



Reputation Management

More important and more challenging than ever before

What is reputation and why does it matter?

Reputation is the most important asset for any organisation, individual or brand. A strong reputation can lead to increased product use, higher investment, and the capacity to attract the best staff. The halo effect of a positive reputation can also result in greater trust, advocacy, pride of association and forgiveness when things go wrong. In our recent survey of 100 of the UK's top opinion leaders:

- 81% identified reputation as one of the strongest drivers of market value
- 95% perceived that companies with strong reputations engendered pride in being associated with them
- 89% said that people are more likely to forgive mistakes from companies with a strong reputation

However, reputation is a fragile commodity which, if damaged, can quickly become a major liability. In the same survey of opinion leaders:

- 95% felt that reputations take a long time to build but only a short time to lose
- 95% believed that reputational damage could directly affect the bottom line
- 61% agreed that reputation is the biggest single risk that organisations need to manage

Our definition of reputation simple – in essence it is 'what people say about you when you are out of the room'. Reputation is about what you say and do. It is about your behaviour, values and communications. But it is also about how this is filtered through on-the-ground experience, word of mouth and other influences.



The often complex interplay of factors that contribute to overall reputation will be different for every organisation. However, through all of our work in this area we have identified some common themes.

Reputation is judged by 'what you do and how you do it'. This can encompass a range of factors including product quality, customer service standards, financial performance, as well as how the organisation behaves in terms of its contribution to society, environmental policies and treatment of staff.

Across all of this, consistency of performance is important but so is the bravery to innovate. Authenticity and integrity are also key. This is about 'being true to thyself', which means knowing what you stand for and where you fit in today's world.

Reputation can depend on the weakest link and how an organisation handles crises and deals with mistakes is critical. Stakeholders expect honesty and accountability – 'to own up and clean up if you do something wrong'.

Leadership and leaders can also have a significant impact. True leaders share charisma and flair, as well as a preparedness to say what they believe.

At a fundamental level, reputation is about winning hearts as well as minds. The emotional element, particularly a belief in the brand promise, is critical. Engendering this belief means being in touch with key audiences, listening and responding to them, and matching their needs.

The new challenges for reputation management

There is no doubt that reputation management is becoming more difficult, with 87% of opinion leaders in our recent survey agreeing that this is the case.

In the current economic climate, it will be clearly be more difficult to achieve the reputational benefits associated with strong financial performance and growth – however we are already seeing some organisations that are managing to create some clear blue water and stand out for the right rather than wrong reasons.

Reputational influences are also becoming increasingly difficult for organisations to control in today's digital world with its preponderance of blogs, chat rooms and content sharing. A long term trend that we have observed from deference (to authority) to reference (to peers) has accelerated with the availability of a host of new online forums to share information, experiences and perceptions.

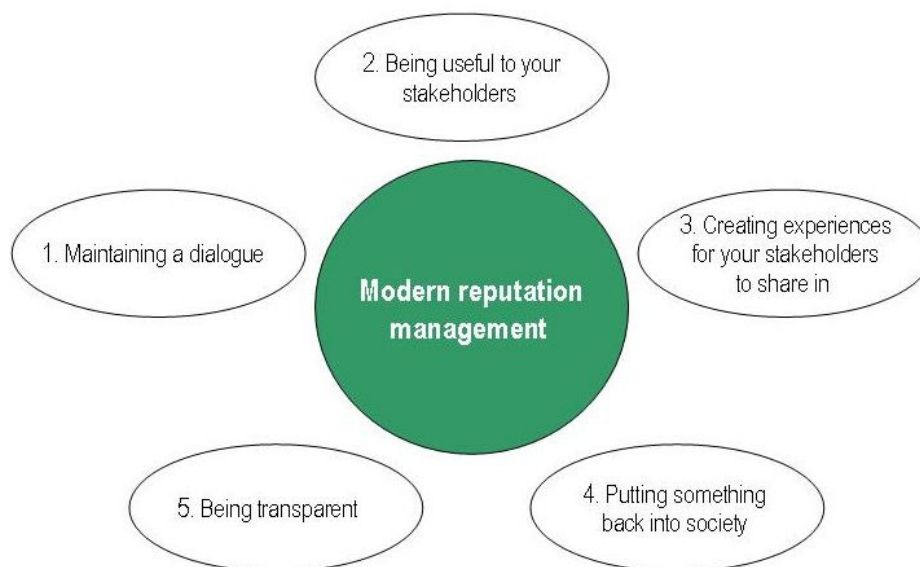
The advent of Web 2.0 means that we are no longer living in a world of messages but in a world of conversations, a phenomenon that has had the effect of democratising reputations. Consumers have

