



HVAC Advertising and Social Media – Chapter 1

by Bill Krueger, SKSW Inc.- June 2009

As a first step for getting active in social media – own your name, and protect it!

I still rue (just a little bit) the almost total lack of control the internet represents. Used to be, if a customer was unhappy with you, they would call or write. They might write a letter to the editor, or contact the parent company if they weren't getting anywhere. But in those cases, the letter or phone call was taken and mediated by a human. And, often, few knew anything happened, unless your transgression was bad enough you did "make the papers".

Now, you could see yourself talked about in a negative light on a world-wide basis for something you didn't even know happened, and no one had to edit or approve the post for being outrageous! The absolute worst is when negative comments on your company show up in natural search results before your company Web site does. This is extremely common because the social media and blog sites are very search-engine friendly.

It's almost true - you are no longer in control of your reputation, your customers are. I say almost, because if you provide great customer service at competitive rates, the chances of you getting slammed are much lower. But one bad apple can really spoil a bunch.

Still deliberating on the impact of social media for business? Don't. Here's my recommendation on what to do:

- 1) Own your name. Register your name, or something using your name, on as many sites as you can. This doesn't mean you have to post something on all of them. This will reduce the possibility of someone using your company name for their username, and your company being associated with something potentially damaging to your business. We've recommended Knowem (www.knowem.com) as one resource that monitors social sites, and they will even register your name to a great number of them for a reasonable fee.
- 2) Using any number of free or paid tools, check to see if your company name is being mentioned "out there". We've used Google (www.google.com) and Social Mention (www.socialmention.com) as general tools, Facebook (www.facebook.com) and Twitter (www.twitter.com) to search within those environments. Don't forget that "social media" also includes blog and board-based sites like Angie's List, (www.angieslist.com) and even homeowners' association Web sites. For additional free and paid tools to try, check Mashable (www.mashable.com), a great social media resource.
- 3) Respond if you find someone has a problem or complaint. Ask them to call or email you, as you would be glad to help. Don't go through the discovery process online – the world is watching. Of course, if the problem is solved to everyone's satisfaction (or not), respond to the post. Don't make it an advertisement, though.



- 4) Have a policy as to who in your organization will monitor and respond to social media. Don't allow the rank-and-file to participate without some controls in place. Remind your employees that even with their personal sites, any negative mention or image of your company could hurt everyone. Put together a routine, and take an hour once a week, or 15 minutes a day, to scout for news and coordinate a response if required. Your first search will probably take a few hours, but from there out it shouldn't be a major time drain.

- 5) Apply good search engine optimization techniques (SEO) to your Web site, so it comes up higher in search results than the social media posts!

I'll discuss next steps in a subsequent article because there really are business drivers beyond a defensive strategy for the use of social media. In the meantime, seek out what your customers are saying about you. It may be positive, providing a great reference! But if it's not, you can at least start dealing with it.

Question or comments? Let me know your thoughts. Email: bkrueger@sksw.com