywords and Search Engine Rankings	N/A
Social Media Presence	N/A
ORM Repair - how they explain it.	N/A
Accessible - access to someone with adequate expertise for consumer problem?	N/A
Privacy	N/A
Pricing and Guarantees	N/A
Complaints	N/A
Canada Relevance	N/A
Comments	N/A

Reputation Armor www.reputationarmor.com

	Reputation Armor
Completed Questionnaire	No
Granted interview	No
Type of Business	Solely online reputation management. Has been in the business longer than most, since 2007. Consumer focused.
Business Credentials	Verifiable address, but according to the Better Business Bureau “this company's address in Salem, VA goes to a mail drop box at a UPS Store.” Confirmed through Google Maps.
Website Comments	Well constructed website.
Demonstrated SEO capability	Strong SEO skills
SEO Keywords and Search Engine Rankings	Does not show well in search engine rankings for “online reputation management” or “online reputation repair” Keywords. Its strong Keywords are “remove blog post”, “remove google search listing”, remove negative search results”, “remove ripoff report” which are good consumer ORM Keywords. Also placed well for “reputation management”.
Social Media Presence	There are three blogs for Reputation Armor. Although, one of them is not set up for visibility on the Internet. The other two appear similar, but are not linked to a visible place on the Reputation Armor website. reputationarmor.net, reputationarmorblog.com, blog.reputationarmor.com Has Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and LinkedIn presence, but not much content.
ORM Repair - how they explain it.	Considerable information on website regarding how they repair. The system appears formulaic.
Accessible - access to someone with adequate expertise for consumer problem?	No evidence of accessibility, other than a form for free consultation and service quote. No names of staff or executives on website. No knowledge of address other than a post office box at street address for a UPS Store.
Privacy	Privacy statement on website.
Pricing and Guarantees	No set fee. Contact them for quote.
Complaints	The Better Business Bureau have given Reputation Armor a BBB rating of F.
Canada Relevance	None apparent.
Comments	

Reputation Defender/Reputation.com www.reputationdefender.com www.reputation.com

Completed Questionnaire?	No
Granted Interview?	No
Type of Business	Focused solely on online reputation management for consumers.
Business Credentials	Credible business. Has a focus on good Public Relations for the organization, as evidenced by the considerable mainstream media attention given to Michael Fertik, CEO. As well, Mr. Fertik has written, along with colleague David Thompson, Wild West 2.0 focusing on the issues of online reputation management for individuals.
Website Comments	Strong website from design, content and search engine optimization capability. Have a free service for individuals to check their reputation online.
Demonstrated SEO capability	Strong.
SEO Keywords and Search Engine Rankings	Search engine rankings are high for standard search terms, particularly "online reputation management," "remove negative search results," "remove ripoff report," "reputation management." Google Keyword Tool shows high for standard ORM search terms.
Social Media Presence	Very strong and sustained Facebook, Twitter, blog and YouTube presence. Demonstrate a clear understanding of their audience.
ORM Repair – how they explain it.	Provide a clear understandable plan/process and have consumer focused products. "1. Protect your personal info. 2. Define your image . 3. Defend your reputation. 4. Monitor your image." More information available. Site aimed well for their intended audience although reading level is much higher than average.
Accessible – access to someone with adequate expertise for consumer problem?	Access to material through social media. Access to those who can help. Not so much a boutique firm like Reputation Hawk or 9 th sphere, so access to senior people at the organization is less important than a clearly defined consumer product, priced reasonably. It does have high-end packages – see below. MyPrivacy – Protect your privacy from \$4.15/month MyReputation – Manage your reputation from \$10.95/month My Privacy and MyReputation – Protect your privacy and reputation from \$99/year Also have higher tier packages for \$3,000, \$5,000 and \$10,000 based on the number of personal websites, biographies and other mentions they will put online for the consumer
Privacy	Privacy policy available online.
Pricing and Guarantees	Clearly stated prices for products.
Complaints	Have an 'A' rating with the Better Business Bureau. Difficult to judge complaints from elsewhere because of what appear to be a multitude of false complaints across many complaints boards.
Canada Relevance	Nothing stated.
Comments	Appears to be a leader in the field of consumer online reputation management. Has significant financial backing, infrastructure, packaged processes (some free) for consumers and a tremendous media machine.

Reputation Friendly www.reputationfriendly.com

Completed Questionnaire	No
Granted Interview	No
Type of Business	Solely ORM with a focus on business and consumers. Indicates 6 and 10 years SEO experience on their website.
Business Credentials	Difficult to determine. No address provided, other than Charlotte, North Carolina in their FAQ's.
Website Comments	Current, well designed website.
Demonstrated SEO capability	Strong technical and display SEO.
SEO Keywords and Search Engine Rankings	Search engine rankings were strong for only one Keyword, "remove ripoff report" Google Keywords Tool indicated the website shows well for many common search terms/Keywords.
Social Media Presence	No apparent blog, and only a trivial Twitter presence. The blog at www.reputationfriendly.org , started late in 2010, is not connected or linked to/from their website. Much of it is just a replica of their website material, not what would be considered a typical blog, not particularly useful to a consumer.
ORM Repair - how they explain it.	Very clearly explained on website. They have a consistent apparently cookie cutter approach.
Accessible - access to someone with adequate expertise for consumer problem?	Difficult to assure oneself of who is behind the company, although for a consumer based product with a single fee for all, it is not going after the high-end market, which might typically want greater assistance. Standard approach, well defined, may not be the best for a particularly serious ORM issue.
Privacy	No privacy statement
Pricing and Guarantees	\$199 first month, \$99 a month thereafter. They suggest paying for at least 12 months.
Canada Relevance	Nothing noted.
Comments	They state in their FAQs, for no apparent reason, that they are not affiliated with any other ORM organization, other than to serve as a back end for a couple of other ORM organizations.

Reputation Hawk www.reputationhawk.com

Completed Questionnaire?	Yes
Granted Interview?	Yes
Type of Business	Focus solely on ORM. One of the original companies in the business. Small company – focused on small number of chosen clients.
Business Credentials	Verifiable address, although residential. Founder completed questionnaire and had a particularly candid, and informative Key Informant interview. Small organization, led by knowledgeable individual running a boutique type operation – not for the average consumer looking for a Facebook picture removal. Has received national press regarding his work.
Website Comments	Weak old design for a website. Not maintained well. However, has some very insightful information.
Demonstrated SEO capability	From website and evaluation of SEO the site demonstrates only average SEO skills.
SEO Keywords and Search Engine Rankings	Search engine rankings high for “online reputation management,” and “reputation management” Google Keywords Tools ranks site high on online reputation management Keywords
Social Media Presence	Blog is not well updated. No Twitter or Facebook presence.
ORM Repair – how they explain it.	From the Reputation Hawk website: “In short, this is what we do. Research the problem. Develop a plan. Generate more positive publicity about you or your company on the net. Build the “authority” of that publicity and convince the search engines that the positive sites are more valid than the negative sites. Continually monitor the situation to make sure the positive publicity remains front and center, and any negative sites are outside of the top 20 search engine results. The entire process is similar to a game of chess. Search engines use complex algorithms to decide how web sites are ranked. We have to stay on top of those constantly changing algorithms in order to beat the false or negative sites with the truthful or positive sites about you or your company. This is referred to as internet/online reputation management.”
Accessible – access to someone with adequate expertise for consumer problem?	Very accessible. One of only two organizations who responded to our questionnaire and granted a telephone interview with us. Chris Martin deals directly with all clients and does not take on all clients who request his services (from telephone interview).
Privacy	No privacy policy, although there is a clear statement that only Chris Martin the founder of the organization is the one who sees private personal information.
Pricing and Guarantees	Based on a case-by-case basis for ORM repair.
Canada Relevance	Nothing noted.
Comments	On the face of it, Reputation Hawk looks to have weak website and SEO skills. Looking deeper into the website copy and through discussion with the Founder Chris Martin, it becomes clear that his business is one of carefully selecting clients, much like a boutique operation. It is not the \$100-a-month fee based organization, like some other consumer-based reputation management organizations. Their current services are more on a consulting basis for custom ORM work to solve a specific problem. He indicated that they have a strong backroom infrastructure (corporate network) to support strong ORM and SEO activity.

Reputation Professor www.reputationprofessor.com www.reputationprofessor.ca

Completed Questionnaire	No
Granted interview	No
Type of Business	Offshoot of Internet Marketing organization. No Canadian operations, despite being one of the few organizations with a .ca domain.
Business Credentials	Verifiable organization. Now related to Gadook Sales.
Website Comments	.com website and .ca websites are very different. .ca site looks amateurish and vague relative to other related organizations. It does, however, have a considerable list of links and connections to useful ORM sites.
Demonstrated SEO capability	Relatively strong SEO skills demonstrated on the .com website.
SEO Keywords and Search Engine Rankings	Search engine rankings high for only "reputation management" for the .com site Search engine rankings high for "online reputation management", "remove negative search results", and "reputation management," but only in Canada results. Google Keywords Tool shows a limited number of Keywords in ORM related to both sites. Only one other site of the 10 had fewer listed words from the Google Keywords Tool.
Social Media Presence	No social media presence.
ORM Repair – how they explain it.	Explained as a campaign of standard push down search results material. Base level appears template based. Description is broad. Not significant detail about the service.
Accessible – access to someone with adequate expertise for consumer problem?	Small organization. Email address functional. Owner responded directly to one email for clarification, but did not respond to questionnaire or request for interview.
Privacy	Yes, but more an agreement for services than for what they will do with a consumer's private information.
Pricing and Guarantees	Prices start at \$100 monthly, but indicate that to be a starting fee.
Canada Relevance	.ca domain, but no specific Canada related capabilities or focus.
Comments	

Reputation Repair Experts www.reputationrepairexperts.com

Completed Questionnaire?	No
Granted Interview?	No
Type of Business	Solely in the ORM business for individuals and business, but owned, it appears by an individual involved in broader Internet marketing services.
Business Credentials	Canadian company located in Ottawa.
Website Comments	Simple website. Put together with minimal effort.
Demonstrated SEO capability	Moderate SEO capabilities.
SEO Keywords and Search Engine Rankings	Weak results in both SEO Keywords through Google Keywords Tool and Search engine results, notably the weakest of the 10 organizations.
Social Media Presence	No social media presence.
ORM Repair – how they explain it.	Describe ORM candidly on website.
Accessible – access to someone with adequate expertise for consumer problem?	No access to any real name or clear address. They indicate on website that those are available after first contact. Connected, it appears to Peter Lessard an Ottawa Internet Marketer. This is one of his businesses, but difficult to tell. Did not respond for interview or questionnaire.
Privacy	Yes – addresses privacy issues related to ORM.
Pricing and Guarantees	\$399 to \$899 monthly
Canada Relevance	Canadian company serving the North American market
Comments	

9th Sphere www.9thsphere.com

Completed Questionnaire	Yes
Granted interview	Yes
Type of Business	Web Design, Internet Marketing, ORM – serving primarily businesses and high end individuals in the ORM market.
Business Credentials	Google AdWords qualification Voted Best SEO Company in Toronto
Website Comments	Strong web design.
Demonstrated SEO capability	Strong SEO, technically and content for their market
SEO Keywords and Search Engine Rankings	Google Keyword Tool finds clear focus on Web Design, Internet Marketing and SEO, their main businesses. Search engine rankings placed for “online reputation management” and “reputation management”. Results were higher for searches in Canada
Social Media Presence	Strong social media presence. Blog, Twitter and Facebook
ORM Repair – how they explain it.	<p>“The way I look at it at SEO is more related to a website whether it be a company or an individual's. Basically increasing the ranking of your website. Whereas ORM is typically not your website that you are optimizing, it is usually other websites that you are optimizing. There is a distinct difference between optimizing another's website or optimizing your website. Obviously the first step that we will suggest for any ORM client is to claim your name online. There are challenges around people with the same names and their different names with different spellings but the first thing you want to do is claim your real name online. And we suggest register your own domain name. Make sure you can get your URLs with some of the social network sites. We suggest doing it directly with the most popular social media sites.”</p> <p>“It's generally best for people to create their own content. Everything else can be done by the ORM company. People give us access to their accounts to update their content. But obviously we get approval before we update anything.”</p> <p>From Key Informant Interview</p>
Accessible – access to someone with adequate expertise for consumer problem?	Easy access to founder and President Ezra Silvertan. Useful in significant ORM cases. A boutique firm for ORM services.
Privacy	Privacy Policy. Clearly describes adherence to PIPEDA.
Pricing and Guarantees	\$125 per hour. Initial efforts minimum three months, for an estimate of \$2,200 to \$2,500.
Canada Relevance	Situated near Toronto, focused primarily on Canadian clients.
Comments	

The Public Interest Network of the Consumers Council

What is the Public Interest Network

PIN participants form a national network of thoughtful, knowledgeable Canadian consumers.

The Council consults the PIN online about important public and consumer policy issues being considered by government, corporations and consumer organizations. The Consumers Council of Canada owns and operates the PIN.

PIN is a group of informed consumers and people involved in their communities. They have volunteered to join the network and respond to surveys regarding consumer issues. Potential members complete a short questionnaire to provide basic demographic information.

PIN participants are:

- Educated and informed consumers at the community level;
- Aware of consumer and public policy issues;
- Or have been involved and influential in their communities of interest;
- Or have expressed opinions and taken a stand on issues.

PIN participants agree to be consulted online about important public and consumer policy issues being considered by government, corporations and consumer organizations.

The Council tries to balance the PIN but does not seek to build a statistically representative sample of Canadians. PIN participants may be more educated with higher incomes than the general Canadian population. As active, aware, critical and informed consumers, PIN participants can offer insights into issues and future trends emerging among Canadian consumers.

The Objectives of This Questionnaire

From an educated involved group of individuals, not statistically valid, we will determine an understanding of their awareness, actions and thoughts on issues and their resolutions:

- Do people make efforts to check their online reputation?
- Do they find information that they would consider inappropriate?
- Are they aware of any of the organizations under review by this research?
- What should stakeholders do to mitigate/resolve issues?
- What are the risks from the availability, accessibility and the use/or misuse of this information?

The Survey

Online Reputation Management – Questionnaire

1. Have you made an effort to determine what information is available about you online- in other words, to find your online reputation?
2. Have you come across information about yourself, or your family, on the Internet that was inappropriately available or at risk of being misused to your detriment?
3. If Yes, please explain? How did you find out about it? What action, if any, did you take? What was the result?
4. What do you see as the risks to individuals, particularly as consumers, of the increased availability and accessibility of their information on the Internet? Please give any specific examples you may have.
5. Are you aware of any of these organizations that provide Online Reputation Management/Repair services?
 - Reputation Defender
 - Reputation Hawk
 - Reputation Armor
 - Reputation Friendly

Remove It Now
 Reputation Repair Experts
 eBadPress
 Reputation Professor
 Defend My Name²³²

If Yes, please outline your experience with them.

6. What should search engines do to assist consumers in managing, protecting or repairing their online information?
7. What should social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, do to assist consumers in managing, protecting or repairing their online information?
8. What should other sites, (e.g., business web sites, blogs, ripoff report sites, discussion forums) do to assist consumers in managing, protecting or repairing their online information, given that they are often the purveyors of this information?
9. What responsibilities do consumers have in maintaining and protecting their own online reputation?
10. What can government or the regulatory authorities do to mitigate the inappropriate availability and misuse of consumer information online?
11. What can consumer protection groups do to mitigate the inappropriate use and availability of consumer information?

PIN Survey Results

The survey was primarily comprised of open-ended questions. For each question below, we have stated the question, summarized the primary response and then under Specific Responses included some of the representative and relevant or compelling comments.

Effort to Determine Reputation

Question: Have you made an effort to determine what information is available about you online – in other words, to find your online reputation?

More than half had at least searched for their name online. Google, Google, and Google was the consistent response about method. Some check Facebook, but nowhere to the same degree as Google. This may be because many expect that Facebook results are included in Google, but until recently they have not, in fact, typically been included. Many check regularly. There is a clear awareness of the need to check one's online/digital footprint.

Specific responses

"Google search of my name (which is an uncommon one) including with or without initials, nickname or full name, etc. I do this every couple of years when the mood strikes. Not 100% enthusiastic about what I find but have seen nothing derogatory or damaging and only one minor break in privacy."

"About once a month I check my Facebook profile to see that I'm only giving access to friends and nothing more."

Found Inappropriate Information

Question: Have you come across information about yourself, or your family, on the Internet that was inappropriately available or at risk of being misused to your detriment?

The availability of inappropriate content was not uncommon in this group of respondents. Nevertheless, there was a remarkably low level of concern given their assessment of the risk.

²³² The addition of 9th sphere to the list of evaluated organizations was after the PIN questionnaire was conducted.

Specific responses

“Only that an organization had copied a paper I wrote on water quality in cottage lakes, without giving me credit. It was actually a bit nice that they liked my work, but they should have asked for permission to use it.”

“No, why would I share erroneous/misleading information with you?”

“Many emails that were sent as forwards contain my family members’ email addresses as well as mine. My concern is where these email are coming from and why they are being posted on the Internet. I did nothing about it, doubt I could have anyway.”

“Googled my name and found some information which to the best of my knowledge was revealed to Canada Revenue Agency only. I took no action since it was out of date.”

Risks to Individuals

Question: What do you see as the risks to individuals, particularly as consumers, of the increased availability and accessibility of their information on the Internet? Please give any specific examples you may have.

There was a clear focus on the issue of identity theft and risk of damaging credit reports. Another concern was the risk of confusion with others of the same or similar name.

Specific responses

“The biggest risk is a lack of awareness/understanding. I work in marketing for a tech background (I get it and am sophisticated enough to take care of my own brand). My family is not, though. Most people do not understand the implications of privacy controls (or lack thereof).”

“Photos in particular being used to bully, or later in life to be potentially incriminating”

“Pretty obvious, isn't it? Adverse credit reports and the myriad repercussions from it. Impact on employment, relations with your employer, potential employers, etc. Impact on relations with people you do business with. Impact on personal relations. Estate related stuff. Ad nauseam.”

“With today's advanced technology we are being put into databases depending on what parts of the internet we are what we are doing and what our interests are. We are then exposed to many products, services and readily available products via the internet... this in my eyes is creating and shaping this and the next generation to what society wants it to look like; not on our beliefs and values.”

“I would guess the main risk is confusion with others of the same name and about whom discreditable information is posted. For those who have misbehaved, there is no ‘information bankruptcy’ process to ever remove it. Starting newspaper writers are reminded that: The architect covers his errors in ivy; the doctor buries his. But make a mistake on the printed page, and forever, THERE IT IS.”

“Once your personal missteps become a matter of indexed public record, they will haunt you for the rest of your days.”

“I'm quite protective of my online profile, but I have a teenage daughter with a huge Facebook profile. If she was a drinker, she'd have trouble.”

“False and/or damaging information can be posted by anyone and would be difficult or even impossible to remove.”

Awareness of ORM Organizations

Question: Are you aware of any of these organizations that provide Online Reputation Management/Repair services?

Reputation Defender

Reputation Hawk

Reputation Armor

Reputation Friendly

Remove It Now

Reputation Repair Experts

eBadPress

Reputation Professor

Defend My Name

One person knew one organization. These organizations are not well known. It is not unreasonable to conclude that you only know of them when you have a problem. It is not the type of organization that the ordinary consumer would have in their “rolodex” address book or smartphone contacts.

Efforts of Search Engines to Remedy

Question: What should search engines do to assist consumers in managing, protecting or repairing their online information?

Interestingly, this question evoked a wide range of answers. There was no consistent theme. It ranged from nothing to allowing people to remove information with written request, to acknowledgement of the lack of responsibility of the search engines for material they only purvey and do not create. Surprisingly, little was suggested regarding consumer or user education.

Specific responses

“Full disclosure of what is being collected and what is done with it.”

“Offer the chance to erase the information or delete it after the consumer has made his/her order or finished browsing the site.”

“Searching for information should be sacrosanct so restrictions seem the wrong route ... maybe whenever anyone looks up my online information, I should automatically get an email with their co-ordinates so I can consider my options.”

