

Virtual Business Professional

Google's Online Presence

An In-Depth Analysis

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Executive Summary

i. Introduction

Google has been one of the top technology companies but recently their reputation has dropped. Recently, social media has become the main communication method for companies which can shape a company's reputation. The objectives of this study are to understand Google's reputation by analyzing its online platforms and provide recommendations to improve their online presence and reputation.

ii. Background and Methodology

Google's reputation is "built in" to the company's mission, meaning that it is "guided by the organization's statements of purpose and driven by its objectives and business model." However, recently, the company has faced several offences that seem to not be as big as other tech companies', yet why does their reputation still suffer?

iii. Google's Online Presence Analysis

Using the pillar system on Twitter, Google is able to promote products to specific targeted audiences and share account related outreach programs. The company also uses the platform to interact with customers and attain customer perspectives.

Similar to the system used on the Twitter platform, Google's Instagram structure also follows a pillar system. Through these accounts they also announce important news and promote products by posting aesthetically pleasing photos as the platform demands. Google has always maintained a high reputation ranking for their main Instagram account, thus their strategy is effective.

Targeted towards researchers, educators and professionals, the Google AI blog posts at least once per week and provides insight into the developments the company is making in the AI field. Having the information out on the internet aligns with their corporate mission statement and also builds trust with public by helping the reader understand their product.

LinkedIn is included in this study to understand how Google uses the platform to reach businesses and professionals. The main account has a regular schedule of posing 3 times per week on company projects and rarely employee life. There are 3 other accounts that do not add much value to the company but instead offers information and builds trust among stakeholders.

iv. Recommendations

Based off the analysis in this study, it is recommended that the company respond positively to more customers on Twitter, post more employee testimonials on LinkedIn, and open a comments section on their blogs. Additionally, the company should address negative press through add campaigns and appoint a Chief Reputation Officer.

v. Conclusion

Corporate Social Responsibility is "built in" Google's reputation and due to their recent negative press, their reputation is falling. To mitigate these issues, Google needs to address these issues through their online platforms to build trust among stakeholders and customers.

Introduction

Google's mission statement – “to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful” (Google, n.d.) – has guided the company's actions since its creation in 1998 making it one of the most successful in the world. With Google's success grew its corporate reputation, defined as the “collective judgments of a corporation based on assessments of financial, social and environmental impacts [over time]” (Financial Time Lexicon, n.d.), at least until recently. Indeed, the company's strong and stable reputation recently deteriorated among Google's various stakeholders. For instance, Google's worldwide reputation as measured by the *Global RepTrak* rankings appears to have decreased among the general public dropping from 3rd place in 2018 to 14th in 2019 (Reputation Institute, 2019). Similarly, *The Axios Harris Poll 100* shows that Google's reputation plummeted in the United States falling from 3rd place in 2017 to 41st in 2019 (Harris Insights & Analytics).

A well-managed corporate reputation is undoubtedly a great competitive advantage as it inspires trust among stakeholders and trust often translates in market performance (Dowling & Moran, 2012, p.27). A good reputation is at least partly built through an organization's communication which “can shape the interpretations and perceptions of stakeholders” and “lead to overall positive evaluation of the company” (Floreddu et al., 2014, p.739). The rise of social media has completely upended the way organizations communicate with their stakeholders and as such the way organizations manage their reputations. Once “shaped by the unidirectional communications firms disseminated to stakeholders”, corporate reputation has become a negotiation between an organization and its stakeholders who have the “ability to communicate with one another, to disseminate their own messages about a firm, and - finally - to threaten firms' reputations” (Floreddu et al., 2014, p.739). Thus, it seems important to look at Google's online communication strategy when trying to understand what the company could do to redress its deteriorating reputation.

The objectives of this study are to (1) understand the recent decline of Google's reputation and see how it relates to its online presence, (2) analyze Google's online communication strategy on various social media platforms, and (3) formulate recommendations to help the company improve its online presence and, in consequence, reinforce its reputation.

Background and Methodology

For many years, Google's strong reputation appeared to be “built in” into the company's DNA in the sense that it was “guided by the organization's statements of purpose and driven by its objectives and business model” (Dowling & Moran, 2012, p.28). Indeed, keeping its main stakeholders – that is its users and customers – in mind, Google

build upon its free universal search engine and came up with innovative goods and services aimed at “significantly improving the lives of as many people as possible” (Page & Brin, 2004). Wanting to “make the world a better place” (Page & Brin, 2004), Google also committed to uphold certain ideals such as sustainability and humanitarian actions, equal and fair opportunities in the workplace, and the education and protection of its users, which only made its reputation stronger.

