

How to Choose a Reputation Management Service Firm for Your Business's Social Media Needs: The 10 Best Questions

Highlight

What others say about you online can make or break your business faster than you can say "Twitter." Ask these 10 questions when you need to hire reputation management pros.

The 10 Best Questions

[This is the shorthand version.](#) [The experts' suggested best answers are below.](#)

1. Why do we need a professional reputation management service? What's our biggest online vulnerability?
2. How long have you been in business? What is your previous experience with companies like ours?
3. What types of online reputation services do you specialize in?
4. How will you assess our needs? What's your process for working with new clients?
5. What will you do to enhance our positive reviews/rankings/customer comments?
6. How will you suppress negative search results/reviews?
7. How do you protect your clients' confidentiality and propitiatory information?
8. Could you please furnish the names and contact information for three references?
9. What is your pricing structure? Will we receive a written estimate and a detailed, written contract?
10. What will you do to help me save money and stay on budget with this project?

The Golden Question

The million-dollar question you almost forgot to ask.

Why should I hire you and not your competitor?

The 10 Best Answers

1. [Why do we need a professional reputation management service? What's our biggest online vulnerability?](#)

Typical clients for online reputation management (ORM) firms include new businesses wanting to build a positive online reputation or prevent a reputation crisis. Other businesses need solutions for the sting of bad online reviews or smear campaigns launched by disgruntled customers, employees or competitors.

You may not need to hire anyone if your ORM problems are relatively small and simple or you have in-house expertise in Search Engine Optimization (SEO), the process of ensuring higher Google rankings for your content.

2. How long have you been in business? What is your previous experience with companies like ours?

The ORM field is still young. Even senior officers often lack extensive ORM experience or specialized training. There's a current vacuum of independent third-party ratings, official certifications, or standardized qualifications., making savvy hiring questions all the more important. Ask about any awards or recognitions the company has won, including Better Business Bureau verification.

The first big site, Reputation.com, was launched in 2006. It now claims 1.6 million customers in over 100 countries. Reputation.com recommends: "Make sure they offer services that actually address your business reputation management problem. Proactive reputation management services are not always a one-size fits all process."

3. What types of online reputation services do you specialize in?

Your business needs should dictate which ORM services you purchase. Services are often bundled and sold as monthly or annually-priced packages.

The two broad service types are positive ORM services, such as brand building and management, and negative ORM services, including the management of existing negative reviews/comments.

Look for companies offering customizable features and access to live customer reps, not only online or email guidance.

4. How will you assess our needs? What's your process for working with new clients?

What may seem like a big deal to you, might be relatively easy to fix, say the experts. Ask potential providers to provide a needs analysis that's tailored beyond their standard, scripted approach.

Ken Wisnefski, CEO of ORM provider WebiMax told *Business News Daily*, "The reality is, for a reputation or crisis management plan, you need to have it customized to meet your needs. You need to understand the depth of your problems."

5. What will you do to enhance our positive reviews/rankings/customer comments?

The positive ORM approach consists of monitoring your public reputation on a regular basis and making sure customers find easily find positive reviews and comments online.

However, some reputation-management companies overzealously react to this need. Case in point is a lawsuit filed by the automotive website Edmunds.com against ORM Humankind Design Ltd., which operated GlowingReviews.com. They allegedly tried to register more than two thousand phony users.

6. How will you suppress negative search results/reviews?

Many businesses seek out ORM services to response to negative reviews. But not all negative reviews are equal.

According to the web analytics firm KISSmetrics, writing for *SME World*, “There are two types of negative content that companies should be aware of. One consists of complaints on social networks, which often don’t pose a real challenge to your business. The other I define as ‘online reputation bombs,’ which can severely damage a business because they are prominent in search engine results.”

7. How do you protect your clients’ confidentiality and propitiatory information?

In the process of working closely with your company, an online reputation management firm may have access to your clients’ sensitive data and your in-house operations.

It may be prudent to ask the ORM firm you hire to sign a non-disclosure document. Beware if they balk at this request.

8. Could you please furnish the names and contact information for three references?

Don’t skip this smart question, even if you can learn a lot about ORMs companies online. While you’re looking for online negative reviews, keep in mind that ORM firms know how to enhance their own online reputations while suppressing negative comments.

Talk to or email a live person so you can gauge the credibility of this person. Ask questions like:

Why did you choose this ORM?

How much research did you do before making your decision?

9. What is your pricing structure? Will we receive a written estimate and a detailed, written contract?

Ask this question instead of relying strictly on the firms’ website information. This open-ended question will help you determine which services or level of service you actually need. There are often unexplained portions on even the best websites’ pricing descriptions of cyber-scrubbing options.

For example, there is a five-level pricing structure for Reputation.com's ReputationDefender, based on the severity of clients' reputation management problems. They also offer two subscription levels with different service levels.

Ask if the subscription will automatically roll over – while automatically charging your credit card – or if you'll receive an advance notice. Your reputation management needs are likely to change over time so why pay for services you no longer need?

10. What will you do to save me money and stay on budget for your services?

Most reputation management firms won't be prepared for this question, but ask it anyway. It may open the door on a conversation on what's negotiable and what isn't in their offerings.

You might be surprised to learn that you can decline parts of a package at a substantial savings. You never know until you ask.

The Golden Question

The million-dollar question you almost forgot to ask.

Why should I hire you and not your competitor?

This blunt question is an important one. As the field of ORM services explodes, lots of amateurs will be cashing in. Why be the guinea pig, the learning curve, an early "mistake" case?

If nothing else, how the potential ORM firm responds to this question will be insightful about how client-centered they really are.

QDoc's Q-Tipsters

Warren Buffet once said, "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and 5 minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently."

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by Dr. Dede Bonner, The Question Doctor
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