“Provide simplified directions on how to remove such material. If it is placed there by a third party, have the search engine provide rules, that upon request such information be removed.”

“Keep e-mail addresses out of the view of others.”

“I don't think this is the responsibility of Search Engines (other than ensuring that your own searches are not made public). This is an issue for the entities that host this information (social media sites, financial services, etc). Of course Google and MS have products that overlap into those domains, but the Search Engines themselves are not the issue.”

“Allow the source posting such information to be identified and contacted.”

“Find some algorithm that at least suppresses information obtained from a source that obtained the information on promise of privacy, or stolen from a guarded private source. I see this as unlikely. They should warn users of the high likelihood of identity confusion both in the case of individuals and at least small businesses, when providing results. Perhaps a process similar to that offered by credit rating agencies, to correct specific provably incorrect information, would help. But I suspect such would be so hopelessly inundated with spurious and irremediable claims (I'm not like Johnnie said about me on his website) they could not be made functional.”

“User education.”

“Ensure security of the consumer using the search engine – I don't recall any information regarding security provided to the consumer at this point.”

Efforts of Social Media Organizations to Remedy

Question: What should social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, do to assist consumers in managing, protecting or repairing their online information?

Privacy, privacy and more privacy. The emphasis was to tighten it up, at least at the default level, and to make it clearer. Some suggested to allow easy removal. Information and education at registration on such sites of the risks was recommended. Interestingly there did not seem to be a large involvement in Facebook as participants, but there was a large negative response to the Facebook privacy issue.

Specific responses

“Clearly disclose privacy policies and what is done with the info, how secure it is and whether and to whom it is shared. Allow consumers to opt out if they wish.”

“Stop adding new features with sharing set as open. Automatically keep identity private unless explicitly requested to share. Explicitly permit pseudonyms (many young users ignore site rules that true names are required). At the same time, make content owner’s identity available to law enforcement, legitimate legal processes.”

“Full disclosure of what is being collected and what is done with it. I am not on any of these because of lax security concerns.”

“Especially for kids, limit who can see their pages. Privacy options available to users.”

“Make it easier to understand.”

“Password security. Ensure only those you have given access to can see your information. When new people sign up use clear security bulletins to ensure they are aware of how to limit access.”

“Provide better instructions. For example, I’d like to cancel my Facebook and Twitter account. I rarely use the latter and Facebook creates more messages than I want to deal with. However, finding a process to do this seems quite difficult.”

“Privacy settings need to be obvious. They should be mandated that a link to them in prominent on every page and that easy to understand (ideally universal) settings are available for every user. Facebook fails miserably at this, their settings are impossible to discern.”

“Make the highest privacy setting the default instead of making users search out the privacy settings. – make sure that they respond to requests to remove personal information.”

“Give access to all the information on a person in their files. Honour written requests for removal of inaccurate info.”

“They should provide clear, easy methods to choose which information is shared with the public and which is not. They should also have a complaints/reparation system in place when a consumer notices someone is fraudulently using their account, or has set up a fake account in their name. They should also warn consumers that information they put online is difficult to remove and may be accessed by people you don’t want seeing it, and note that information such as credit card numbers, maiden names, personal phone numbers and addresses, etc, should generally not be posted.”

“Children ought to be required to prove age (13) to access Facebook. Parental controls within the site should be accessible and able to be turned on. YouTube ought to have age restrictions (i.e. censorship) to protect youngsters.”

“Add the option to hide the information from the search engine.”

“They can modify their own pages and perhaps they should be allowed to withdraw their own postings from other pages. They should also be warned of the permanence and ubiquity of Internet information. And they can be given clear explanations of the hazards of exposing information that could prove useful to criminals – what not to tell and the dangers in telling. Again, allowing the fixing of third-party injuries could be very difficult.”

“Stop changing the use of information in their applications without seeking permission first.”

“Punishment to those who post inappropriate online info.”

“I would simply suggest a means of removing the offending information. Other sites have a responsibility to maintain their sites according to the law (no libel/slander what have you) but they also need a means to remove material. If they don’t oblige, the legal system needs a lot of catching up...”

Efforts of Other Sites to Remedy

Question: What should other sites, (e.g., business web sites, blogs, rip-off report sites, discussion forums) do to assist consumers in managing, protecting or repairing their online information, given that they are often the purveyors of this information?

The emphasis was on more control of the information and adherence to more rigid guidelines.

Specific responses

“Enable the “report” button on blog/discussion board posts for all users, without requiring reader to login. There are many times I see offensive content, but I cannot report it to a moderator because I do not want to create an account and login on the site. Unless someone reports it, many discussion forums are not moderated effectively enough to catch these.”

“These sites need to follow the same rules that traditional media do. If it wouldn’t be publicly available in a newspaper, it shouldn’t be displayed by them online.”

"Give access to all the information on a person in their files. Honour written requests for removal of inaccurate info."

"How do you get someone without ethics to suddenly have them?"

"Again, I would simply suggest a means of removing the offending information. Other sites have a responsibility to maintain their sites according to the law (no libel/slander what have you) but they also need a means to remove material. If they don't oblige, the legal system needs a lot of catching up...."

Responsibilities of Consumers

Question: What responsibilities do consumers have in maintaining and protecting their own online reputation?

This question provoked the greatest response of the responsibility questions. Be aware and divulge minimally and with caution. Understand the implications of posting. Inform themselves and think twice. Interestingly, only one response suggested checking Google regularly for one's name, despite the fact that most respondents regularly checked for names. Indicates a concern with material going up, not so much with information going up without the knowledge of an individual. May indicate a perspective that most damage is self-inflicted.

Specific

"Primary responsibility lies with consumers – don't give the info out."

"Think ahead to possible misuse. Put on a clean pair of metaphorical underwear before you leave the house."

"AWARENESS AND TAKE ACTION WHEN THEY DISCOVER ERRORS."

"Understand that anything you post is liable to be shared elsewhere, forever. Should be able to access a digital location where everything in one's name is available for proofing. Make themselves informed but the sites should clearly state any risks and how to avoid them."

"Consumers should think twice about placing information for all the world to see."

"Divulge as little as possible."

"Thought of who might have access to the information should be given before making information available on the internet and how you would feel if you saw this information on another venue you had not considered."

"Ideally, a very strong one. Unfortunately, they don't (and for most above a certain age) and can't grasp this stuff. So, it has to be taken care of via legislation."

"The same responsibility they have in any other sphere of life."

"It is our responsibility to manage our own reputation by keeping information that might be incriminating down the road to a minimum. Of course, teenagers and youngsters do not have this insight and therefore are at greater risk, so better controls of this data is needed. One ought to have the ability to change or delete information readily before it hits the 'Net.'"

"BE CAREFUL what you post – it is an ongoing issue that mostly everyone is aware of. So why do people continue to post unnecessary information, that can lead to many other problems."

"It's up to the individual. The last thing the Internet needs is a bunch of net nanny legislation. People need to think before they type and be responsible for themselves."

"I think consumers have to inform themselves of the risks of posting information online, and learn about the security features they should look for on websites, as well as the ins and outs of their online accounts to be able to increase privacy features and better manage their online reputation. Also, consumers should search their names every so often to see what appears and whether some of the information that does come up shouldn't be there. In general, consumers have to be more aware that almost anyone can access what they post online, not just their family and friends."

"They, themselves, are responsible for releasing most of their personal information. Deal with some of the questions being asked, as if you were being asked for a blank cheque signed by you, or giving away your credit card information, social insurance number, etc. to totally unknown individuals."

Government or Regulatory Efforts to Remedy

Question: What can government or the regulatory authorities do to mitigate the inappropriate availability and misuse of consumer information online?

“The respondents produced a variety of responses, but they leaned toward penalties and punishment, and complaints processes, more than greater legislation or education. Seems out of odds with the previous response that consumers should take more responsibilities for their actions on input.”

Specific

“Pass legislation that requires automatic feedback to the person under scrutiny ... please note this isn't an invasion of privacy it is simply a sharing of information (the point is to use the system to allow equanimity among those under scrutiny)”

“Pass regulations which penalize the publishing of private or false information.”

“Strict monitoring, receiving & handling of complaints & strict rules & legislation.”

“I'd like to see the legal system do some catching up, though. Enforcing libel/slander etc. would be a good start.

Raise consumer awareness of pitfalls.”

“Run PSA infomercials on television channels about the problem and dangers.”

“Go after the bad actors when consumers complain. There is NO ONE who is chasing these people. Insist on realistic disclosure and go after those who use long scroll down boxes that no one reads. Insist on information based on things the customer should worry about but doesn't know enough to act, i.e. disclosure should assume that the retailer puts the consumer interest first.”

“I'm not sure. If we ask government to regulate it seems to me it will involve the creation of yet more government, and I'm not sure that is the answer. It might be better to have government set up an action oriented “complaints group” which could consult with industry on specific concerns raised by individuals.”

“Pass regulations which penalize the publishing of private or false information.”

“Less meddling. More compliance related penalties and their swift enforcement.”

Consumer Protection Group's Recommendations to Remedy

Question: What can consumer protection groups do to mitigate the inappropriate use and availability of consumer information?

Typically education was the recommendation. However, there was strong support for publication of egregious instances to both shame and warn.

Specific

“Monitor every instance of abuse, flag it, publish the name of the offender and broadcast it. ALSO list the NAMES of the people responsible to embarrass and shame them.”

“Continue to highlight breaches, press service providers/businesses to protect privacy.”

“Education of consumers so they don't disclose so much information and so they use the tools available to limit unwanted collection Keep pressure on governments and organizations to set out and implement frameworks for appropriate use of information.”

“PUBLISH EXAMPLES OF ABUSES TO MAKE PEOPLE MORE AWARE.”

“Monitor every instance of abuse, flag it, publish the name of the offender and broadcast it. ALSO list the NAMES of the people responsible to embarrass and shame them.”

“Expose stinkers – lobby for regulations to restrict these practices.”

“Less meddling. More advocacy with governments for compliance related penalties and their swift enforcement.”

“Consumer education, education, education.”

“Make consumers more aware and advocate to government and the websites.”

Findings – Answering the Key Questions

What are key issues for consumers in the management of their online reputation?

Reputation Does Matter

There continues to be an inexorable drive of many individuals to go online to develop and augment their reputation. Despite this push by many, others make concerted efforts to keep their information offline. Either position requires diligent and ongoing efforts, as a person's reputation is at greater risk online than in other forms of media or from meeting others face-to-face. More importantly, regardless of one's stance, online reputation has become a significant part of one's reputation, and because of the lack of online context, it is susceptible to misuse.

There are many reasons why one's online reputation is important: the risks of bullying, defamation, identity theft, scams, and personal branding, although it seems that the drunken picture on Facebook affecting employment prospects gets much of the publicity. This is for good reason. A study conducted by Microsoft for Data Privacy Day, 2010 found that "70% of surveyed HR professionals in the U.S. have rejected a candidate based on online reputation information."²³³ From a positive point of view that same study found that "86% of HR professionals stated that a positive online reputation influences the candidate's application to some extent, and almost half stated that it does so to a great extent."²³⁴ The bottom line: Reputation Matters.

Anonymity

On the Internet today a person can be helpless as they are anonymously attacked, their personal information presented in false context, or outright untruths about them are displayed, whether to a potential audience of millions or the one person who matters to them most. The increase of anonymity and the corresponding decrease in accountability is a key concern in online reputation management. Not surprisingly, the malicious, salacious and anonymous attacks garner the most attention. This is one social force that remains unchanged from 1890.

The newness of the Internet to the Canadian courts brings some uncertainty around anonymity. The courts will allow access to the identity of anonymous bloggers, but generally only when a prima facie case of defamation has been made. Canadian courts through several decisions are working through the issues of anonymity on the Internet as it relates to defamation. In particular, they are attempting to balance the freedom of speech rights of Canadians, with the right of Canadians to protection from defamation.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, anonymity can increase the credibility of information in the eyes of a reader. The Canadian courts have recently ascribed more credibility to anonymous bloggers as able to inflict harm, causing them to be more susceptible to a charge of defamation – if they can be identified.²³⁵

Awareness

Many individuals check their online presence, or reputation, regularly. A large number do not. Established research indicates this, as do our discussions with experts in the field. Many people do not know that they already have an online reputation issue. They are unprepared to avoid injury to their reputation.

Many consumers need to address their lack of awareness of the significant effect of their online reputation, and the potential for damage to it. They have plenty of choices, all of which appear to be in practice today. They can be blissful in their ignorance – until something happens. They can knowingly ignore it. They can monitor and protect it. They can get it fixed if they have a problem, ideally, with the benefit of some education, assessment tools, and a reasoned, continuous effort to monitor and maintain.

The Quickness and Severity of Reputation Damage

An individual can make one mistake and become a lightning rod for the criticism and concerns of others. When videos go viral, there is no going back. Viral material can never be removed from the Internet. It will remain

²³³ Online Reputation in a Connected World, Microsoft – Cross-Tab for Data Privacy Day, 2010

²³⁴ Online Reputation in a Connected World, Microsoft / Cross-Tab for Data Privacy Day, 2010

²³⁵ Barrick Gold Corp. v. Lopehandia

somewhere. A small indiscretion can attract all the attention that a communications mechanism open to billions of people can bring. The key point for consumers is that some indiscretions, if they are publicized and tickle the public's fancy, may never be forgotten and attach to a person's "résumé" for life.

Maintaining a Reputation

Consumers must determine how they intend to maintain their online reputation. They have to determine what their risks are and their level of risk tolerance. They may manage their reputation by ensuring no information is made available about them on line. They may do it through diligent monitoring. They may employ aggressive legal pursuit. Given the risks, basic maintenance if left unchecked may be catastrophic for an individual.

Fixing a Problem

Knowing what to do when there is a problem may be an issue for many. Removal of information from the Internet is not simple, and in some cases if approached the wrong way will only exacerbate the situation. Consumers have to ask themselves some questions. What do they do when they find that information? Do they attempt to remove it? If so, how? Do they attempt to refute it? Do they attempt to obfuscate or conceal it? Do they pursue legal action? How do they determine the extent of damage to date and prospectively?

Getting help to repair one's reputation may not be as easy as assumed. Finding an organization that is clearly consumer focused, particularly if the issue to be managed is insignificant, may not be overly burdensome or challenging, but it does require effort on the part of the consumer. Fortunately, material that can most help an individual repair their reputation is typically information written or provided by them.²³⁶

Getting Help

The online reputation management (ORM) industry is a fluid one. The efficacy of the services offered by this new industry is uncertain. The level of consumer satisfaction with the products of this industry is difficult to determine. In many cases consumers will need help in fixing their online reputation given the risk involved with having a damaged reputation, but they will first need help in getting the right kind of help.

What information is misused and how?

Out of Context

Virtually any information can be made available about an individual consumer on the Internet. Some is there appropriately. Some is not. Much information is made available without appropriate context. The Internet does not excel at providing context. The degree of context provided by search engines typically depends on the ability of the individual to query and evaluate – skills imbued to greater and lesser degrees on individual members of the public. Context, or the lack of it, is the primary source of misused information. As one executive in the industry put it, misused information is "*anything out of context.*"²³⁷ The lack of context, and the willingness of many users to rely blindly, and heavily, on information gathered from the Internet combine to create potential and potent misuse of virtually any information available about an individual.

Source of Information

Information can be misused when it is put up on the Internet, or when it is copied or used from the Internet.

Information can be misused unknowingly, carelessly or thoughtlessly – or maliciously.

An important point to note is that often the victim is the source of the misused information.

Type of Information Misused

Information that may be made available and be subject to misuse can include:

²³⁶ In interviews with two ORM executives, both echoed this point. – Chris Martin, Founder – Reputation Hawk, and Ezra Silverton, President 9th sphere

²³⁷ Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

- Photographs
- Videos
- Audio²³⁸
- Blog posts or blog comments
- Twitter tweets
- Discussion forum entries
- Traditional media stories
- Quotations
- References to oneself on a social network site, particularly in a photograph
- Document
- Official/public record (e.g., criminal record)

What prompts consumers to seek such repair?

A consumer finds information on the Internet

An individual searches his or her name in Google and finds information that is either wrong or which may easily be taken out of context, or information that is private and should not be available on the Internet.

Someone else finds a consumer's information on the Internet

Someone, ideally a friend, not so ideally an individual on the other side of a business transaction or employment situation, brings to your attention some information about yourself you did not know, you know to be incorrect, or you hoped would not see the light of day. In some cases consumers are proactive in seeking repair, but typically these services are sought in reaction to adverse revelation of some information on the Internet.

When the problem is big enough to warrant attention

People seek to repair their reputation when the potential for damage, or damage already incurred, is serious enough. However, knowing what is 'serious enough,' can be a difficult and even impossible act of judgment.

Most people will have 'controlled' issues. Such issues arise when an individual posts something to Facebook and doesn't realize it was available to the public, or a friend posts an image and tags the individual. In both these cases the fix is straightforward – just remove the information, because the individual has control over the troublesome content or knows the person who's posted it. Those that need to use a repair company are likely a small percentage. The majority of people probably only need guidance in self-management and basic online reputation management – hence, the extensive list of tips and steps for consideration at the end of this report for the do-it-yourselfer.

What organizations perform repair?

Several types of organizations perform online reputation management repair. They can be classed in roughly four categories:

1. *Organizations that primarily service businesses for brand management and online reputation management.* They may also provide service to high-end consumers – executives, celebrities, professionals, politicians, etc., or to average consumers with a significant online reputation issue.
2. *Organizations that provide search engine optimization for businesses, and also provide online reputation management services to a variety of individuals, including high-profile individuals.* These organizations might be considered boutique organizations in the field of online reputation management.

²³⁸ The ability of smartphones to surreptitiously record conversations, and upload immediately to the Internet, provides a significant new avenue for reputation damage.

3. *Organizations that have prepackaged systems, or processes, and service primarily mass market consumers.*
4. *Organizations that have little background, and provide services from what might be considered to be a shady position.*

There is a fifth category: Lawyers. A person dealing with an online reputation problem typically retains a lawyer for serious instances of libel or defamation. Lawyers can be useful at the outset of problem resolution when a consumer needs to apply pressure on a website or blog or seriously intends litigation.

Our research focused primarily on organizations in the second and third categories.

There are not a significant number of high-volume retail consumer-focused reputation repair and management organizations. The number gets considerably smaller when one looks to only Canadian solutions.

What services are provided?

The services provided are simple, yet can require considerable time and effort to produce results. Accountability for results may be difficult to ascertain, as the methodology of service delivery may not be transparent to a consumer. The services include removing material from search engine results, removing material from websites, removing basic personal information from ‘people sites,’ blogs and other social media, as well as concealing information from search engine results. The latter is by far the most common activity. What is called repair or removal in the industry typically involves moving search results from the first page of Google, further down the first page or to the second or third page of search results. One ORM/Search Engine Optimization executive placed the probability of true removal of material at less than 10%.²³⁹ Even in those cases removal may not be complete, because such information can still reside in various archives available on the Internet.

Some organizations also provide monitoring and maintenance services. They will monitor to determine a person’s online reputation and whether problems exist. They will continue to monitor to ensure that nothing else arises. And they can perform maintenance/protective type services that strengthen online reputation proactively.

What is the value to the consumer?

Generally, the value provided by online reputation management and repair organizations may be less than expected by many average consumers. Higher costs and longer times to repair may be experienced than expected, and uncertainty around the product and any guarantees available combine to potentially limit value. It can be a rude shock to a consumer that they just can’t request something to be removed from the Internet and have it done. Technology, the legal environment, the global environment of the Internet, and the vagaries of irrational human actions combine to make it difficult to truly remove material from the Internet.

Organizations that have programs to remove some of an individual’s basic personal information from ‘people’ sites can be useful – an easy task that can be done by an individual themselves, if they take the time and effort to find out how.

Getting value will require picking the right organization to provide services. Getting value will require working together with such an organization.

For some of the minor offences and material on the Internet, such as Facebook pictures, removal can be simple, particularly if the consumer has access to the account in control of the offending content. Some repair organizations counsel or educate the consumer to varying degrees, but this is often an insignificant part of their program or services. Astute consumers would gather information during the repair service and use it to reduce the incidence of such future information being shared publicly, or excise the information themselves.