previously unheard of opportunities to take direct control of the narrative about brands and companies. In the words of one participant at our recent Reputation Debate: “*you don’t own your reputation any more, it is given to you*”. The speed of influence has also accelerated with the possibility now to make and break reputations by the click of a mouse.

We believe that this new landscape means that the reputation of organisations, their brands and their leadership are more closely and transparently linked than ever before. Given this, it is increasingly important that different parts of organisations work collaboratively to manage their reputation in the most holistic way possible. Opinion leaders agree - 83% of the opinion leaders interviewed in our recent survey believe that brand and corporate teams need to work more closely together on this agenda.

Another consequence is that stakeholders now expect a different kind of relationship with corporate entities. They expect transparency and openness, and for organisations to listen as well as to speak. This represents a paradigm shift in reputation management from one-way messaging to two-way dialogue and ultimately collaboration.

Modern reputation management therefore requires action on three fronts: what you say, how you behave and how you engage. We have observed a number of recent examples of organisations successfully enhancing their reputations by delivering in one or more of the following ways.



Responding to these new challenges, and thriving rather than surviving in this rapidly changing world, requires an increasingly fine-tuned understanding of what is driving your reputation. You will need to uncover the specific drivers and expectations in your market and for your organisation.

How can we help?

At Opinion Leader, we are focussed on helping our clients to understand, build and manage their reputations. We have developed a range of innovative methods and have been at the forefront of developing thinking on how influence works in a Web 2.0 world.

The design of our reputation research is grounded in delivering information that is actionable. Working collaboratively with our parent company, Chime Communications PLC, ensures that we are constantly evolving our thinking and actively learning from 'reputation management' practitioners. We closely monitor cultural movements – such as the devolution of influence, the desire for connectivity and growth of new communities - to ensure that our research techniques are insightful and appropriate to challenges facing our clients.

We can offer a range of research options from detailed, exploratory research audits to regular light-touch tracking with key audiences. No off the shelf packages, no standardised approaches, we create a programme of research that will really get to the heart of your company's reputation.

We can offer:

- 'Influence mapping' to uncover the range of influences and influencers affecting your reputation
- Both qualitative and quantitative methods of reputation evaluation
- 360° measurement programmes ensuring that all key stakeholders' views are captured and understood – from opinion leaders to partners, customers, and employees
- Detailed exploration of perceived strengths and weaknesses and what drives and could enhance your reputation
- Benchmarking of your reputation against your key competitors and a wider set of admired companies
- Monitoring of your reputation over time
- Both UK and international studies
- Action planning workshops to enable the results to be taken forward within the organisation

In simple terms, we can get you the answers to your key questions:

- Where do we currently stand relative to our competitors and peers?
- What is driving our reputation?
- Who are the key influencers and how can we reach out to them?
- What do we need to do to maintain and enhance our reputation?

Our experience

In our 15 years of work in this area, we have conducted reputation assessments for a wide range of blue chip companies, government agencies and not-for-profit organisations. We have been at the forefront in the development of reputation evaluation methods, and have a unique depth of experience in this field.

Our corporate client list for reputation audits includes:

Association of British Insurers	London Stock Exchange
Barclaycard	Nabarro
BBC	Norwich Union
British Airways	Siemens
BT	Standard Chartered
Bupa	Sky

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