The most significant value for many consumers of seeking this service may be the impetus for monitoring, or ideally self-monitoring, of their online reputations. The result may be that consumers experience the difficulty of removing personal information from the Internet, so they commit to monitoring for themselves or hire a lower cost organization to manage the work for them. Online reputation management, when practiced at its best, is more of a promotional and reputation-enhancing process, than it is one of repair.

²³⁹ Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

High profile individuals (executives, professionals), although their needs was not within the scope of this research, would appear more likely to benefit, given what is typically a greater need and commitment to the process.

ORM is a business that has arisen from the services provided to businesses regarding brand and online reputation. Services provided to consumers in many cases require the same amount of effort to remove material. And the costs are similar accordingly.

Monitoring (typically an automatic search of social media and search engines which may contain references to an individual) can be fairly straightforward, and some basic protection can be easily obtained from minimal to moderate efforts.

When it comes to moving damaging information off the first page of Google results, professional organizations can do this job better than an individual can himself or herself, although, as mentioned earlier, input from the individual is important.

What, if any, are the problematic practices of these organizations and this industry?

This service sector appears to be served by many organizations with vague credentials as to location, history and personnel/management. The frequency of name changes and unknown ownership, business relationships, management, and even phone numbers, do not portend easy access to redress for an aggrieved consumer. Of the organizations we evaluated, one had an address that is tied to a UPS store. Another only indicates the city in which they reside, and that statement is found only within the FAQ section. Neither gives the name of any individual associated with the organization. The organizations evaluated as part of this research were some of the more respected in the field of providing services to consumers, and expressed concerns and accusations of unethical behaviour could be found even within this group.

Lack of clarity around time to repair and the resulting cost appears problematic.

Clarity is lacking in marketing presentations on the nature of the repair service, in that “repair” generally amounts to meeting the goal of having offending content relegated to a second page of a Google, Bing or other provider’s search, rather than achieving outright removal of the material from the Internet. The statement that removal of material from the Internet is difficult in most cases, and impossible in many, is not always presented upfront in service claims. Furthermore, there is uncertainty around the definition of what will be removed, particularly around specific search terms or keywords. The nature of the information used to move the negative material down in search engines is not outlined in detail on some of the ORM websites. This is an important consideration for an individual; because the extra material used to push other material down in the search engine rankings must still be of quality. Rarely is repair a one-time event, and it can require several months or a year to effectively “remove” information and have it disappear from ready public access.

Ironically, some reputation repair organizations demonstrated less than ideal Online Reputation Management (“ORM”) and Search Engine Optimization (“SEO”) skills on their own websites and presence on social media and often use techniques regularly obviated by the capabilities of large search engine service providers. However, the lack of SEO skills was considerably more apparent in the organizations on which this research focused the least – those referred to as shady or fly-by-night.

The industry itself is evolving. There is a dominant service provider in Reputation.com with significant venture capital investment and well-developed and marketed consumer-focused packages. No other organization appears to have been able to capture this market in such a way. This dominance by Reputation.com may be changing the way others do business, causing some of them slowly to move to services for businesses and high-end/high-profile individuals.

This leaves organizations without the clout or capability of a Reputation.com trying to compete on the low monthly fees that Reputation.com charges for some of the basic services. Others take on the more sophisticated reputation problems, becoming, in essence, boutique firms but nevertheless still having to compete with Reputation.com’s high-level service. They work with individual and business, clients with problems that require significant shaping of search results, work that cannot be done with just a series of simpler measures (e.g., blog posts, press releases and social media sign ups).

What can consumers do to maintain and repair their online reputations?

As one person put it – stop what you are doing right now and go search your name on Google. If everybody started there and read through the first two pages of search results it would serve to catch many of the issues immediately – before they are brought to one’s attention by someone on the other side of a business transaction or employment interview.

Consumers considering the use of ORM services should see the chart in the recommendations section of this report, and consider some of the questions this report poses in advance of selecting an ORM service provider.

Recommendations

For Consumers

General

- Do not put damaging stuff up there in the first place.
- Do not put damaging stuff up there in the first place.²⁴⁰
- Check your online reputation now, and set a plan to monitor – weekly, monthly, semi-annually or annually. Pick a period and adhere to it.
- Read all privacy settings and adhere to them. Restrict them as tightly as possible.
- When using Google and other search engines take more time to craft your search to get better results. Consumers are on both sides of the problem.

Monitoring Your Reputation

Do you need a lawyer first?

The Monitor Plan

It is simple, quick, and just three steps:

1. Before doing anything else, search for your name, and variations thereof. Start with Google. Most other people do.²⁴¹ Check the first 10 pages of results. Now do the same in Bing. This will give you a sense of what information people may find with just cursory search, which in many cases is all that people will search for. Many will not go past the first page of search results in Google, and few go past the third.²⁴² See below for a more comprehensive list of “Where to Search,” and for “What to Search.”
2. If you find anything, assess the damage potential, create a plan to address it. This may include fixing it, or living with it. Then execute.
3. Create a plan to monitor on a periodic basis (you determine the frequency, from daily to annually), protect and manage your reputation online.

What to Search For:

When searching for your name to determine what is out there about an individual, it is not just their name that is searched.

- Rank the results: positive, neutral, negative. Note which results may be susceptible to misinterpretation, or have the potential for misuse. Note which results may be easily taken out of context.
- Determine the ways in which other people will look for you on a search engine. Do they add your employer to your name when they search?
- Projects or other efforts in which you have been involved. Search terms to start to find places where your name may be associated.
- Determine the ways in which your name may be searched. Do you have nicknames? Is your name easily, and commonly misspelled? Did you change your name when you got married?
- Use the phrase search capability. Put your name(s) in quotation marks, e.g., “Paul Jacobs.” Only results with that precise spelling and phrase are returned, allowing for a more focused search and deeper results.

²⁴⁰ There was considerable debate amongst the research team as to whether we would state this a third time.

²⁴¹ 80% of searches are through Google – Chitika Research – <http://www.bighitmedia.co.uk/bing-catching-up-on-google/>

²⁴² Jupiter Research http://digikraf.blogspot.com/2010_12_01_archive.html

Where to Search:

Many places to search exist. Hence the continually increasing risk to consumers of their information being in places they do not know.

- Google – Search the .com and the .ca sites.
- Bing/Yahoo – Search the .com and the .ca sites. Bing performs Yahoo search, so the results are typically similar if not identical. It is important to search Bing/Yahoo as well as Google because the two approaches are different. Google often captures more, whereas Bing/Yahoo can be more targeted. The reasons why they are different remain a secret of the two organizations, but the main reason to search both is to ensure that you capture all the potential search results that people will see when they search for you. Not everybody searches just in Google.
- Google Blog Search – many negative comments are found in blogs. Recent research indicates that Bing and Yahoo have better success rates in searches – 81% for Bing and Yahoo and 66% for Google. Although, according to their statistics Google still commands over 70% of the search market.²⁴³
- Determine websites where you may have posted material. Search that service directly.
- Facebook – check the Facebook sites of all your friends. Use the Facebook search.
- LinkedIn – does someone else have the same name as you, and can they be misinterpreted as being you?

How To Search (Tools):

- There are a several sites that can assist you in finding information about yourself, and sites that have already accumulated considerable information about you. Check these:
 - Socialmention.com – “Like Google Alerts, but for Social Media”
 - Whostalkin.com – Social Media search/monitor tool. Add it to your Google page to easily monitor regularly.
 - Naymz.com (visibleme.com) – monitor, and help manage your reputation online.
 - Pipl.com – searches deep into the Internet to find references about people. A very useful site as it pulls information from sources deeper than Google or Bing would go.
 - Zoominfo.co – useful for finding people, particularly their relationships with organizations.
 - Reprvine.com – allows you to collect and share references. A tool for managing reputation.
 - Google Alerts – set up a daily Google Alert for your name, and any common variations on how your name is, or may be, searched.
 - Rollyo.com – a personalized search engine.
 - Technorati.com – technorati.com is a real-time search on weblogs.
 - 123people.com – aggregation site of information on individuals. Remarkably precise.
 - Spokeo.com – a voracious aggregator. Less of a presence in Canada.
 - Twitter – start with the regular search.twitter.com or advanced search.twitter.com/advanced search. Start with the regular.
 - Google Twitter Search –
www.google.com/cse/home?cx=004053080137224009376%3Aicdh3tsqkzy

Other Monitor Tips

- Look at paying an organization to search for you – if it is important enough.

Fixing Your Reputation

You found something damaging about you on the Internet. What do you do? First, assess the situation and then make your plan and execute it.

Assess the Situation:

- What is the nature of the material? Is it embarrassing, or is it truly damaging? Is there the risk of an inappropriately large backlash, possibly because of an underlying, possibly widespread, latent perception that could be launched if this information was found? Could you become a scapegoat,

²⁴³ <http://www.hitwise.com/us/press-center/press-releases/experian-hitwise-reports-bing-searches-increase>

much like the Korean dog poop girl?²⁴⁴ The greater the potential damage the more that removal or professional assistance may be warranted.

- What is the probability of it being found? Under what circumstances would it be found? Does it show up in search results, particularly on the first page, or does a user have to go to a particular site in order to find it? Therefore, a casual searcher – for example a potential employer – may not find it. However, someone operating in the field of interest to which this issue may apply might see it, possibly because it is a blog they would regularly visit, or results from an RSS feed from that blog.
- What search terms appear in the results? Does it appear when search terms likely to be chosen by others are used? Consider the way others might search for you, not just the way you might define or search for yourself. If damaging information is not easily found with search terms others would use, then taking an active role in trying to remove it may only exacerbate the situation. It may best be ignored rather than risk inflaming a blogger or the poster into repeating the issue, or expanding on it. Both of these could keep the result higher up in search engines for a longer time. This does not mean that you would not try to remove the material, but it does suggest some probability the information will be hard enough to find that it does not warrant the effort to remove it.
- Is it in a location that requires password entry? If so, fewer people will see it, those who see it will probably understand the context, and, in some instances, you will be able to track who sees your profile or that information.
- Is it true? As one key informant, an owner of a successful web design, SEO and Online Reputation Management organization put it *"There is a better chance of information that is 100% factually not true being removed."*²⁴⁵ In some cases, ORM repair organizations will not look to remove documents that are not untrue. It is much easier to remove untrue information.
- How long has it been there? The longer it has been there, the greater the probability that people have seen it, that people have copied it, that people have linked to it, or that it has been incorporated into the Internet Archive, also known as the Wayback Machine. Although, the longer it has been there without an issue indicates that perhaps it may be best left alone. Given its focus on more corporate-type sites and Web 1.0 material, it may be of less use.
- Who posted the information? Or is the poster's identity anonymous? It can be very difficult to determine the identity of a poster. And the law has not been particularly helpful in bringing the identity of such individuals to light. In one case, the judge cited that they would not be willing to let people determine identities, or remove the cloak of anonymity, solely as a fishing expedition. There must be real harm proved in order to require identification. If you put the information up yourself, for instance, tagging a photo in Facebook or authoring a product or service review on a review board or a comment in a discussion forum, there is a greater chance of being able to remove it.
- Who controls the site where the information was posted? Is it controlled by an organization that has a clear and reasonable Terms of Use policy? If the site is controlled by an individual, we have seen that they might be more intimidated by legal letter than would be a corporation or a business that holds reviews on its site, and can damage its own reputation by retracting or removing a post.
- What is the authority of the site that is showing the information? Is it CBC.ca or an anonymous rarely read blogger? If the site containing this information is one with substantial authority or credibility, it poses more significant barriers for two reasons. One, search engines will keep it higher in the search results because of the page rank or authority of the site, and, two, in assessing the information people will more than likely give it greater weighting in their assessment. In other words, typically www.CBC.ca will carry more weight than www.bobtheblogger.ca. If the information is untrue, then it is likely that www.CBC.ca would remove it.
- Is this information anywhere else on the Internet? Removing it from the source does not remove it from other sites. If linked to other pages, the information will effectively be removed from the other

²⁴⁴ The Korean Dog Poop girl has become widely known for the damage caused to her reputation when she let her dog poop on the floor of a Korean subway car. She refused to clean it up. A movie was taken and uploaded to the Internet. She was subsequently identified and vilified.

²⁴⁵ Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

pages, as the link will be dead. However, discussions about the link content or other sites that are not linked but are copies of the problem content will not be removed.

- Who is aware of this information? This may be difficult to determine. However, a review of how people would find this information, and what would prompt them to look in the first place, will give you an idea of who would have seen this information, and assist in determining the true risk of leaving, removing or attempting to remove this information. Often, people find out that information is inappropriately available on the Internet, through others who find it when searching this individual, as they are about to step into a business deal with them.
- Does the information “breach” involve a trademark or copyright infraction? Both lawyers and search engine optimization executives make it clear that it is much easier to remove information that has violated trademark or copyright than it is to remove other information.
- How much are you willing to pay, and for how long, to remove it or conceal it?

Only once you have this information are you truly in a position to make and take an appropriate course of action. Even then take care not to react too quickly.

The next step is to decide whether to “Remove It,” “Explain It, Mitigate It, and/or Contextualize It,” “Conceal It,” or “Ignore It.” All are reasonable approaches, depending on the context of the situation.

Remove It

If you can, remove it. However, this is an action that can be risky, and if legal avenues are pursued, almost always expensive. So: *“Keep it off-line, kiss butt, beg, apologize, do whatever you have to in order to keep your dirty laundry offline.”*²⁴⁶ This statement from Chris Bennett of 97th Floor, a search engine optimization company, clearly indicates the importance of not having the information up in the first place, but also the importance of trying to remove it if possible.

In General:

- Act quickly and thoughtfully. Don’t bluff. And in all cases, take the high road. This is not the time to double the problem.
- If the issue is with your site on Facebook, particularly if someone else sets up a site in your name without your knowledge or permission, you can have the site deleted at Facebook’s “Delete My Account” page.²⁴⁷ They make it clear that you will not be able to reactivate or retrieve information, but they will still be able to retain the information for their own purpose, which means it may be accessible if ordered by a court.
- Talk to somebody first, preferably a professional if the issue is serious. It is your reputation you are dealing with, and the implications of lifelong damage to it. If removal entails possible legal action, consider consulting a lawyer.
- If you have been defamed you have legal rights. However it is expensive, time consuming and a considerable effort and strain to sue for libel or defamation. You may have the issue of not knowing the identity of the individual who posted the information. Legal action does not have to be the first course of action. *“But proving the fact of libel as a defence to an ethics complaint is not a road most of us would choose to travel.”*²⁴⁸
- Assuming legal action is not your choice, there are ways to work to achieve removal. If that is not successful, you can decide to attempt to lower the problem information in search engine results or contextualize the information using various online reputation management techniques. You can choose to ignore the information.
- If the information is primarily found through search engine results, first attempt to have it removed from the search engines. They have instructions on how to apply to have information removed. However, it is rarely possible to remove negative search results from search engines. Only the search

²⁴⁶ Notes: Chris Bennett on Reputation Management (E-Tourism Summit) <http://www.97thfloor.com/blog/notes-chris-bennett-on-reputation-management-e-tourism-summit/>

²⁴⁷ https://ssl.facebook.com/help/contact.php?show_form=delete_account

²⁴⁸ *Online Reputation Management- First Rule is to Avoid Self-Inflicted Wound*, Jim Calloway's Law Practice Tips Blog , <http://jimcalloway.typepad.com/lawpracticetips/2009/08/online-reputation-management-first-rule-is-to-avoid-selfinflicted-wounds.html>

engines can remove such results, and they have made it clear that except in absolutely exceptional cases this will not happen. They are likely to remove it for trademark or copyright violation. Google will remove references where:²⁴⁹

- The webmaster has already blocked the page
- The content has already been removed from the page
- The owner of the website will not remove personal content, which includes:
 - Government ID number
 - Bank account or credit card number
 - An image of your handwritten signature
 - Your full name or the name of your business appearing on an adult content site that's spamming Google's search results
- Inappropriate content appears in Google's SafeSearch filtered results
- Check Terms of Use, Conditions, Contribution Guidelines and any other agreements on the website to determine whether material falls afoul of these, and use these to request removal. Often the site administrator, or owner, is unaware that information on their site breaches the rules, or their policies. If the owner of the site is not the poster of the information, it may be easy to persuade them to pull the information, given that they do not want the difficulties that might ensue with debatable or potentially libellous information.
- If the website owner or administrator will not remove the information, check with their ISP and their Terms and Conditions of Use. If the material contravenes those terms, file a complaint with the ISP. Some have forms that will allow you to comment or complain.
- If you contact a website owner or a blog owner, it may be preferable to do it by telephone, so that there is no written message that can be placed on the site by the blogger or the website administrator. It is best to check the backgrounds of the poster or the administrators in advance. It can be useful in determining whether you want to contact them. You may not know why this information was posted, and this may give you some insight. As well, it will help you assess whether contact may inflame the situation.
- The following sites can assist you in determining ownership of websites or blogs: Networksolutions.com, Whois.domaintools.com, Internic.net, domaintools.com and betterwhois.com.

Explained/Mitigated/Contextualized

Information out of context is most liable/susceptible to misuse, intentionally or otherwise. If you are unable to remove it, placing it in context may readily solve the problem. If it is something you do not want to be seen (e.g., a youthful indiscretion resulting in inappropriate photographs, videos, or in a criminal record with accompanying news coverage in an authoritative and highly placed media article in the search engine results), but cannot be removed or easily explained, then concealment is the best option – see next section.

How to contextualize/explain:

- *First, put out the fire.* Consider whether you will respond in the blog or discussion forum, for example, but this is risky, and only taken with a strong sense of the reaction of the writer of the comment.
- Is an apology necessary? Vancouver franchise lawyer, turned Online Reputation Management “expert” Tony Wilson devotes a full chapter to “the apology” in his book, *Manage Your Online Reputation – Sometimes You Have to Say You’re Sorry and Mean It*. The essence of the book is accept responsibility and be sincere.²⁵⁰ Keep in mind, that an apology must also be accompanied by an explanation and appropriate context. Ideally, a solution should also be provided.
- *When an explanation is more appropriate.* Use the blog posts comments area or discussion forum response to explain your side of the story. Offer to remedy the situation, if that might help. Consumers often take into account how people respond to difficult problems as they read reviews

²⁴⁹ Remove a URL from Google's search results, <https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/removals?hl=en&pli=1>, but you will require a Google account to sign in and request removal.

²⁵⁰ Tony Wilson, Key Informant interview

and sites like this. Keep in mind that because blogs have content that change regularly, references to them can move up, and down, in Google's search engine results quite rapidly. It may just take some time for the content to drop down. And to this point, keep in mind that adding your comments to a blog post may increase its visibility. Take the high road. Only the truth will be acceptable.

- Consider running a Pay-Per-Click campaign through Google AdWords or Microsoft's adCenter. It does have a cost, but can effectively target a message more pointedly than any ad hoc SEO or ORM techniques can. It can address very specifically any issue and display for search terms including your name.
- As Brian Sharwood, president of Homestars.com puts it *"Engage the conversation. You may expose the criticizer for exactly what they are criticizing. So if there is a way of engaging whether it's a forum board or Twitter or something on Facebook to acknowledge and engage. And say, 'yes I am here, can you help me understand what the issue you have is, is there anyway I can correct it.'"* Homestars.com is a popular site located in Toronto that allows homeowners to comment on home renovations and contractors, and allows contractors to respond to specific reviews. The responses to critical reviews help shape his views of those contractors and their services. As he states. *"We spend a lot of time convincing companies about bad responses. My wife won't hire a company that doesn't have at least one bad response."*²⁵¹

Conceal it:

In many cases, if not most, the best approach is one of concealment – moving offending information down in the search results, as search is the manner in which most people find this material initially. Bury the offending information with more positive information about you. Concealment of problem information requires adding sufficient new information to appear first in search results. The information is still there on the Internet and in the search engine results. However, it shows up on the second page of Google or Bing, not the top of the first. It may be acceptable to be toward the bottom of the first page of Google results. People who search your name may see it but it will not be the first information they see.

Given that most requests for removal are denied from search engines and websites, discussion forums and blogs, and explanations often backfire, the primary option becomes the effort of moving it down in the search engines. This has the added benefit of not just repairing your reputation by moving the out-of-context material out of sight, but also increasing the positive material about you ahead of it. As one lawyer involved in the industry indicated, *"I am one of the people who sometimes says go hire a kid who will put up some websites and manipulate the search engine results so the bad stuff ends up being on the second or third page. I agree that's not removing it, but you know, for 95% of the population, it does the trick. And that costs virtually nothing. Some people aren't computer savvy. It doesn't cost much. And it certainly costs less than hiring me to start a lawsuit."*²⁵²

This sentiment is clearly echoed by Ezra Silverton, President of 9th sphere, a Toronto based Web Design, SEO, Internet Marketing and Online Reputation Management organization: *"The chances of winning a lawsuit may be higher than not, but it's the time that goes by and the cost that it would take to win. It's worth putting that time and cost into ORM, which will get you a lot faster and quicker results. It's a real tough one. Because the speed at which things are going at the law is not keeping up with the Internet. They are so far behind. Because every day they keep on getting further and further behind because technology is getting that much further ahead and so sometimes it's whether it's worth the cost or not of going the legal way."*²⁵³

What are the steps/tools in concealment?

- Claim your name online – use a blog, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Create meaningful sites that echo what you do, and your views, to the extent you are willing to publicize. Keep in mind, that establishing, or improving a reputation means giving up some privacy. As Mr. Silverton puts it, *"If you're trying to improve your reputation online you need to be public."*²⁵⁴
- Twitter can be very important. You have tremendous capability to define yourself: whom you follow; who follows you; any number of ways. Tweets are returned in Google search results. Create

²⁵¹ Brian Sharwood, Key Informant interview

²⁵² Mr. Yellow – Lawyer, Key Informant interview

²⁵³ Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

²⁵⁴ Ezra Silverton, Key Informant interview

or resurrect your Twitter account. Be consistent. Talk about your industry. Talk about yourself. Be meaningful. Be professional. Be engaging. The decision to begin Tweeting is a very personal one, but at least claim your name so that you do not have to battle someone else being mistaken for you.

- LinkedIn is now your online resume. Set up an account and fill it in as you would a resume. Join various interest groups. Participate in discussions.
- Join Discussion Forums in areas of interest to you. Keep it current.
- WordPress, Blogger and many other places allow you to set up a free blog. And make it easy. Keep it current. Search engines value current sites. Be regular and current with your postings. Write about something you know – preferably a passion.
- Write for other people’s blogs.
- Comment on other people’s blogs.
- Consider carefully whether you want a Facebook account and set your privacy settings carefully. Keep your Facebook friends to your real friends. As one security expert told us, *“When you have 950 friends you may have misjudged some of those people. You are exposed.”*²⁵⁵
- Create a Google Knol page. Google Knol²⁵⁶ is a place to demonstrate some expertise.
- Very carefully manage your social media accounts. Review your privacy settings. Control them tightly. Understand them. Determine whether you want to include yourself in search results.
- Take part in local discussions in your trade or business, particularly those that advertise or produce these results on the Internet.

These are only a few suggestions, but it is quickly evident that it can be a lot of work. Hence the fairly large price tag when a professional does the work for you. But if the problem is big enough – and that is to be assessed by you initially – then the work or the expense is worth it.

Remember that open and honest are two different terms. Be honest, completely, and be as open as you reasonably can be, or need to be, to restore or improve your reputation. Keep in mind that privacy (openness) and reputation are often in conflict. In other words, you have to give up some privacy in order to improve your reputation.

“You have to decide which face to show to the world. It is okay to have a public and a personal persona. They can be different, but they do have to be truthful,” says Tony Wilson.

Evaluation Grid for Consumers

The focus of this research has been on the consumer from two perspectives: First, for an individual with a need to manage his or her online reputation and, second, as a potential consumer of ORM services from an ORM organization. The grid below gives some broad, and then more specific, questions/criteria to consider when considering use of an ORM organization for reputation repair. It is not designed to lead a consumer to a conclusion as to whether to use a third party service,.

Broad Consideration	Specific Questions
What is your problem?	Are you trying to remove a Facebook tag or photograph, or a YouTube video, or do you have a past felony conviction you would rather have the world forget? Is there some personal/ private information on “people” site you would like removed? Do you have all the details about the information you want removed, how it got there, who put it there, how long it has been there, and what are the implications of it being there and how could it be misinterpreted? What prompted the need to consider repair? Is the problem that someone else with the same name has a background that others are confusing with you? What are the risks of damage to your reputation?
What do you need?	Do you know what you need, or do you need help with that? Is it a quick fix or is it a little more serious? Do you need just a consumer-canned package or a custom service from a boutique organization with an experienced professional to work with you to solve a serious problem?
Do your problem and their	Can the service provider help you determine what you need?

²⁵⁵ Mr. Green – Security Expert, Key Informant interview

²⁵⁶ <http://knol.google.com/k>

product/service/ solution match?	<p>Do they have the right product/service for you?</p> <p>Are you looking for some basic monitoring and protection? If so, do they have a simple monthly fee to cover this?</p> <p>Are you looking for a greater degree of protection and looking to create some more positive information about you on the Internet to boost your reputation? Do they have a solution that has an initial assessment and then a plan for ongoing maintenance and protection?</p> <p>Do you have damaging negative information that you want removed or concealed? If so do they tell they have a program that is customized to that problem? And if that program is \$100 a month, can it really be expected to solve a complex reputational issue?</p> <p>Narrow it down to a couple of companies that appear to have a workable solution.</p>
Do you sense that you can work with them? Are they candid about their services and results?	<p>Do they allow you to work with them? Experts in the business suggest that content intended to bolster reputation is best provided by the individual, not the ORM company?²⁵⁷</p> <p>Do they work with you taking your input and material, or do they take some basic information and create a persona for you with minimum input?</p> <p>Do they provide information on their website that suggests they understand your problem? Does anything on their website resonate with you and your issue?</p> <p>Will they talk to you and help you determine whether you need help or can do it yourself?</p> <p>Talk to the company on the phone and listen to your instincts.²⁵⁸</p> <p>Is the organization candid about results? What others have been, and what yours can be? Do they tell you what they expect of you and specifically what they will do?</p>
Is ORM their main focus?	<p>Are they attached to a search engine optimization company? How did you find them? Did you search for them and found them at the top of the list of search engine results?</p> <p>Are they attached to an Affiliate Marketing company?</p> <p>What is their product? Is it one size fits all, or do they customize?</p>
Check them out	<p>Is there any negative information about them in Google or Bing search listings?</p> <p>Check the Better Business Bureau to see if they have complaints and whether and how they have been resolved.</p> <p>How long have they been in business?</p> <p>What has the traditional media had to say about them? If they display a reference in the mainstream media about themselves on their website, can you link to it.</p> <p>Can they show you examples of how your information will look, especially if they are producing a template-based solution?</p> <p>When you look at the type of material they will produce does it look like the kind of material you want about you on the Internet? Does it look like Internet spam? This is particularly important, because not only do you want any negative information pushed down, if there is any, but you also want positive information to show first – but it has to be positive information about you that works. It has to be information that is true and not just a façade. It requires substance.</p> <p>Do they have a privacy policy that clearly addresses the issue of ORM and not just the standard collection of personal data? Does it answer your concerns as to what they may do with your personal information?</p> <p>Can they give you concrete examples of problems they have fixed? Keep in mind the difficulty of disclosing this information without breaching client privacy.</p> <p>Can they give you a client reference that did not go well, and then was resolved? Knowing how they fix an awkward client relationship problem is key in determining their character?</p> <p>Can they tell you what they consider to be unethical practices of repairing reputations?</p>
Do they leverage social media?	<p>Do they have a blog? Is it informative and up to date? After you read it (along with their website) do you feel better informed about how your problem can be fixed, how long it will take, what it will look like, and the risks?</p> <p>Do they have a Twitter account? Do they tweet regularly? Who follows them on Twitter?</p> <p>Do they have a Facebook account? Who likes them?</p> <p>Do they make instructional video available on YouTube?</p> <p>Do Social Media efforts tell you anything that can specifically help with your problem, or indicate that they really understand yours?</p>
What about the money?	<p>Are they honest about guarantees? A complete guarantee is difficult to support, as it is not a cut and dried business.</p> <p>Do they make you pay up front?</p>

²⁵⁷ Chris Martin, Reputation Hawk and Ezra Silvertown, 9th sphere voiced this advice in separate interviews

²⁵⁸ Recommendation of Chris Martin, Founder, Reputation Hawk

	Do they require a long-term contract? Does the fee structure match the service that you need? Is it too good to be true? Is the fee in the thousands of dollars with no clear statement of the work and customization to your problem?
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Protecting Your Reputation

Mike Yang, Google's managing product counsel, probably said it best, about how to deal with the reputation issue and how to enhance and protect it, *"Supply(ing) true and accurate information about themselves on the Internet. That balances the possibility that what turns up in search results better represent who they are."*²⁵⁹

At a Minimum:

- Claim your name on Twitter, .com, .ca, Facebook, and a blogging site. This will ensure others do not use your name to set up sites, which you will not control. There is a cost to this for the websites, but all trends indicate that controlling your online reputation will become increasingly important as more information becomes available and accessible on the Internet.
- You will have checked already to see what is currently available and accessible on the Internet about you. Continue that with a reasonable monitoring plan – from daily with extensive coverage, to annually with just a search in Google and Bing for your name. But, pick one and commit to it. The probability is low of a significant problem, but the outcome of such a problem can be severely damaging to a career, a potential career, or your relationships with family friends and acquaintances.
- Determine the privacy you are willing to give up to improve or establish your reputation. Essentially, what is your privacy-reputation tensile strength? The stronger it is, the more improvement in your reputation without an unacceptable (to you) privacy breach.
- Make an effort to keep to the minimum necessary amount of personal information about you online. Minimum does not mean a small amount; it means the least amount you need to support your reputation.
- Review all your posts and information in Facebook, on your site and others that you have posted to. Determine what needs to be removed and remove it. Consider removing your Facebook account if you do not need it.
- Twitter allows removal by the owner. Review your tweets and remove those you do not want found. Keep in mind that any Tweets that have been re-tweeted will not be removable and may be accessible somewhere into the foreseeable future. Twitter in most cases is not searchable forever, but many tweets are captured in other mechanisms so will still be there if you do not catch them quickly.
- If you have a blog, review your posts. Consider removing anything that you believe can be damaging, or give it more context where necessary.
- For all this material that you remove, examine carefully those self-revealing, judgmental comments and assess whether there is anyone who might be offended or upset by it, or who might take action as a result that would not be in your best interest.

For Consideration:

Should you decide to do more than just claim the primary domains/names and monitor on a periodic basis consider the following:

- Start tweeting. Create or resurrect your Twitter account. Be consistent. Talk about your industry. Talk about yourself. Be meaningful. Be professional. Be engaging.
- Establish your credentials, your resume, on LinkedIn. Revise what you have, or sign up and create it. Join LinkedIn groups in your field. Answer questions in the group. Pose meaningful questions in the group.
- Write for online publications. Many sites are looking for writers and contributors.
- Claim your name. Claim your domain (.com and .ca). Create your website.

²⁵⁹ How to Address Defamatory Online Content, *PCWorld*, April 7, 2009.

http://www.pcworld.com/article/162703/how_to_address_defamatory_online_content.html

- Create your blog. WordPress, Blogger and many other places allow you to set up a free blog. And make it easy. Keep it current. Search engines value current sites.
- Write for other blogs on topics you know.
- Watch your language and your rants. They can and will come back to haunt you.
- Get a designated online driver, says Tony Wilson. An aunt or an uncle can oversee efforts, particularly for indiscretion-prone teenagers. Let them have access to their Facebook account and keep a watchful, private and concerned eye on it. Young people may not want their parents to have access, but such a designated online driver can be a lifesaver when Tom or Betty applies for their first job out of university and are facing an HR manager, who may be armed with their Google and Facebook results.
- Link to positive content about you on other websites, particularly if they are authoritative sites.
- Social bookmarking sites are useful.
- Get involved in discussions. Facebook, Twitter and discussion forums provide plenty of opportunities for meaningful discussion and engagement.
- Very carefully manage your social media accounts. Review your privacy settings. Control them tightly. Understand them. Determine whether you want to include yourself in search results. Consider DIGG.com, Technorati.com and youtube.com for further involvement, engagement and contributions, all building your profile.
- Read the privacy policies. Be part of the small minority that does.
- Be consistent. Watch carefully to ensure that your privacy is not breached, and that your reputation remains intact. Reputation is readily besmirched and more difficult to repair or restore than maintain.
- Take part in local discussions in your trade or business, particularly those that advertise or produce these results on the Internet.
- Worry more about your future employer than your mother. Your mother will forgive you.
- Think about your profile for each environment/network you are in. Consider who will have access, and the extent to which that information can be shared or missed.
- And perhaps, most importantly, if you are thinking Facebook, then think privacy. Period. Think it again, and think about it with every post.

For ORM Organizations, in their service to consumers

- Be upfront about what you are and what you do. For those businesses with ORM as a side business, it should be noted, especially when the other business is related to affiliate marketing or other significant marketing on the Internet.
- Create a privacy policy and make it available online. Focus on the issues of privacy in ORM, not just a standard policy. If providing services directly to Canadians through clearly Canadian marketing or through a .ca website, such a Privacy Statement should be required and adhere to Canadian regulations.
- Demonstrate better skills on SEO on their own websites, citing examples of what they do.
- Get involved in Social Media to help educate consumers and highlight areas of concern. Produce a helpful blog with useful current material for consumers (see Reputation.com's blog) and maintain a Twitter account.
- Put a name, address (not a P.O. Box or UPS Store) and a face to a web site – follow the example of Reputation Hawk (Chris Martin), 9th sphere (Ezra Silvertan), Reputation Defender/Reputation.com (Michael Fertik).
- Review the list of questions that consumers are recommended to consider – in the Recommendation section of this report. Consider making this information available on their websites.
- Provide products clearly aimed at consumers, particularly for basic personal information, and Facebook and YouTube issues.

- Continue with efforts to establish and grow membership in the Online Reputation Management Association.²⁶⁰ A Code of Ethics, not unlike the ORMA Code of Ethics²⁶¹, and education within the industry is needed if consumers are to be certain of the service they will receive. It can help remove the lack of transparency in the industry.
- Clearly delineate between the “removal of a Facebook picture, the removal of information from a website the consumer does not own or control, and the moving down of information to the bottom of the first page of Google, or to the second page, or to the third in your promise of performance. Consider services, along the line of those of reputation.com, which seeks to provide a baseline cleaning service for consumers – clearly marketed and designed for consumers.
- As an industry determine who owns Reputation Reviews (www.ireputationreviews.com) and arrange to remove or clarify the controversy and allegations over its ownership and content.

For Content Hosting Sites

- Adhere to terms and conditions that they have posted on their site, if they have one. Create and post a Terms of Use or Terms & Conditions if they do not. Consider the nature of the information and reasonable need for anonymity in drafting such terms and conditions.
- Review terms and conditions and contribution guidelines in light of current legislation.
- Deal with lawyers’ requests consistently, and let people know your position on removal. Make a clear statement on contributor anonymity. State if it is allowed, and what will cause it to be unclocked.
- Have a link on the front page of the search site that allows the reporting of improper information, without having to sign in

For Search Sites

1. Make clear the process for search result removal and make it easy to find. Make it clear that the chance of search result removal is slim. Give clear indication of the factors for removal – trademark, copyright, etc.
2. Make clear that the policy that the search engine has regarding presentation of information on their sites – effectively that they take little responsibility for the information, and that it is primarily the responsibility of the website that makes the information available on the Internet.
3. Assist users of their search engine, to use their search engine to find information about themselves to monitor their online reputation.
4. Have a link on the front page of the search site that allows the reporting of improper information.

For Regulators and Government

1. Consider developing a reputation online application that allows individuals to input their name and location and get a broad look at what information is on the Internet about them. In some cases it will demonstrate that while they have a “clean” reputation, others with the same name do not, and that this may present confusion to people searching on the Internet for them.
2. Get people protecting themselves. Guide them to an understanding and appreciation of the risks.
3. Explain to the public the laws of libel, slander and defamation. The Internet is turning individuals into publishers and they need to learn their legal responsibilities.
4. Encourage sites in Canada – particularly review sites – to take a reasonable approach to moderation, anonymity and value of information.
5. Make public through an awareness campaign the message that people need be aware of their online reputation. Make them aware that they have a responsibility to both be careful about what they put on the Internet and in how they manage what others may have put up. This should be a campaign to

²⁶⁰ <http://www.orm-association.org/>

²⁶¹ http://www.orm-association.org/mem_Code_of_Conduct.php

inform, not scare people. People need to consider the implications of an HR manager or hiring executive reviewing a Facebook picture or their tweets on Twitter and not necessarily seeing them with the same humour as their classmates, nor with the mild head shaking, but blind forgiveness of their mother or father.

6. Consider the European Commission's themed campaign of "Think before you post!"²⁶²
7. Consider a campaign to work with universities, colleges and high schools to explain the implications. This is being done on an ad hoc basis, but a concerted effort across the country could be more effective and powerful. Governments sanction seatbelt or drinking and driving advertisements to save lives. Damaged reputations are ruining lives.
8. Make public a simple outline of what is acceptable to communicate anonymously and what is not.

For Consumer groups and educators

1. Create a website that will allow an individual to get an initial view of their online reputation. Furthermore, consider creating an application that will work on tablets and/or smart phones, given that the take-up of these devices is particularly high among those who are at higher risk for issues with their online reputation. This website and application would allow an individual to input their name and some other relevant information and determine what information is available about them on the Internet, and where. It could also help consumers identify whether negative information about others with the same name may be problematic.
2. Help consumers understand the relationship of privacy and reputation. For many, the issue of reputation is more important than the privacy issue. Those in the know understand the privacy versus reputation difference/tension, but to the average consumer these are not concepts they spend much time thinking about. To a consumer it may be a bigger issue when their reputation is besmirched than those instances of their privacy being violated.

²⁶²Hogben, Giles

Appendices

Appendix I – ORM Repair Organization Questionnaire

Personal Online Reputation Management Leading Service Providers

1. Given that we are sending this survey to only a select number of organizations (nine), if you decline to respond to the survey would you please do us the courtesy of indicating so below and your next click will take you to the end of the survey. Otherwise please click NEXT.

I/we decline to respond to this survey

Company Name

2. Organization Name(s)

3. Organization Information

Address One

Address Two

City

Province/State

Postal/Zip Code

Phone No.

4. Contact Information

Name

Title

Email

Phone No.

5. Chief Executive Officer/President

Email

Phone No.

Title

6. Please note the type of organizations/individuals for whom you provide reputation repair services. Please check all that apply.

Businesses/organizations High profile individuals (e.g., executive, professionals, celebrities)

Individuals

Comments

7. Personal online reputation management and repair are rapidly growing considerations for individuals using the Internet. What do you see as the implications for individuals as this growth continues?

8. For what areas are individuals most concerned about/involved in managing/repairing their reputation online?

Determining their online reputation

Promoting an online image

Keeping personal information private

Monitoring their online profile

Removing embarrassing truths

Preparing for expected views of their online presence/profile (e.g. re: job or other application)

Other (please specify)

9. What are the most important factors you believe your potential clients should consider, as they prepare for seeking your services?

10. Do you provide precautionary and/or preventive advice to clients or potential clients? Please elaborate to the extent possible:
11. Do you provide strategic advice to clients, as part of your repair service, to ensure that they do not repeat some of the difficulties that caused them to seek your services initially?
12. Is your repair relating to search engine results typically one of removal from websites and thereby the search engines as well, or moving of search engine results from the first pages of Google, Bing etc. to subsequent pages?
 - Removal from original websites
 - Moving results off first page of search engines
 - Please explain to the extent that competitive concerns would allow.
13. From which Search Engines do you remove results?
 - Google
 - Bing
 - Yahoo (Bing)
 - AskAOL
 - Search
 - Other (please specify)
14. Does removal of search engine results relate to a specific geography or does the repair/removal apply to searches from any geography?
 - All geographies
 - Specific geographies
 - Other
 - Comments
15. Do you provide a service that removes information from websites, other than search engines?
 - Yes/No/Other (please specify)
16. If yes, specifically?
 - Facebook
 - YouTube
 - Twitter
 - MySpace
 - Flickr
 - Spokeo
 - Blogs
 - Discussion Forums
 - Complaint Sites
 - People sites
 - Other Comments
17. For individuals, other than high profile individuals, what is typically the MINIMUM time it takes to ensure that their material is repaired/removed? What factors contribute to the time it takes to repair a reputation?
18. For individuals, other than high profile individuals, what is the AVERAGE time it takes to ensure that their material is repaired/removed?
19. What guarantees are provided for removal of search engine results, in terms of length of time and the nature of search terms guaranteed to not return results?
20. How do you ensure the privacy of data you gather from clients?
21. Are you able to provide Canadian legal advice where necessary for removal of material from either a website or search results?
 - Yes/No/In some cases/Comments

22. Have your services been developed with an awareness of the Canadian legal context, where you provide services for Canadian consumers?
- Yes
 - No
 - Other (please specify)
23. Organizations may often present themselves and similar services through different brands (e.g., Chevrolet, Pontiac). Are your services provided under only the one brand/organization or are there related brands/organizations providing similar services?
- One brand
 - Multiple brands
 - If multiple, please elaborate:
24. The history of an organization can often be important to an individual in seeking such repair services as provided by your organization. Has this organization (or a related organization previously provided similar services under a different name?
- Yes
 - No
 - If Yes, please elaborate:
25. Known accreditations are often considered by individuals in selecting service providers. What professional organizations/accreditation does your company have in the area of the services you provide? (e.g., SEMPO, SEO credentials, Microsoft Partner, TrustLink, Better Business Bureau etc.)
26. Would you be willing to participate in a telephone interview with a representative of our organization to elaborate on this survey, and your views on the personal Online Reputation Management and repair industry and issues?
- Yes
 - No
 - Uncertain
 - Comments
27. Contact Details for Telephone Interview
- Contact name
 - email
 - Phone No.
28. Would you be willing to participate in a telephone interview with a representative of our organization to elaborate on this survey, and your views on the personal Online Reputation Management and repair industry and issues?
- Yes/No/Uncertain
 - Comments
 - Organization
 - Contact name
 - email
 - Phone No.

Appendix II – Evaluation Detail – Credible Business – Website – Basic SEO

Chart A – Defend My Name, eBadPress, Remove it Now, Reputation Armor, Reputation Defender

	Defend My Name	EBadPress	Remove It Now	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender
Notes as of February 6, 2011					
	<p>Site appears to be the same as it was during Q1/Q2 testing.</p> <p>Copyright date is still 2010. With no blog, there are no recent indications of updated content</p> <p>Domain has been extended to 2017-01-10 (five extra years).</p>	<p>Website no longer active. Domain is still valid/active.</p> <p>Adviatech Corp.'s parent site still mentions eBadPress as a service under reputation management. The link from that page is to the dead site.</p> <p>http://www.adviatech.com/reputation-management/</p> <p>Blog link is active but all blog content has been removed.</p> <p>Domain has been extended to 2012-02-17 (one extra year).</p>	<p>Site/company renamed to RemoveSlander.com.</p> <p>Now offers clearer 'Self Service' and 'Full Service' options. Indicated prices for both have increased.</p> <p>Domain was updated on 2010-08-22, expiry date is still 2011-04-15.</p>	<p>Site does not appear to have been updated.</p> <p>Site copyright is still 2009.</p> <p>There has been some activity on the one of the 3 blogs that appear to be maintained by Reputation Armor.</p> <p>http://blog.reputationarmor.com/ has new postings on Jan 3, 2011, Nov 1, 2010, and Oct 25, 2010.</p> <p>No domain updates.</p> <p>Twitter account was dormant from November 2010, began again on Jan 3, 2011 with 4 tweets.</p>	<p>Reputation Defender renamed to Reputation.com as of January 27, 2011.</p> <p>Website has been maintained with some reorganization on the home page and within the service areas. Copyright date on site is 2011.</p> <p>Prices of the services have been adjusted. Less expensive options with fewer options are offered.</p> <p>Now offers a free monitoring service (appears to be for U.S. residents/addresses only) – http://www.reputation.com/free</p> <p>Board of Directors are the same as last tested.</p> <p>Significant blog post updates, average of one per day.</p> <p>No changes to reputationdefender.com domain.</p> <p>reputation.com whois lookup has no information (strange).</p> <p>New twitter account – Reputation_Com, has significant (3 to 4) daily tweets.</p>
Business Info					
Company Name	Digital Broadcast Network LLC	Adviatech Corp.	Remove It Now, LLC	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender, Inc.

	Defend My Name	EBadPress	Remove It Now	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender
Service Website Address	www.defendmyname.com	www.ebadpress.com	www.removeitnow.com	www.reputationarmor.com	www.reputationdefender.com
Company Website Address	www.digitalbroadcastnetwork.com	www.adviatech.com	www.removeitnow.com	www.reputationarmor.com	www.reputationdefender.com
Address	43 US Route 1 (PO BOX 4052)	9280 Bay Plaza Blvd. – Suite 706	2159 Rapatel St.	1329 W Main Street	2688 Middlefield Road – Bldg. C
City	Portland	Tampa	Mandeville	Salem	Redwood City
State/Province	ME	FL	LA	VA	CA
Postal/Zip Code	04105	33619	70448	24153	94063
Country	United States	United States	United States	United States	United States
Phone Number	866-268-5588 800-651-4827 207-252-3816 216-393-9990	800-728-5306 813-600-3017	985-633-1413 985-869-1198	888-358-2766	877-720-6488, 888-786-9995 888-720-9980, 877-720-6487 877-720-6489, 877-720-6490 877-735-3058, 888-784-7770 650-206-2707, 650-456-2277 650-361-1425
Owners/Officers	Robert Russo	Christopher Kazor Jason Bland	Tyronne Jacques	William Clay (owner) Heather Reed (owner) Joshua Holcomb Mike Reed Jason Taylor	Michael Fertik (Founder/CEO) Paul Kirincich (CFO) Owen Tripp (COO) David Thompson (CPO) Terence Sweeney (CMO) Tiger Lan (VPE) Tom Dignan (VPR) Dorothy Colantuono (VPO) Joe Jose (VPS) Brent Franson (SD) Bart Munro (VPPM) Ted Schlein (BOD) David Cowan (BOD) Michael Maples Jr. (BOD) Nick Sturiale (BOD)
Email Address	None	Employee addresses available on adviatech.com website	None	reputationarmor@yahoo.com	info@reputationdefender.com press@reputationdefender.com
Public/Private Co	Private	Private	Private	Private	Private
Start of Business Date	2006	2007	2010	2008	2006
Start of Reputation Repair	2006	2007	2010	2008	2006
Google Maps Address Verification	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Discernible Size of Company	Small	Medium	Individual	Small	Large

	Defend My Name	EBadPress	Remove It Now	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender
Business Directories					
Best of the Web	No	No	No	No	No
Bloomberg Businessweek	No	No	No	No	Yes
Google Business Directory	No	No	No	No	No
Local Business Directory	No	No	No	No	No
Open Directory	No	No	No	No	No
Superpages	No	Yes	No	No	No
Yahoo Directory	No	No	No	No	Yes
Yellow Pages	No	No	No	No	Yes
Canada					
Canadian Business Directory	No	No	No	No	No
Business Credentials					
Better Business Bureau Accreditation	No	No	No	No	Yes
Google Qualifications					
Microsoft adExcellence Member	No	No	No	No	No
Microsoft Partner	No	No	No	No	No
SEMPO	No	No	No	No	No
TrustLink	No	No	No	No	No
Canada					
Canadian Marketing Association	No	No	No	No	No
Domain Information					
Domain Registrant Contact	Digital Broadcast Network LLC PO Box 4052 Portland, ME,04101	Adviatech Corp. 9280 Bay Plaza Blvd. Suite 706 Tampa, FL	2159 rapatel mandeville, LA 70448	Private	Reputation Defender, Inc. 2688 Middlefield Road Building C Redwood City, CA, 94063
Domain Telephone	207-252-3816	813-600-3017	985-869-1198	Private	888-720-3332
Registered Email	qedonline@gmail.com	info@adviatech.com	maximusbiz@ymail.com	Private	domains@reputationdefender.com
Registered By	Robert Russo	Chris Kazor	Tyronne Jacques	Private	Omer Hasan (Technical Contact)

	Defend My Name	EBadPress	Remove It Now	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender
Registrar	Enom, Inc.	Enom, Inc.	Tucows Inc.	Moniker Online Services, LLC.	Network Solutions, LLC
Domain Created	2006-01-10	2007-02-17	2010-04-15	2008-11-06	2006-06-15
Domain Expiry	2012-01-10	2011-02-17	2011-04-15	2016-11-06	2014-06-15
Domain Updated	2008-07-18	2010-02-16	2010-04-15	2010-07-22	2008-10-14
General Top Level Domains	defendmyname.com & .net, .org, .biz, .tv, .cc, .co.uk	ebadpress.com & .net	removeitnow.com & .net, .org, .co.uk	reputationarmor.com & .net, .org, .info, .us, .tv, .ca	reputationdefender.com & .net, .org, .biz, .info, .name, .co.uk, .me, .co, .ca
Number of sites hosted on IP	351	dedicated server	192020	275	7 (all reputation.com and reputationdefender.com related)
Website Details					
Technical					
Build Technology	HTML (Adobe Dreamweaver)	HTML	Intuit SiteBuilder by Homestead	HTML	HTML
Displays in Top Browsers	(IE) (FF) (S) (C)	(IE) (FF) (S) (C)	(IE) (FF) (S) (C)	(IE) (FF) (S) (C)	(IE) (FF) (S) (C)
W3C HTML Validation	53 errors	20 errors, 6 warnings	77 errors, 12 warnings	68 errors	56 errors, 29 warnings
H1/H2/H3 Headers	None	H1: Yes H2: Yes H3: Yes	None	H1: No H2: Yes H3: No	H1: No H2: Yes H3: Yes
Img Alt Tags	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Web Analytics (Discernible from Page source)	No	Google (UA-5237614-1)	web4.realtracker.com (1756025742)	No	Google (UA-838951-1) Yahoo 1340BV6BPGDNBEP0RIPDP5451Q8
sitemap.xml	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Error page	No	Standard	Standard	No	Custom
Meta Tags					
description	Suppress negative links from 1st Pages of search engines	Use a reputation management company that guarantees success on online reputation management projects. Let EBadPress restore your good name and reputation.	As Seen On TV – Remove it Now! How to Remove Negative Articles in Google , How to Remove negative links in Google, How to fight Google, how to fight Google, Google uk anti trust complaint, How to deal with negative links, ...	Remove Rip Off Reports with reputation armor reputation management remove complaints from search results	ReputationDefender was created in 2006 to defend your good name on the Internet. Today, ReputationDefender has grown to be the world's first comprehensive online reputation management and privacy company. ...

	Defend My Name	EBadPress	Remove It Now	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender
keywords	Remove Negative Links, Remove Negative Internet Posts, Repair Bad Press	Reputation management, online reputation management, internet reputation management, bad press removal, negative press removal, reputation repair, online reputation repair	cyber bullying, how to stop cyber bullying, cyber slander, public relations, brand, Repair Bad Press, Reputation Management, Online Reputation Management, Internet Reputation Management, Online Business Reputation, online reputation management services, Online Reputation, ...	reputation management, remove my name, remove rip off reports, remove blog posts, remove search engine results, remove negative feedback, remove ripoff report, internet slander, remove slander, remove false complaints, remove complaints, reputation consultant, reputation firm, reputation managers, false blog posts, company reputation	reputation management, online management, online reputation management, internet reputation, internet reputation management, corporate reputation management, reputation monitoring, search reputation management, reputation management services, search engine reputation management, ...
Content					
Conversion Form	Yes (contact)	Yes (quote)	Yes (contact)	Yes (contact)	Yes (contact)
Privacy Policy	No	No	No	No	Yes
Terms of Use	No	No	No	No	Yes
Copyright Date	2010	2008	2010	2009	2010
WSG Readability Level	Primary/Elementary	Secondary/High School	Primary/Elementary	Secondary/High School	Advanced/Doctoral Degree
Site Usage					
Traffic Ranking	825,705	11,401,670	2,183,106	935,029	45,688 (Canada: 80,400)
History					
Internet Archive Wayback Machine	24 pages (2006-2008)	26 pages (2007-2008)	No archive	No archive	124 pages (2006-2008)
SEO Capabilities					
Website Grader – One	88	57	68	96	98
Website Grader – Two	87	54	49 36 removeslander.com	90	88/88
Social Media Presence					
Blog	No	http://www.ebadpress.com/blog/	No	reputationarmor.net, reputationarmorblog.co, blog.reputationarmor.com	http://www.reputationdefender.com/blog/
No. of Posts	None	33	None	For blog.reputationarmor.com –	526

	Defend My Name	EBadPress	Remove It Now	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender
				68	
First Post	None	2008-08-11	None	2009-12-28	2008-01-23
Last Post	None	2009-04-20	None	2010-08-15	2010-09-20
Twitter	No	No	No	ReputationArmor	repdef
Number of Tweets	None	None	None	188	2131
Last Tweet	None	None	None	2010-08-15	2010-09-20
Number Following/Followers/ Listed	None	None	None	70/3035/11	1361/1878/96
Facebook	No	No	No	reputationarmor	reputationdefender
Number of People Likes	None	None	None	74	1508
YouTube	defendmyname defendmyname1	No	ImageMaxPR	ReputationArmor	repdefvideos ReputationDefender2
Number of Videos	1	None	15	1	52
Total Number of Video Views	95	None	932	361	15675
Last Video Post	2009-05-19	None	2010-09-09	2009-01-29	2010-09-10
Number of Channel Subscribers	0	None	1	3	15
LinkedIn	defend-my-name- defendmyname	No	No	reputationarmor1	reputationdefender
Number of Employees on LinkedIn	None	None	None	None	106
Number of Followers	None	None	None	None	180
Podcasts	None	None	Yes blogtalkradio.com	None	None
Media References					
Online Media	The Wall Street Journal Online (but not linked)	None	None	None	None
Traditional Media (Print, Television)	Reader's Digest Fox News MSNBC (but not linked)	None	None	None	New York Times, CNBC, CNN, CBS, USA Today, Wall Street Journal, Dr. Phil
Relationships					
Related Companies	qedmediagroup LLC	unknown	Image Max Personal Public Relations & Events		There is also a visible relationship from the privacy page of Spokeo. http://www.spokeo.com/privacy

	Defend My Name	EBadPress	Remove It Now	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender
Related Websites	www.verifiedcredible.com www.reputationportals.com www.progressconnect.com www.correcttherecord.com	http://www.adviatech.com/ (parent SEO company)	ironcladrep.com		www.reputation.com
Canada					
References to Business in Canada	None	None	None	None	None
Aware of Differences in Canada	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Act in a legal capacity in Canada	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated
Comments					
		Site is now down.		Member of TrustGuard http://www.trust-guard.com/	

Chart B – Reputation Friendly, Reputation Hawk, Reputation Professor, Reputation Repair Experts, 9th Sphere

	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk	Reputation Professor	Reputation Repair Experts	9th sphere
Notes as of February 6, 2011	<p>Site has been updated with a slightly modified look. Content appears to be the similar to previous testing.</p> <p>Copyright date is 2010.</p> <p>No domain updates.</p>	<p>Site appears to be the same as during last round of testing. Content appears to be similar.</p> <p>Site has no copyright date.</p> <p>Recent blog posts on main site from 2010-12-16 and 2010-10-09.</p> <p>New blog posts on http://reputationhawkblog.com/ from 2011-01-06 and 2010-10-14.</p> <p>No domain updates, still set to expire 2011-06-08.</p>	<p>Site appears to be the same, blog content on main page has been updated.</p> <p>Site has no copyright date.</p> <p>Recent blog posts on 2011-01-08, 2010-12-09, 2010-11-10.</p> <p>No domain updates, still set to expire 2011-08-21.</p>	<p>Site appears to be the same.</p> <p>Copyright date is 2009.</p> <p>No domain updates, still set to expire 2011-07-14.</p>	<p>March 2011, in discussions with Ezra Silverton, President of 9th sphere we were informed that they did perform ORM services for individuals. Their website had not clearly indicated that they performed services for individuals. Consequently they were added to the testing for ORM services.</p>
Business Information					
Company Name	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk	eBusiness Architects, LLC	Reputation Repair Experts	9th sphere
Service Website Address	reputationfriendly.com	reputationhawk.com	reputationprofessor.ca reputationprofessor.com	reputationrepaiexperts.com	www.9thsphere.com/ services_reputation_manage ment.html
Company Website Address	reputationfriendly.com	reputationhawk.com	reputationprofessor.com reputationprofessor.ca	reputationrepaiexperts.com	9thsphere.com
Address	None provided	7861 Spanish Oak Rd.	5401 South Kirkman Road	2255 Carling Ave	100 York Blvd.
City	Charlotte	Denham Springs	Orlando	Ottawa	Richmond Hill
State/Province	North Carolina	LA	FL	ON	ON
Postal/Zip Code	?	70706	32819	K2B7E9	L4B 1J8
Country	United States	United States	United States	Canada	Canada
Phone Number	888-404-4115	online form	877-355-6410 321-945-7973	888-206-0384 888-298-2237	905-709-2991 1-866-811-5604
Owners/Officers	?	Chris Martin (interviewed during this research project)	David Daniels	Robert Walsh (Peter Lessard?)	Ezra Silverton (Interviewed during this research project)
Email Address	None	None	reputationprofessor@gmail.com	None	info@9thsphere.com

	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk	Reputation Professor	Reputation Repair Experts	9th sphere
Public/Private Company	Private	Private	Private	Private	Private
Start of Business Date	2009	2007	2007	2009	1997
Start of Reputation Repair	2009	2007	2007	2009	2000
Google Maps Address Verification	No	No	No	No	Yes
Discernible Size of Company	Small	Small	Small	Small	Medium
Business Directories					
Best of the Web	No	No	No	No	No
Bloomberg Businessweek	No	No	No	No	No
Google Business Directory	No	No	No	No	No
Local Business Directory	No	No	No	No	No
Open Directory	No	No	No	No	No
Superpages	No	No	No	No	No
Yahoo Directory	No	No	No	No	No
Yellow Pages	No	No	No	No	No
Canada					
Canadian Business Directory	No	No	No	No	No
Business Credentials					
Better Business Bureau Accreditation	No	No	No	No	No
Google Qualifications	No	No	No	No	Google AdWords Accreditation
Microsoft adExcellence Member	No	No	No	No	No
Microsoft Partner	No	No	No	No	No
SEMPO	No	No	No	No	No
TrustLink	No	No	No	No	No
Canada					
Canadian Marketing Association	No	No	No	No	No
Domain Information					
Domain Registrant	Private	Private	eBusiness Architects, LLC	2255 Carling Ave	Etalco Limited

	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk	Reputation Professor	Reputation Repair Experts	9th sphere
Contact			5401 South Kirkman Road Orlando, FL, 32819	Ottawa, ON K2B7E9	Suite #228, 100 York Blvd. Richmond Hill, ON L4B 1J8
Domain Telephone	Private	Private	321-945-7973	888-298-2237	905-709-2991
Registered Email	Private	Private	ebusinessarchitects@gmail.com	robertwalshmain@yahoo.com	info@9thsphere.com
Registered By	Private	Private	David Daniels	Robert Walsh	Etalco Limited
Registrar	Moniker Online Services, Inc.	Godaddy.com, Inc.	Enom, Inc.	Enom, Inc.	Tucows, Inc.
Domain Created	2009-11-21	2007-06-08	2007-08-21	2009-07-13	2000-07-05
Domain Expiry	2015-11-21	2011-06-08	2011-08-21	2011-07-14	2012-Jul-05
Domain Updated	2010-07-22	2010-05-28	2010-03-13	2010-07-14	2010-Sep-14
General Top Level Domains	reputationfriendly.com, .net, .org	reputationhawk.com, .net, .org, .info	reputationprofessor.com, .net, .org, .biz, .info, .us, .ca, .co.uk	reputationrepaiexperts.com	9thsphere.com
Number of sites hosted on IP	458	dedicated server	1327	880	dedicated server
Website Details					
Technical					
Build Technology	HTML	HTML (Adobe Dreamweaver)	WordPress 2.5.1	WordPress 2.8.3	HTML with database (Adobe Dreamweaver)
Displays in Browsers	(IE) (FF) (S) (C)	(IE) (FF) (S) (C)	(IE) (FF) (S) (C)	(IE) (FF) (S) (C)	(IE) (FF) (S) (C)
W3C HTML Validation	5 errors, 2 warnings	21 errors, 5 warnings	10 errors	6 errors, 6 warnings	3 errors (mobile site only)
H1/H2/H3 Headers	H1: Yes H2: No H3: No	None	H1: No H2: Yes H3: Yes	H1: No H2: Yes H3: Yes	H1: Yes H2: Yes H3: No
Img Alt Tags	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes , but not all
Web Analytics (Discernible from Page source)	No	No	No	No	Google (UA-237348-1)
sitemap.xml	No	No	No	No	Yes
Error page	No	No	Standard	Standard	Custom
Meta Tags					
description	Affordable Reputation management services – remove rip off reports and online slander with social media	Recent client testimonial. I wish I would have contacted you 3 months ago when my problem first started! You have taken a thorn in my side, and moved it significantly down in the search results.	<none>	Remove Rip Off Report Remove Negative Posts Reputation Repair Specialists	An award winning Toronto web design company offering distinctive web design, web development and Internet marketing services. Call toll-free 1.866.811.5604.
keywords	reputation management, remove rip off reports, delete rip off report, remove	<none>	<none>	rip off report, remove rip off report, rip-off report, reputation repair service, reputation improvements,	web design toronto,toronto web design,toronto web design company,ontario,canada,can

	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk	Reputation Professor	Reputation Repair Experts	9th sphere
	slander, internet defamation, social media marketing, remove yelp, remove complaints, brand management			Google rank, remove negative name	adian
Content					
Conversion Form	Yes (contact)	Yes (contact)	No	Yes (contact)	No
Privacy Policy	No	No	No	Yes	Yes - detailed, clear and customized
Terms of Use	No	No	Yes	None	None
Copyright Date	2010	None	None	2009	2010
WSG Readability Level	College Undergraduate	Primary/Elementary	Secondary/High School .ca	Secondary/High School	College Undergraduate
Site Usage					
Traffic Ranking	1190477	679933	15,703,208 (.com: 836,447)	9032583	185045
History					
Internet Archive Wayback Machine	No archive	16 pages (2007-2008)	4 pages (2008)	No archive	366 pages (2001-2009) 354 pages (2001-2008)
SEO Capabilities					
Website Grader Ranking	73	89	83	81	N/A not tested in first round
Website Grader Ranking	78	70	69 .ca 65 .com	78	90
Social Media Presence					
Blog	None	www.reputationhawk.com/large-scale-seo.html reputationhawkblog.com/	No	No	blog.9thsphere.com
Number of Posts	None	30	None	None	91
First Blog Post	None	2007-2-28	None	None	2005-01-01
Last Blog Post	None	2010-12-16	None	None	2010-10-07
Twitter	repfriendly	reputationhawk	No	No	9thsphere
Number of Tweets	6	1	None	None	293
Last Tweet	2010-08-24	2007-10-07	None	None	Recent
Number of Following/Followers/Li sted	0/9/0	0/1/0	None	None	52/1400/16
Facebook	No	No	No	No	9 th sphere
Number of People Likes	None	None	None	None	16
YouTube	No	No	No	No	9 th sphere

	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk	Reputation Professor	Reputation Repair Experts	9th sphere
Number of Videos	None	None	None	None	2
Total Number of Video Views	None	None	None	None	472
Last Video Post	None	None	None	None	2009
Number of Channel Subscribers	None	None	None	None	3
LinkedIn	reputationfriendly	None	reputationprofessor	No	Ezra Silverton
Number of Employees on LinkedIn	None	None	None	None	Ten
Number of Followers	None	None	None	None	24
Podcasts	None	None	None	None	None
Media References					
Online Media	None	Google News	None	None	Web design award coverage
Traditional Media (Print and Television)	None	Time, Newsweek, ComputerWorld, New York Post, Chicago Tribune, BusinessWeek, Business Report, The Early Show	None	None	None
Relationships					
Related Companies	unknown	unknown	Gadook Sales	unknown	Etalco
Related Websites	unknown	unknown	www.reputationprofessor.com	unknown	None
Canada					
References to Business in Canada	None	None	Yes (.CA domain/website)	Yes (Canadian company)	Yes (Canadian company)
Aware of Differences in Canada	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Not stated, but Canadian company	Yes
Act in a legal capacity in Canada	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated	Refer clients to a layer for this work.
Comments					
				In a number of places on the site reference is made to the leader of the company as "one of the most renowned Internet Marketers in North America" but nowhere is the name mentioned or credentials provided. No .ca domain	

Appendix III – Search Engine Rankings for Common ORM Terms/Keywords

We tested the search engine rankings of several Keywords for each ORM organization. The number indicates the placement in search engine results. The lower the better. A blank means the Keyword did not show in search results.²⁶³

Included Keywords:

online reputation management	online reputation repair	remove blog post	remove google search listing
remove negative search results	remove ripoff report	reputation management	reputation repair

Organization Legend

DMN	Defend My Name	EBP	eBadPress	RIN	Remove it Now
RESL	Remove Slander	RPA	Reputation Armor	REP	Reputation.com
RD	Reputation Defender	RPF	Reputation Friendly	RPH	Reputation Hawk
RPP	Reputation Professor (.com)	RPca	Reputation Professor (.ca)	RRE	Reputation Repair Experts
SPH	9 th sphere			RRE	

online reputation management

	DMN	EBP	RIN	RESL	RPA	REP	RD	RPF	RPH	RPP	RPca	RRE	SPH
Google.com			80			8	78		48				
Bing.com		24				2	52		7				49
Yahoo.com		24				2	52		8				49
Google.com Mobile			63			8	61						
Google Blog													
Google.ca pages from Canada											5		2
Google.ca (the web)						46							23
Bing.ca (only from Canada)									5		11		
Bing.ca (the web)					72	2	15						8
Yahoo.ca (only from Canada)									5		11		8
Yahoo.ca (the web)					72	2	15						

online reputation repair

	DMN	EBP	RIN	RESL	RPA	REP	RD	RPF	RPH	RPP	RPca	RRE	SPH
Google.com	10											12	
Bing.com	33	84					69					11	
Yahoo.com	33	78					68					11	
Google.com Mobile												12	
Google Blog													
Google.ca pages from Canada											77		
Google.ca (the web)	32											9	
Google.ca (Canada)													
Bing.ca -only from Canada													
Bing.ca (the web)	46						35	72				39	
Yahoo.ca - only from Canada													
Yahoo.ca (the web)	46						36	73				40	

²⁶³ Several Keywords “remove youtube video”, “remove facebook photo” and “remove flickr photo,” were too common and removed.

remove blog post

	DMN	EBP	RIN	RESL	RPA	REP	RD	RPF	RPH	RPP	RPca	RRE	SPH
Google.com					22								
Bing.com					1								
Yahoo.com					1								
Google.com Mobile													
Google Blog													
Google.ca pages from Canada													
Google.ca (the web)					58								
Google.ca (Canada)													
Bing.ca (only from Canada)													
Bing.ca (the web)					1								
Yahoo.ca (only from Canada)													
Yahoo.ca (the web)					1								

remove google search listing

	DMN	EBP	RIN	RESL	RPA	REP	RD	RPF	RPH	RPP	RPca	RRE	SPH
Google.com	54				31	90							
Bing.com													
Yahoo.com													
Google.com Mobile													
Google Blog													
Google.ca pages from Canada													
Google.ca (the web)													
Google.ca (Canada)													
Bing.ca (only from Canada)													
Bing.ca (the web)					39								
Yahoo.ca (only from Canada)													
Yahoo.ca (the web)													

remove negative search results

	DMN	EBP	RIN	RESL	RPA	REP	RD	RPF	RPH	RPP	RPca	RRE	SPH
Google.com	10		89		4	20						54	
Bing.com	42		48		1	46						74	
Yahoo.com	42		48		1	46						75	
Google.com Mobile			87	95		17						50	
Google Blog					37								
Google.ca pages from Canada											26		
Google.ca (the web)	20				9	29						45	
Google.ca (Canada)													
Bing.ca (only from Canada)											16		
Bing.ca (the web)	18			77	1	14						37	
Yahoo.ca (only from Canada)											16		
Yahoo.ca (the web)	18			77	1	14						37	

Appendix IV – Keywords Generated by Website

Using the Google Keywords tool, we examined each site to determine the Keywords that would be most likely to return the website in the search engine results.

The Google Keywords tool generates Keywords based on relevance to the content of the website. The Keywords listed below are the top 50 Keywords generated. They are sorted by estimated global search volume the highest first.

A reading of these Keywords will give the reader a sense of how Google sees the website at its most elemental level.

Chart A – Defend My Name, Remove Slander, eBadPress, Remove it Now

DefendMyName	Remove Slander	eBadPress	Remove It Now
online reputation	slander on the internet	reputation management	remove negative links
branding your company	slander on internet	reputation management online	online it management
protect my reputation online	reputation management	reputation management on	remove your name from the
online reputation repair	management	line	internet
online reputation management	slander internet	online reputation	remove my name from the
companies	reputation management on	reputation management	internet
online reputation management	line	management	remove negative comments
firm	internet slander	reputationsmanagement	remove negative reviews
repair online reputation	job for felony	online reputation management	remove my name from
branding your business	reputation management	online rep management	internet
online business reputation	felons and employment	personal online reputation	remove your name internet
relations marketing	find a job with a felony	management	remove your name
your online reputation	reputation management online	manage online reputation	
online reputation management	job with felony	online reputation repair	
company	offenders in my area	online it management	
protect reputation	reputation management is	repair online reputation	
online reputation management	felon job search	personal reputation	
service	job with a felony	online reputation management	
pay per click costs	hiring a felon	firm	
managing your online	online rep management	online reputation management	
reputation	hiring felons	companies	
monitoring your online	remove slander	management reputation	
reputation	job search for felons	personal reputation	
pay per click pricing	my online reputation	management	
protect your reputation online	convicted felons	reputation management is	
cost of pay per click	job search for convicted felons	online reputation management	
my reputation online	online business reputation	company	
online pr marketing	job felony	internet reputation	
cost pay per click	now hiring in my area	internet reputation repair	
remove negative links	registered felons in my area	reputation repair	
online reputation service	protect your online reputation	managing online reputation	
cost per action rates	reputationsmanagement	reputation management firms	
brand your company		your online reputation	
public relations groups		reputation manager	
managing online reputation		reputation management	
online reputation services		companies	
		reputation reputation	
		reputation google	

Chart B – Reputation Armor, Reputation Friendly, Reputation Defender, Reputation Professor (com)

Reputation Armor	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Defender	Reputation Professor.com
slander on the internet	remove complaints board	online reputation	online reputation management
slander on internet	reputation management	reputation management on	services
defamation on internet	management	line	online reputation management
slander internet	online reputation management	online business reputation	service
remove complaints board	service	reputation management	reputation management
reputation management	reputation management	management	services
management	service	online rep management	reputation management
internet slander	online reputation management	reputation management online	service
defamation and internet	services	reputation myedge	brand management online
defamation and slander	reputation management	online reputation management	brand reputation
remove ripoff reports	delete rip off report	personal online reputation	online reputation management
personal reputation	complaints board removal	management	company
internet and defamation	remove ripoff reports	reputation management	online brand management
remove rip off report	online rep management	manage online reputation	search engine reputation
internet defamation	reputation management on	your online reputation	
remove rip off reports	line	protect your online reputation	
defamation and the internet	remove rip off report	online it management	
internet slander laws	online reputation management	reputation management is	
rip off report removal	firm	protecting your online	
delete rip off report	remove rip off reports	reputation	
defamation on the internet	delete ripoff report	my edge pro	
defamation internet	remove ripoff report	online reputation management	
remove ripoff report	reputation management is	company	
personal reputation	online reputation	online reputation management	
management	rip off report removal	services	
online reputation management	reputation management and	protect online reputation	
firm	social media	reputation technologies	
delete ripoff report	online reputation management	protecting online reputation	
reputation management	companies	online reputation specialist	
slander and defamation	reputation management online	business reputation	
online slander laws	social media management	management	
reputation management on	packages	online reputation management	
line	online reputation management	service	
remove slander	company	online pr management	
	reputationsmanagement	protect your reputation online	
	reputation management	monitoring your online	
	services	reputation	
	online reputation management	reputation management and	
	management reputation	social media	
	remove bad reviews google	reputation manager	
	social media management	online reputation	
	services	reputation management on	
		line	

Chart C – Reputation Hawk, Reputation Professor (ca), Reputation Repair Experts, 9th sphere

Reputation Hawk	Reputation Professor.ca	Reputation Repair Experts	9 th sphere
online reputation reputation management reputation management services online reputation management reputation online reputation management company search engine reputation management search reputation management online reputation repair reputation management online corporate reputation management business reputation management rip off report google reputation management manage online reputation web reputation management management reputation protect online reputation your online reputation internet reputation management online reputation manager internet reputation online reputation company online reputation management services reputation management consultants reputation management service reputation management seo online reputation management service reputation management system reputation management systems	internet reputation management online reputation rip off report rip off reports online libel reputation managers internet reputation management services internet reputation manager	reputation repair services reputation repair	marketing in toronto internet in toronto web design in toronto web designers toronto web designer toronto web designer in toronto web designers in toronto mobile web designer seo in toronto design toronto web domain in canada toronto search engine marketing company seo company in toronto toronto search engine optimization company design company toronto seo company toronto web design companies toronto toronto web design companies web design company toronto canadian web design company web design company in canada toronto search engine marketing canada web design company toronto web page design web page design toronto toronto internet marketing company search engine company toronto toronto web design services web design services toronto seo toronto canada

Appendix V – Content Focused Testing

(ORM organizations websites Sept.2010, and Feb. 2011 – data copied verbatim from organizational website) –

Chart A – Defend My Name, eBadPress, Remove It Now

	Defend My Name	EBadPress	Remove It Now
Business Information			
Company Name	Digital Broadcast Network LLC	Adviatech Corp.	Remove It Now, LLC
Service Website Address	www.defendmyname.com	www.ebadpress.com	www.removeitnow.com
Company Website Address	www.digitalbroadcastnetwork.com	www.adviatech.com	www.removeitnow.com
Method of Repair			
Definition of Repair	<p>Because we have access to many resources in building and developing Custom website portals, custom designed blogs, access to press release networks and press release distribution channels and most importantly access to the BEST link building networks.</p> <p>If you want to remove negative links from the 1st page in Google just follow Google's blueprint to accomplish this! Now that you have decided this is the smartest way to move forward you are going to need a company to help you get it all built and implemented!</p> <p>We are ready to create the most amazing reputation management network of sites that will help protect your reputation in ALL major search engines.</p>	Site has been removed.	<p>Are You Being Humiliated By Negative Links In Google? Let's Knock It Out In 3 Simple Steps With Punch Google!</p> <p>The Negative Link On The First Page Of Your Search Results Will Not Simply Go Away You Have To Move It With Force!!!!</p>
How is repair processed?	We Register your name on and post content to many social media sites and blog sites and optimize you content to include your company name or personal name.Distribution to approx. 4000+ web sites including PR Newswire, Yahoo News, Google News, Marketwatch, MSNBC, ABC News, CNN.com, AOLWe develop new. com., net. and. org. domain names for your	Site has been removed.	What's Included1. Remove the negative site off the 1st Page of Google, to the 2nd page or lower.2. Our 90 Day Money Back Guarantee that we will remove your negative link.3. Lifetime warranty to keep the negative item off the 1st page.4. Status Reports as well as email updates on the removal process.5. Guarantee to replace your negative site with positive information about you or your business.6. The removal of sites like Rip off Reports, Complaints, Forums, and Blogs just to name a few are all included. Yahoo & Bing

	Defend My Name	EBadPress	Remove It Now
	backlinksWe Monitor search engine indexing and develop action plan based on the highest performing links in the SERPS.Ongoing Content Posting For All URLs – Optimized For Your Target Phrase t Original Content Development – SEO CopywritingLicenced Content From Our Article Network Of Content ProvidersWe provide once a month position reporting and progress reports for the client.		Sites.5. The removal of individual comments within Facebook, or Twitter.6. Please note that despite the fact that we will not remove comments from a privately hosted site, we still can remove that actual URL from the 1st page of Google and other search engines.
Define which search terms?	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Not stated
Define the number of search pages removed from?	How we remove negative links from 1st page in Google!	Site has been removed.	This price is backed by our Money Back Guarantee which states that if we have not removed your item from the 1st page of Google in 90 days then you will receive a full refund.
Do they find information or only repair what is requested?	Not stated but they don't appear to offer 'monitoring' services so it is unlikely.	Site has been removed.	Repair per negative item (what is requested).
One time fix or continuing monitoring and repair?	No monitoring, but they continue to work with you to continuously update your online profile.	Site has been removed.	Appears to be one time fix.
How long does repair take?	Not stated	Site has been removed.	This price is backed by our Money Back Guarantee which states that if we have not removed your item from the 1st page of Google in 90 days then you will receive a full refund.
Can information be removed anonymously?	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Not stated
What happens if content reappears?	Not stated but they offer their service of new pages and sites over a period of time.	Site has been removed.	This price is backed by our Money Back Guarantee which states that if we have not removed your item from the 1st page of Google in 90 days then you will receive a full refund.
Do they use legal counsel?	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Not stated
Client Details			
What is done with private client information?	Not stated	EBadPress.com will never: 1) Sell your information including name, phone, address, or email address with any person, organization, or institution outside of the Adviatech Corporation family. 2) Share the case information of our clients with anybody outside of Adviatech (see our section of Reputation Confidentiality). Your case details are strictly confidential.	Not stated
How do they guarantee privacy?	Not stated	When it comes to your reputation, we believe it is best repaired in the shadows.	Not stated

	Defend My Name	EBadPress	Remove It Now
		Here is a list of promises that protect you and your reputation.1) Security. Our facilities are secured with 24/7 monitoring. Hard files such as printed information pertaining to your case are shredded after use and virtual documentation pertaining to your case is stored securely off site using the same system trusted by many of the world's financial institutions.2) Selective personnel. The EBadPress division of Adviatech Corp., is directly managed by Adviatech President and co-founder, C.P. Kazor. Only Mr. Kazor, corporate officers, and staff members who have completed a background check and signed non-disclosure agreements are allowed access to privileged information pertaining to your case. Most staff members working on your case, are not aware that they are working on a reputation management case as it is handled along with other public relation clients.3) Silence. Mr. Kazor's history that dates back to the early days of Las Vegas (as described in his novel, Back Home to Vegas) understands the importance of privacy and silence. Your secret is secured with us... we are not talking.	
Remove Information			
Search			
Google	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Not stated
Bing	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Yes
Yahoo	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Yes
Social Networking			
Facebook	Not stated	Site has been removed.	No
Twitter	Not stated	Site has been removed.	No
YouTube	Not stated	Site has been removed.	No
MySpace	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Not stated
Flickr	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Not stated
LinkedIn	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Not stated
Other Sources			

	Defend My Name	EBadPress	Remove It Now
Blogs	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Not stated
Blog Comments	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Not stated
Discussion Forums	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Not stated
Other	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Not stated
Client Counseling			
Demonstrate understanding of requests	Not shown	Site has been removed.	Not shown
General advice to clients	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Not stated
Explain implications/expectations	Services explained only.	Site has been removed.	Not stated
Recommendations for self-repair	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Offer a self repair book for \$24.95 or an online eBook and videos for \$99.95. These prices frequently go 'on sale' and have been as low as \$3.95 for the eBook and online videos.
Assisted repair vs. self repair	Appears to be assisted repair by providing you the tools and places to create things like blogs and websites.	Site has been removed.	Two services offered:1. a self repair book/eBook and access to online videos.2. full service per negative item.
Information that can not be removed	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Not stated
Warnings about the industry	Not stated	Site has been removed.	Not stated
Monitoring			
What is monitored?	We Monitor search engine indexing and develop action plan based on the highest performing links in the SERPS.	Not stated	Not stated
Frequency of monitoring	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated
Price and Guarantees			
Fees	Because everyone's situation is different our program is designated by man hours and is submitted by a cost by proposal basis.	Get a Reputation Management Quote	With Remove It Now Full Service we will remove your negative site from the first page of Google for only: \$159 Per Negative ItemAs of February 2011 prices have increased to \$299 per negative item.
Estimates	Not stated	Get a Reputation Management Quote	Not stated
Free consultation	Just call for a FREE consultation and we will send you a proposal quote today!	Not stated	Not stated
Method of payment	Not stated	(see image)	PayPal
Method of Payment (image)	None	None	
Payment due	Not stated	Not stated	On signup
Guarantee	Though we charge very nominal fee for our search engine reputation management services, we guarantee total satisfaction on all our	Guaranteed success on online reputation management cases.	This price is backed by our Money Back Guarantee which states that if we have not removed your item from the 1st page of Google in 90 days then you will receive a full refund.

	Defend My Name	EBadPress	Remove It Now
	services. Call us today for all your search engine reputation management needs.		We Guarantee To Keep Your Negative Information Off The 1st Page Or Your Money Back.

Chart B – Reputation Armor, Reputation Defender, Reputation Friendly, Reputation Hawk

	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk
Business Information				
Company Name	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender, Inc.	Reputation Friendly	ReputationHawk.com
Service Website Address	www.reputationarmor.com	www.reputationdefender.com	www.reputationfriendly.com	www.reputationhawk.com
Company Website Address	www.reputationarmor.com	www.reputationdefender.com	www.reputationfriendly.com	www.reputationhawk.com
Method of Repair				
Definition of Repair	<p>The most valuable asset you or your company has is your name and reputation. With the explosive growth of social sites, search engine use, and online forums, thousands of companies and individuals find their name being bashed, slandered, trashed, and abused, all over the internet. When someone wants to make negative, false, or slanderous statements about your company, all they have to do is post a few negative comments about you on Forums, Blogs, and Social Websites.</p> <p>These negative statements will find their way to search engine like Google, which customers, employers, friends, family, and anyone, CAN and WILL search and find. These complaints can be very embarrassing for you and damaging to your good image and reputation.</p> <p>ReputationArmor will fight to keep negative statements and feedback about you or your company out of public view.</p> <p>ReputationArmor has a full staff of reputation management experts, online marketing experts, programmers, web</p>	<p>Reputation.com helps businesses and consumers control their online lives. By drastically expanding the scope of freely available information, the Internet has fundamentally altered the concept of privacy as well as how people form opinions of anything and, perhaps more significantly, anyone.</p> <p>The proliferation of blogs, online forums, and social media has created a space for fruitful exchanges of information between people across the globe. While readers often take what they find seriously, such content should not always be considered at face value. When it comes to information about people, the Internet and</p>	<p>A full service reputation management company that offers you an affordable way to build and repair your online reputation with minimal fees.</p> <p>Providing online reputation management and social network optimization services for individuals and businesses for over six years.</p> <p>The ReputationFriendly.com team has been involved with search engine optimization, social media, PR, and reputation management for over 6 years and can help you control what is found about your name or company online.</p>	<p>The problem...</p> <p>When you input your name or the name of your company into a search engine, you see one or more web sites that speak negatively about you. What is even more frustrating is that it feels like there is nothing you can do about it. It may be true that you cannot do anything about it, but we can.</p> <p>It's important that we keep the following facts in mind regarding this issue,</p> <p>The problem will not go away on it's own.</p> <p>Stressing out is not worth it! There are millions of good people dealing with this problem.</p> <p>Some content can be removed but most cannot (Section 203 of Communications Decency Act).</p> <p>Statistics show that 94% of people stay on the front page of Google when searching. 99% stay on the first two pages of search results! So, if your unwanted sites are pushed off of the first two pages than we can assume that</p>

	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk
	<p>developers, and search engine experts that not only can have negative details about you or your company Removed from search engine results, blogs, forums, and other public web pages, we can also create a positive image campaign for you or your company.</p> <p>Our reputation management service gives you the opportunity to fight back and reclaim your positive image. ReputationArmor uses many different types of tools and websites to publicize the positive attributes/information about you and we create a positive image campaign that will overpower and bury the negative information that is currently haunting you.</p>	<p>search engines often call up information that is private, untrue, or out of context.</p> <p>The growth of the Internet has made managing your online reputation online a necessity. Through proprietary technology we allow customers to monitor the web, delete their personal information, and control how they look when searched online. With the backing of Kleiner Perkins, Bessemer, and Jafco, Reputation.com primed an industry focused on providing individuals and businesses with the necessary tools to define their online image. Today we are thrilled to be serving customers in over 100 countries, and honored to be recognized by the World Economic Forum as a 2011 Technology Pioneer Award winner.</p>		99 out of 100 people will never see it.
How is repair processed?	<p>Removing Negative Search Engine Results That Appear On Search Engine About You Or Your Company. This is where we penetrate and dominate search engine results with favorable posts, reviews, articles and more about your company. This is done to displace, push down, and bury negative information found about you on the major search engines. Positive Press Release Campaigns. This is where we create multiple press releases about your company and distribute the press</p>	<p>Reputation.com allows you to take control of your online information in four simple steps. 1. Protect your personal info – We find and remove your personal data from sites that sell it. 2. Define your image – We help you promote a truthful online image that you control. 3. Defend your reputation – We</p>	<p>Reputation Management Features Below is a partial list of what is included with our Reputation Management Campaigns: 1-3 Micro Domains (YourNameHere.com) – Hosting Included 125+ Social Profiles (Search Engine Optimized) Press Release Distribution Campaign (Businesses Only) Article/BIO Featured On 450+ Targeted Blogs (Blog Posting Campaign) Link Building Campaign To Increase</p>	<p>In short, this is what we do. Research the problem. Develop a plan. Generate more positive publicity about you or your company on the net. Build the "authority" of that publicity and convince the search engines that the positive sites are more valid than the negative sites. Continually monitor the situation to make sure the positive publicity remains front and center, and any negative sites are outside of the top 20 search engine results. The entire process is similar to a game of chess. Search engines use complex algorithms to decide how web sites are</p>

	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk
	<p>releases throughout a large network of PR websites like PRWEB, Yahoo News, PR.com, and many more. These positive press releases will create permanent positive reputation boosting gateways to your website, and also help dilute or eliminate negative feedback about you. Reputation Blog Branding. This is where we create a new search engine optimized blog website specifically about your company and company news. This blog can be updated multiple times per week/month, this will create multiple pages of information about your company that will show up in Google and other search results, thus pushing any negative results or feedback out of sight. Blog Posting. This is where we submit your website and company name and a quick bite of information about your company to highly ranked search engine friendly Blogs. This will create more positive results about your company on search engine. Reputation Monitoring. This is where we constantly monitor the internet and major search engines along with all know "complaint portals" and scan them for your company name, address, website, phone number and email. If a negative item is found about you or your company, we immediately notify you and recommend a solution to remove the negative information. Forum Posting. This is where we submit your website and company name and a quick bite of information about your company to highly ranked search engine friendly forums. This will create more positive results about your company on search engine. This services goes hand in hand with Blog Posting. Article Marketing. Our technical writers and ghost writers will create keyword rich articles about topics that are relevant to your business. We tag these articles with backlinks that will carry readers to your website and</p>	<p>defend you against attacks, rumors and distortions online. 4. Monitor your image – We provide ongoing, deep Internet monitoring.</p>	<p>Ranking Of Positive Links Twitter Account Creation/Management + Follower Acquisition Reputation Monitoring – Alerts Of New Items Indexed By Google Full Campaign Reports and Stats + Monthly Updates Weekly Content Creation and Update Campaign Negative Information Removal Negotiation Dedicated Reputation Management Consultant 24/7 Email Support/Phone Support M-Sat 11AM-9PM EST. Online Reputation Management ReputationFriendly.com provides reputation and brand management services for companies and individuals. We use our 10+ years of search engine optimization experience to leverage search results in the favor of our clients. The Reputation Friendly Staff is comprised of search engine optimization specialists, technical writers, content creation technicians, and administrative staff. We currently have 8 in-house employees and 6 telecommuters on our team. Our staff is well versed in all aspects of online reputation management and has worked on an abundance of campaigns in a variety of industries. We have a proven methodology we follow when helping our clients with online reputation issues. Some of our techniques include: Micro Domains Optimized Company/individual Blogs Online Social Networks Press Releases Link Building Campaigns Mass Blog Posting (Non-Black Hat) Search Engine Optimization View Our Service Features Page</p>	<p>ranked. We have to stay on top of those constantly changing algorithms in order to beat the false or negative sites with the truthful or positive sites about you or your company. This is referred to as internet/online reputation management.</p>

	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk
	<p>increase your search engine ranking. We aggressively distribute these articles to hundreds of article websites, feeds, and outlets. Eventually your articles will appear in search engine results, and create more positive results, which will eliminate would be searchers from seeing any negative feedback about you or your company.</p> <p>Back Links. Getting quality websites to link back to your website is a backlink (back link). Obtaining backlinks can sometimes be a difficult task. It is very important to have a lot of backlinks. Having quality backlinks will increase your link popularity and PageRank, this will increase your search engine ranking and make your website show up higher when people search for keywords related to your business, product, or service.</p> <p>Search Engine Optimization (SEO Services). Buy applying our 10+ years experience in search engine marketing and search engine optimization, we can increase your websites visibility throughout all major search engine and Google (The Biggest). We have dozens of techniques to get your company more web traffic, and higher rankings on search engines for the keywords that are relevant to your company. Our SEO service is one of the most detailed and advanced in the industry. SEO is always a work in progress, and it is usually a constant battle to keep your website on top of the major search engines.</p> <p>Reputation Negotiation. This is where we carefully negotiate the removal or negative information posted about you, with Bloggers, webmasters, editors, and website owners that have posted or listed negative information about you or your company. This process is very tricky and if not done in the right manner can sometimes motivate the "negative poster" to create more negative pages and information about you. This is where we come in. We have successfully</p>			

	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk
	negotiated with several sites and Bloggers, and have had negative information suppressed or removed.			
Define which search terms?	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Search terms dependent on geography or time?	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Define the number of search pages removed from?	<p>When someone searches for you and you have a complaint on one of these sites, the complaint link will most likely rank in the top 2-5 results on Google and other top search engines.</p> <p>We can help you by trying to have these complaint links removed from the sites and in most cases we have to suppress the links in search results and push them back deeper within results. By burying these complaint links and complaints deep within search results, people that search for you will not find them as easily.</p>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<p>Statistics show that 94% of people stay on the front page of Google when searching. 99% stay on the first two pages of search results! So, if your unwanted sites are pushed off of the first two pages than we can assume that 99 out of 100 people will never see it.</p> <p>Continually monitor the situation to make sure the positive publicity remains front and center, and any negative sites are outside of the top 20 search engine results.</p>
Do they find information or only repair what is requested?	<p>Free Reputation Monitoring</p> <p>ReputationArmor – Reputation Monitoring</p> <p>Online reputation monitoring is simply the process of monitoring what is being said about you or your business online. The simplest way to monitor your online reputation is with Google alerts. Reputation Armor offers free reputation monitoring to all active clients. Any client that does business with us we usually monitor their online reputation free of charge or as part of a package.</p>	Find and repair (or suppress)	Appears they find is using monthly service	Continually monitor the situation to make sure the positive publicity remains front and center, and any negative sites are outside of the top 20 search engine results.
One time fix or continuing monitoring and repair?	<p>Free Reputation Monitoring</p> <p>ReputationArmor – Reputation Monitoring</p> <p>Online reputation monitoring is simply the process of monitoring what is being said about you or your business online. The simplest way to monitor your online reputation is with Google alerts. Reputation Armor offers free reputation monitoring to all</p>	Continuous monthly/yearly services	Recommend multiple month service	Continually monitor the situation to make sure the positive publicity remains front and center, and any negative sites are outside of the top 20 search engine results.

	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk
	active clients. Any client that does business with us we usually monitor their online reputation free of charge or as part of a package.			
How long does repair take?	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Can information be removed anonymously?	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
What happens if content reappears?	<i>Not stated</i>	Monthly service	<i>Not stated</i>	Continually monitor the situation to make sure the positive publicity remains front and center, and any negative sites are outside of the top 20 search engine results.
Do they use legal counsel?	<i>Not stated</i>	Not stated specifically, but it appears that have the ability to engage legal counsel is necessary.	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Client Details				
What is done with private client information?	<i>Not stated</i>	THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW: We don't sell your personal information to marketers or spammers. We don't provide any personal information to online "white pages" or "people finder" sites. Period. Our privacy policy has been reviewed and approved by TRUSTe.	<i>Not stated</i>	Your information is held strictly confidential and only seen by the Founder of Reputation hawk – Chris Martin.
How do they guarantee privacy?	<i>Not stated</i>	http://www.reputation.com/privacypolicy	<i>Not stated</i>	The first and only person to receive your initial contact information is the Founder of Reputation Hawk – Chris Martin. You will also have access to his personal email and direct line. Compare this to other companies where your contact from the beginning is a sales rep who has limited experience in this industry.
Remove Information				
Search				
Google	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Bing	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Yahoo	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>

	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk
Social Networking				
Facebook	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Twitter	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
YouTube	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
MySpace	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Flickr	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
LinkedIn	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Other Sources				
Blogs	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Blog Comments	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Discussion Forums	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Other	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Client Counseling				
Demonstrate understanding of requests	<i>Not shown</i>	Through blog posts.	<i>Not shown</i>	<i>Not shown</i>
General advice to clients	<i>Not stated</i>	Lots through blog posts.	<i>Not stated</i>	
Explain implications/expectations	<i>Not stated</i>	Through blog posts.	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Recommendations for self-repair	<i>None</i>	Using services.	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Assisted repair vs. self repair	Repair service only	Both using monthly services.	Repair service only	Repair service only
Information that can not be removed	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Warnings about the industry	Online Reputation Management is an industry that is growing fast. It seems like there are new "reputation management" companies appearing online daily. We are one of the original reputation management companies online and know what it takes to repair and rebuild your online reputation.	In Blog posts.	Most Reputation Management Firms require large upfront fees and ongoing fees that add up to thousands of dollars over the course of a reputation management campaign. What you are really paying for is content creation, social media profiles, and search engine optimization services.	<i>Not stated</i>
Monitoring				
What is monitored?	<i>Not stated</i>	Continual monitoring made easy You'll get the	Reputation Monitoring – Alerts You Of New Items Indexed By	<i>Not stated</i>

	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk
		Reputation.com dashboard. Easily scan your web rankings, trend reports and monthly profile progress statements.	Google About Your Name	
Frequency of monitoring	<i>Not stated</i>	Continual monitoring made easy You'll get the Reputation.com dashboard. Easily scan your web rankings, trend reports and monthly profile progress statements.	By staying our client we will continuously monitor and build your online reputation.	<i>Not stated</i>
Price and Guarantees				
Fees	Contact Us For Reputation Management Help Today! Please fill out the form below for a free consultation and service quote.	MyPrivacy – Protect your privacy from \$4.15/month MyReputation – Manage your reputation from \$10.95/month My Privacy and MyReputation – Protect your privacy and reputation from \$99/year Reputation Defender – Control negative feedback Call Our services are provided on an ongoing subscription basis. (Comment – also has \$3,000, \$5,000 and \$10,000 service for more significant efforts)	ReputationFriendly.com has a simple flat rate price structure. We charge a flat rate of \$99.00 per month for our services. Since real reputation management is an ongoing service, it should not be a large one-time fee like some companies charge. We offer an affordable solution for both business and individual clients. Upon signing up with ReputationFriendly.com you will be charged a one-time \$100.00 account activation fee, plus your first month installment of \$99.00. The total to start is \$199.00. You will then be automatically billed \$99.00 each 30 days (Month) thereafter.	<i>Not stated</i>
Estimates	Contact Us For Reputation Management Help Today! Please fill out the form below for a free consultation and service quote.	Monthly services make up the bulk of work, can call for quotes/estimates for more detailed repair (generally for businesses)	Q: How long do we pay the monthly \$99 fee? A: We encourage our clients to continue the \$99 per month service for 12 months or greater. Even if you use our	CLICK HERE TO REQUEST INFORMATION You are probably curious about pricing, whether or not we can help you in your specific situation, and have a few questions.

	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk
			service and the negative links about you are buried, there is always a risk that new links can appear or the ones we buried come back. By staying our client we will continuously monitor and build your online reputation. You may cancel our service at anytime by sending us an email.	
Free consultation	Need Reputation Management? Get a free reputation consultation from an expert! Contact Us	Call	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>
Method of payment	<i>Not stated</i>	<i>Not stated</i>	Q: How do you accept payments? A: We accept most major credit cards and Paypal. We also can accept checks online and by fax. All credit card payments must be made online.	<i>Not stated</i>
Method of Payment (image)	<i>None</i>	<i>None</i>		<i>None</i>
Payment due	<i>Not stated</i>	How does billing work? Our MyReputation Discovery and MyPrivacy services are sold as subscription services. To ensure your uninterrupted service, your subscription is automatically renewed and you will be automatically charged. You will be charged every month, every year, or every two years depending on the duration of the plan that you purchased. If you have the MyReputation service, you will be contacted by a Reputation Advisor when it is time to renew.	Q: How do I sign-up with your service? A: Getting started with us is easy. Simply click on sign-up and complete the information form (step1), you will then be taken to the payment options page where you can insert your billing details. After receiving your information we will contact your VIA email or phone to launch your campaign.	<i>Not stated</i>
Guarantee	<i>Not stated</i>	We can't guarantee any results, but you can help	When it comes to guaranteeing that a rip off report or bad link	<i>Not stated</i>

	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk
		by giving us better information about yourself.	will be buried, we do not guarantee how deep it will go or how long it will take. If our service (Over Time) will not bury a bad link, then no one can. Unlike other " Reputation Companies" we do not offer false guarantees and hopes.	
Testimonials and/or References	<p>What our customers have said about our company and service:</p> <p>"Your service saved my business literally... I will recommend you to anyone who might need help like I did... Thank you again..."</p> <p>"I would like to thank you for everything... I sleep better at night now that all of this is taken care of. You guys delivered exactly what you promised..."</p> <p>"After spending over \$5000.00 with other "Reputation Companies" with no success, your service was the one who really helped us...Your fees were very reasonable and worth every penny..."</p> <p>"My wife and I thank you... Being real estate brokers we must have a clean reputation and that is what you continue to deliver. Our renters that we evict always bad mouth us. You keep the fire out and that is what we like."</p> <p>"Thanks for all the hard work and understanding, I recommend your service to anyone who needs good PR. You can use this on your testimonial page, ya'll deserve the business"</p> <p>"O' My God! You actually got it ALL taken off of Google... I feel better when I don't see lies about me online... We will stay in touch..."</p> <p>"I love my new blog site and thanks for promoting it like you have. I am all over</p>	<p>Our business is built upon establishing absolute trust between Freestream Aircraft and each and every client. Our continued success depends on maintaining their confidence in every aspect of our relationship. Reputation.com has supported our business model by delivering great results with complete accountability since Day One.</p> <p>- Rebecca P, President & COO, New Jersey</p> <p>As a systems engineer in the Business Intelligence industry, I know what's possible on the open Web. The best thing you can do is to be informed and in control. Reputation.com makes this manageable.</p> <p>- Andre S, Information Technology Specialist, Sao Paolo, Brazil</p> <p>It's important for my business that I'm seen as an expert in my field. Reputation.com helped me build an online resume which properly reflected my professional</p>	<p>Q: Do you have references I can speak with?</p> <p>A: We do not share client information with anyone and have a strict privacy policy in place to protect our clients. Our clients pay us to help hide negative information and it would be unprofessional to share their issues with you. No we can not show you cases we have worked on in the past.</p>	<p>That is amazing! I'm beginning to feel like my life is headed back in the right direction....like you've taken control of the situation and are turning it around for me. Simply amazing! - Well known psychologist</p> <p>I am thrilled to see the "item" already on the second page and holding....! - Financial Industry</p> <p>"Thanks for everything. We're really blown away by your quality of work, output, style and thoroughness." - Technology Company</p> <p>"Man, you are really kicking #\$\$\$!! thanks Chris...you're killing out there!" - Technology Company</p> <p>"Brilliant!!" - Financial Company</p> <p>"You're a genius! Thanks and if we keep at this . . .jeez, it's only been a couple of months..." - Web Company</p> <p>"That is amazing! I'm beginning to feel like my life is headed back in the right direction....like you've taken control of the situation and are turning it around for me. Simply amazing!" - Current client</p> <p>"I am thrilled to see the "item" already on the second page and holding...!" - Current client</p> <p>"So far, you're batting 1,000" - Current client</p> <p>"Thanks for everything Chris. We're really blown away by your quality of work, output, style and thoroughness. Helluva a guy you are!" - Current client</p> <p>"Great idea! I'll ask her if she can do that asap. Great ideas you have!" - Current client</p> <p>"Man, you are really kicking #\$\$\$!! thanks Chris...you're killing out there!" - Current client</p> <p>"Brilliant!!" - Current client</p> <p>"You're a genius! Thanks and if we keep at this . . .jeez, it's only been a couple of months..." - Current client</p> <p>"You're doing a great job, really! I can't tell</p>

	Reputation Armor	Reputation Defender	Reputation Friendly	Reputation Hawk
	<p>the search engines and am getting a lot of good vibe buzz!"</p> <p>"Your service was great...Keep up the good work!"</p> <p>"I recommend Reputation Armor because they are the real deal and get the job done. (Period)..."</p> <p>"It took you only a few weeks to do what others could not do in 2 years...This is why I liked your service..."</p> <p>"Rip-off Report almost ruined my business until you did what you did... I can't express my thanks enough..."</p> <p>"You Rock! You did a super job.... This has helped me a lot..."</p> <p>"After a month my online reputation was better looking than I could have imagined..."</p> <p>"If you need a good company to help you with online reputation management... I recommend Reputation Armor....Great service."</p>	<p>accomplishments." - Dr. B., Psychotherapist, Philadelphia, PA</p> <p>I use Reputation.com because I am a parent ... you cannot possibly know everywhere your child is active online. Thankfully, Reputation.com does! - John C, Small Business Owner, Atlanta, GA</p> <p>Additional testimonials: http://www.reputationdefendertestimonials.com/</p>		<p>you how impressed I am." - Current client</p> <p>"THANKS! You're doing a great job and it has already had a positive affect. Glad there's guys like you...organized and awake throughout. I couldn't do it!" - Current client</p> <p>"Man, you are good!!" - Current client</p> <p>"Great! just back from vegas.. will answer any questions. You have started a buzz about me in the industry...actually working very well... your the man!" - Current client</p> <p>"Brilliant Idea!" - Current client</p> <p>"You've done an incredible job in a few weeks .. Certainly much more than I'd expected." - Current client</p> <p>"Man, you're killing ~em! Way to go." - Current client</p> <p>"Wow - You have great ideas!" - Current client</p> <p>"Thanks again Chris. I really really think that you are doing a great job at this. You know your stuff!" - Current client</p> <p>"Wow! What a great idea!" - Current client</p> <p>"Hey, getting comments on the PR from all over the place... from guys I haven't spoken w/ in years. Good going Chris!" - Current 2007 client</p> <p>"The page is incredible!! Wow!!!" - Current client</p> <p>"Thanks for all the good things you're doing out there Chris. Don't think I don't notice... really appreciate it." - Current client "You're the greatest! Thanks Chris!!....I knew you would be on top of that!" - Current client -</p> <p>"This is great Chris.... Very exciting!" - Current client</p>

Chart C – Reputation Professor, Reputation Repair Experts, 9th sphere

	Reputation Professor	Reputation Repair Experts	9th sphere
Business Information			
Company Name	eBusiness Architects, LLC	ReputationRepairExperts.com	9th sphere
Service Website Address	www.reputationprofessor.ca www.reputationprofessor.com	www.reputationrepairexperts.com	http://www.9thsphere.com/services_reputation_management.html www.9thsphere.com
Company Website Address	www.reputationprofessor.com	www.reputationrepairexperts.com	www.9thsphere.com
Method of Repair			
Definition of Repair	<p>Reputation Management on the Web You should employ personal reputation management as a way to clean up your search results and gain more search real estate. We help you generate a distinguished Web presence on the Internet.</p> <p>The Personal Reputation Management Revolution Personal Reputation Management has come of age. No longer is it solely a marketing discipline, confined to managing the promotion of products. Today, reputation management is also a skill of self promotion. People want to proactively differentiate themselves from their competition.</p> <p>Good personal reputation management creates a point of distinction. It helps you stand apart from the crowd. No two grains of sand are exactly alike and no two personal brands are exactly alike.</p> <p>Strengthen, Build, Manage and Expand your Personal Brand. Why it is important Never has it been more important to understand the power of having, maintaining and developing a strong online presence. Never has a simple Google search been able to tell us more about a person, who they are, what they do, and why they matter. We no longer need just to worry about what people see and hear about us face-to-face but we also need to consider our digital presence. It's all about you</p> <p>Whether its a personal brand or that of a product or service, the value of a brand is in the promise that it makes. A brand can help a customer recall positive or negative experiences and emotions which influence how people behave towards your brand. For the individual, this means that its important to create a online presence that will deliver on the expectations of the customer. If you do not take control of your own reputation, then somebody else will. And unless its a highly paid consultant with your</p>	We can remove negative items associated with you from ... major search engines	<p>"We will look at ORM as a promotional tool, more than some kind of rebuttal tool. We want our clients to be more proactive than reactive. We want people to think of ORM as a resume to highlight your achievements, not to look for items you are trying to hide or dispute against." KI Interview</p> <p>Prospective and current clients will often seek out a company's website by typing in the company or brand name into a search engine. Among the search results, including the company's official website and micro-sites, a searcher may also stumble on comments, reviews, articles, press releases, even an employee's personal social network profile, or other websites about the company. Some remarks may turn out to be negative, if not damaging.</p> <p>Though the conjectures or rumours may be coming from a non-legitimate source; a disgruntled client, past employee, or just a prank, a business' reputation can there and then be put to question. This is where Online Reputation Management plays an important role in diverting harmful claims from easy public access.</p> <p>Social networks, forums, blogs, or other website reviews facilitate the ease with which anyone can post comments on the</p>

	Reputation Professor	Reputation Repair Experts	9th sphere
	<p>interests at heart then its time for you to start thinking about reputation management.</p> <p>Our service offers all the necessary aspects needed to fulfill a successful, ongoing personal reputation management campaign. Starting with strategy creation to implementation through reporting and measurement, our solutions encompass the needs of any person.</p>		<p>Internet. It's no surprise that statements about a company or even a person's name can quickly pop up on a search engine's search results.</p> <p>9th sphere assigns a team of specialists to collaborate with clients to ensure the highest degree of care and ethics.</p> <p>Don't harbour the opportunity to discover damaging information. The longer it's out there, the more difficult it is to mitigate. Take preventative, corrective, or effective action and contact 9th sphere.</p>
How is repair processed?	<p>Personal Services Custom strategies involving Web design, Link building, Positive reviews, Viral marketing, Social media, Video, Article, Newsletter, Press release creation and implementation: Please contact us and we will provide you with a package tailored to your needs.</p>	<p>Positive Information Overload and some world class SEO! Posting our exact strategy on this site would be stupid as it would inform the very people we are trying to protect you from. We will clearly demonstrate our tactics when we chat. What kind of positive information do you create? We are at your disposal, and create any kind of positive information that you wish. If you already have positive content, we will optimize it for search engines, and make sure that it ranks as high as possible. If you do not have content prepared, our professional writing staff will work on your behalf. In order to get your information out there, we use some proprietary methods that include a mix of blog posts, forum comments, custom websites, and online profiles. We never use pornographic, gambling, political, or religious sites. We will work closely with you to determine what type of information you want to promote, and work hard to make it as visible as possible.</p>	<p>"Our first attempt is to reach out to the website that has that data and ask them for removal. The chances of those ever being removed are next to slim. It's very very rare to get the website owner to remove the content. You could go down the avenue of lawsuits but the amount of time and money that it takes to go through that process is often not worth the effort. So what we do, so even though we attempt to do that, if it is not successful our first attempt is to take all the positive aspects of that individual or the company and get those attributes online." KI Interview</p>
Define which search terms?	Not stated	Not stated	based on appropriate context
Search terms dependent on geography or time?	Not stated	Not stated	No
Define the number of search pages removed from?	Not stated	One to three pages from Google, or Google, Yahoo and Bing based on which service purchased	Varies on a case by case basis
Do they find information or only repair what is requested?	Not stated	Not stated	Both, as requested by client
One time fix or	Not stated	Appear to offer both services.	As necessary, based on client need

	Reputation Professor	Reputation Repair Experts	9th sphere
continuing monitoring and repair?			
How long does repair take?	Not stated	Every situation is unique. In some cases, we can change search results in a matter of weeks, and in others it can take much longer. Also some clients require ongoing reputation management as they have constant and ongoing challenges. The time frame depends on which sites host your negative information, and how many web sites we are targeting. It takes time to change the information in search engines, and we work as quickly as this process allows.	Initial assessment and efforts is three months
Can information be removed anonymously?	Not stated	SEO work only, information does not appear to be "removed"	Yes
What happens if content reappears?	Not stated	Ongoing monitoring/repair is available for a fee.	Case by case basis
Do they use legal counsel?	We are not Attorneys and cannot provide legal advice, nor does this Agreement or the Services create any legal representation.	We are also partnered with an investigative solutions group should you wish to determine the source of these negative posts and pursue them through legal channels.	They refer clients to legal counsel as necessary
Client Details			
What is done with private client information?	Privacy. As a condition to using the Service, you agree to the terms of the E-Business Architects, LLC Reputation Management Privacy Policy as it may be updated from time to time E-Business Architects, LLC understands that privacy is important to you. Personal information collected by E-Business Architects, LLC may be stored and processed in the United States or any other country in which E-Business Architects, LLC or its agents maintain facilities. By using services you consent to any such transfer of information outside of your country. You authorize us to be your reputation management advocates. In this role, we might contact third parties, including creators of negative content, hosts of negative content, and other parties who might have control or authority over such content. You authorize us to take such action on your behalf, via email, secure Web link, or the U.S Postal Service or other courier service, and to identify ourselves as acting on your behalf. You recognize that such contact may have unknown consequences, including but not limited to negative responses from others.	we have the utmost respect for our customer's privacy.	They have a Privacy Policy
How do they guarantee privacy?	Not stated	Not stated	All personal information held or collected is protected under the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA). This means

	Reputation Professor	Reputation Repair Experts	9th sphere
			<p>that at any point of collection you will be asked for consent to collect your information, and you will be informed of the purpose for which it is being collected and how to exercise your right of access to that information.</p> <p>Only employees who need the information to perform a specific job (for example, our billing clerk or a customer service representative) are granted access to personally identifiable information. Our employees use password-protected computers. Furthermore, all employees are kept up-to-date on our security and privacy practices. If at any time new policies are added, our employees are notified and reminded about the importance we place on privacy and what they can do to ensure our customers' information is protected. Servers that store personally identifiable information are kept in a secure environment, behind code and key locked doors. We may use this information from time-to-time to contact you about service updates, changes to our systems and procedures. This information is kept for as long as Etalco Limited is in business and it is stored at its office. We protect all personal information in our custody with strong security safeguards, including strict access controls.</p>
Remove Information			
Search			
Google	Not stated	Yes	Yes
Bing	Not stated	Yes	Yes
Yahoo	Not stated	Yes	Yes
Social Networking			
Facebook	Not stated	Yes	Yes
Twitter	Not stated	Not stated	Yes
YouTube	Not stated	Yes (online videos)	Yes

	Reputation Professor	Reputation Repair Experts	9th sphere
MySpace	Not stated	Yes	Not stated
Flickr	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated
LinkedIn	Not stated	Not stated	Not stated
Other Sources			
Blogs	Not stated	Not removed (stated as impossible)	Yes
Blog Comments	Not stated	Not stated	Yes
Discussion Forums	Not stated	Yes	Yes
Other	Not stated	News sites	Yes
Client Counseling			
Demonstrate understanding of requests	Not shown	Not shown	Yes through Key Informant Interview
General advice to clients	Provides blog posts with tips for reputation management for social networking sites as well as links to monitoring sites and other tips on general online reputation management.		Yes, on a case by case basis
Explain implications/expectations	Not stated	Not stated	Yes, on a case by case basis
Recommendations for self-repair	Provides blog posts with tips for reputation management for social networking sites as well as links to monitoring sites and other tips on general online reputation management.	If you have very little budget but still wish to keep an eye on what is being said online regarding your name or company name you should consider signing up for the free service http://www.google.com/alerts	Not mentioned
Assisted repair vs. self repair	Repair service only	Repair service only, but do state that they will use material from their clients.	Both. They prefer to have client write much of the material as it is then more realistic and better for ORM.
Information that can not be removed	Not stated	Will you be able to permanently delete all of my negative information? No, not always and anyone promising they can is lying! That's beyond what any Reputation Repair company can promise you, since the site(s) where the negative information about you may be listed will likely refuse to remove it and they are currently protected by the law.	Facebook accounts are never deleted completely. Some people will not remove blog posts.
Warnings about the industry	Not specifically but there is some touching on this in various blog posts.	WARNING: DO NOT tell ANY reputation company too much! Provide only cell phone & first name, have them PROVE they are for real! Over 50 sites have popped up that are owned by the same groups that own the sites where negative information is posted! You may be seeing all kinds of reputation repair	None

	Reputation Professor	Reputation Repair Experts	9th sphere
		online for \$50-\$150 month etc... WHAT A JOKE! This is designed to lure you in and get you paying. You will not get decent results or they will educate you as to the real costs later.	
Monitoring			
What is monitored?	Monitoring We offer Comprehensive, Automated Reputation Management Monitoring Products for our clients. Learn who is talking about you, your brand, company or products on websites, videos, news, blogs and social networks.	Part of monthly fee service	Case by case basis
Frequency of monitoring	Not stated	Not stated	As required
Price and Guarantees			
Fees	Fees The Standard Plan membership fee (Month-to-Month Membership) is \$99/mo. Some of our flat fee stand-alone services start at around \$100 as found under the services menu. Fees for complex campaigns involving custom strategies and additional expertise are based on individual needs.	Monthly (\$399 to \$899)	Approximately \$2200 to \$2500 in total for first three months.
Estimates	Not stated	We will then quickly perform an in depth analysis of the situation and present you with some options.	Approximately \$2200 to \$2500 in total for first three months.
Free consultation	Not stated	10 minute chat	Initial
Method of payment	Not stated	You can pay via Paypal with any major credit card, Western Union, Interac Money Transfer or mail us a check.	
Method of Payment	None		
Payment due	Not stated	Do I need to pay all of your service fees up front? NO, and you should be extremely concerned about any firm asking for full payment upfront! We structure a monthly recurring payment plan with no long term obligation on your part. If you are ever dissatisfied you simply stop.	
Guarantee	E-Business Architects, LLC, moreover, does not guarantee or warrant that it will be successful in effecting removal or alteration, if such service is to be performed, of any Internet content about the Customer or the Named Party he or she has designated as the subject of the searches to be undertaken by the Company. Further, the Customer hereby acknowledges that the Company can not and does not make any guarantees or warranties, and the Customer therefore understands that he or she foregoes the right	Can the ReputationRepairExperts.com 100% guarantee their work? NO! Let Me Repeat, NO! Anyone that 100% guarantees they can get all information removed from the first page is guessing before analyzing your situation. How can they possibly know if the attacks on you will be ramped up? Maybe some crazy person is willing to register 60 new websites and dedicate 60 hour weeks or huge monetary	Case by case basis – but no absolute guarantees.

	Reputation Professor	Reputation Repair Experts	9th sphere
	to dispute credit card charges on the grounds that the Company has failed to deliver satisfactory services. The Customer therefore foregoes his or her right to dispute the credit card charges he or she incurs with the Company.	budgets to wreaking havoc on your good name. We do guarantee that we will get you fast visible results AND unlike many other service provider we do not take huge sums of money upfront. Instead we work out a monthly agreement and you can stop at anytime. If we're not able to displace or remove damaging information fast enough you simply stop paying. Having been a professional SEO company for years we are certain that we can help you as well or better than any other firm out there.	
Testimonials and/or References	Not stated	Can you provide testimonials or referrals from past clients? We will provide you absolute proof as to our SEO capabilities but due to the sensitive nature of our work, and our strict privacy and confidentiality policies, we cannot provide you with any contact information for our clients. In order to be effective, a testimonial would need to include identifying information about the customer, and we have the utmost respect for our customer's privacy.	

Appendix VI – The Interview Guide

The Interview Guide was used as a basis for discussion. Not all questions were asked of all participants.

Overview

In these interviews looking primarily for certain insights into the following:

- Issues in the area
- Marketplace descriptors
- Current trends
- Experiences (direct and indirect) in the area
- Major participants in the area
- Recommendations for improvement by :
 - Government
 - Consumers groups
 - Service/product providers

The Questions – General

What do you see as the perceived issues, the visible problems, in the availability of information on the Internet for individual consumers, and how it can be used or misused by others?

What do you see as the root causes of these perceived issues and visible problems?

What types of information or types of individuals are most prone to these problems? Ask for fact cause an type of information or an individual to be of high risk.

The Questions – Potential Consumer Of ORM Services

We are interviewing you because you have information on the Internet that you would prefer to not have there.

What information is it that you would like to be removed?

Specific information

What caused it to be available?

What, if anything, have you done to remove it?

Has it damaged your reputation or any particular transaction as a consumer?

How long has it been there?

How did you find out about it?

How familiar are you with the Internet? Do you consider yourself to be Internet savvy?

The Questions – KI “In The Business”

Explain our take on the ORM marketplace (see research summary) and get their take on it. Nature of some of the context of change recently.

You have chosen to not provide services to the individual consumer. Can you speak to this?

The marketplace for individual services seems somewhat “vague” compared to that for business providers? Is this a fair assessment and what do you believe contributes to it?

What do you consider to be the three key factors in providing effective ORM services of removal?

Discuss the concept of removal versus moving down? What are the key factors in providing a quality removal for broader geographies and keywords).

How important is monitoring in the ORM business, and why? What methods work best for individual consumers?

What are some ways that can “repair” a reputation of an individual, but you would consider them “ethical”.

What information cannot be removed?

For an individual what would you consider to be a balance amongst monitoring, careful placement of information and repair?

What do you find you have to do regarding changing the expectations of clients regarding their ORM?

The Questions – Academic

What is your relation to the ORM and Internet, particularly as it relates to consumers?

How do you define ORM?

How does the issue of ORM differ between an individual and an organization?

What are your views on the findings of the PEW Research from May 2010.

How do you define privacy as opposed to reputation? What are the issues and implications of the two relative to the other?

What are the gaps in consumer's awareness and understanding of their information available on the Internet?

Does the provision of this type of information on the Internet cause less research to be done in preparing for a "transaction"?

What do you consider to be the most relevant and recent research on the issues of privacy and/or reputation on the Internet?

Is there a fundamental disconnect between what information is available on a consumer and their awareness of it, and action regarding it?