However, the company recently faced some scandals – employee walkouts over sexual harassment and gender inequality, data breaches potentially exposing millions of users’ personal info, legal issues with company governance practices and transparency, record fine for breaching the European Union antitrust laws, among others – which damaged its reputation. These scandals, however, do not appear to be worse than those recently faced by other tech companies, so why is it that Google’s reputation suffered the most? One explanation is that Google’s actions in these cases betrayed the company’s core value embodied by its longstanding motto “Don’t be evil” (Page & Brin, 2004). For the first time since its creation, the company’s actions do not align with the identity it built for itself and it appears to repulse stakeholders, especially users and customers. Another possible explanation is that Google is not doing what it ought, in terms of managing its reputation, to mitigate the repercussions of these scandals and alleviate stakeholders’ concerns. Indeed, as the company enjoyed a “built in” reputation for so many years, it is possible that it is overlooking the current need to invest in public relations and to adjust their communication strategy, especially online.

This report will look at Google’s online presence and its use of social media platforms to determine what the company could do better. More specifically, the report focuses on Google’s official accounts on Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, as well as official Google Blogs. In analyzing their contents and how they address the interests of different stakeholders, namely potential users, customers, employees, and investors, we will discuss the efficiency of Google’s online communication strategy, its shortcomings in the light of the company’s recent reputation decline, and its potential for improvements.

Google’s Online Presence Analysis

Twitter

Google’s main twitter page alone has twenty-one million followers. With that said, however, google implements a pillar system on Twitter which allows them to narrow down each of their departments so that users can find exactly what they are looking for and do not have to dig through clutter to see unwanted content. Google’s pillar system divides them up into over fifty different active accounts (accounts that have posted within the last week).

Using the pillar system, Google promotes certain upcoming products and events in order to reach a wider variety of consumers. As of March 19th, Google launched a new

gaming platform that will be released this year called the Stadia. In the two days since it has been released, the account has now reached nearly 150,000 followers on twitter. In comparison, Samsung only has 700,000 followers and has been on twitter for years. The reason that Google is able to promote and grow their accounts so quickly is because they use self-promotion throughout all of their pages.

Google uses their Twitter in three main ways. The first way they use it is to promote new products. Google will post videos of their new and upcoming products in order to raise awareness for them. For example, they were able to promote their new product the Stadia using this system. The next way they use their Twitter, is through promoting their outreach in the community and organizational achievements. They post articles about their recent endeavors in the community and how they are improving and helping the growth. Finally, they use their Twitter to promote events. Google hosts a lot of events, so they post about them on Twitter to raise awareness to their consumers and get them involved.

Google's approach consumer interaction is the same way most other companies interact on Twitter. Essentially, they interact two different ways with consumers. The first way is through customer support. When people tweet their problems to them about Google or Gmail, they respond with a solution or ask them to move it to private messaging to reduce clutter. The second way they interact is through polls on Twitter. Their Google Maps account tweeted "What's most likely to slow down your commute? Coffee stop, Train is late, Slow walkers" (@googlemaps, 2019). Through polls like these, Google allows consumers to be involved with their brand and bring awareness throughout the day.

My recommendation for Google's twitter page is to continue to use their Pillar system for twitter. In addition to this, they should reach out to their consumers more frequently and in a better way. Starbucks does a great job with this by replying to their consumers on Twitter and showing that they appreciate them tweeting about their product. Starbucks replies to nearly 100 customers a day through positive interaction. If Google could shift their social media focus to more positive interactions this would help their corporate image improve. This would shift their social media focus to a built-in reputation which would align with their desired corporate reputation. Through improving their social media outreach, Google would create more value for consumers and stockholders. This would allow them to align their social media with their company's purpose.

Instagram

One facet Google uses to communicate is Instagram. The company has a total of 11 verified accounts, following the same pillar strategy found on Twitter. Each serves different purpose; for example, the account @google is used to share a broader view of Google as a whole, encompassing everything from their values to their latest product releases. The account @lifeatgoogle focuses on the internal structure and work environment Google provides for its employees. @googlemaps shares photographs from exotic travel destinations around the world, showcasing the navigational ability of their

maps app. As can be seen, these two accounts are created for a different section of the market and with a different goal in mind.

Google is also effective in showing the capabilities of their smartphone cameras in all of their Instagram accounts, but specifically for the account @googlepixel. Due to the photo-based nature of the platform, Google utilizes the camera it produces on its smartphone, the Google Pixel 3. The Pixel 3 is known for having one of the best cameras in all of modern smartphones, and Google takes advantage of that for their Instagram page. This is another way to market specifically their smartphone. Rather than just showing the subject of the image to portray a message, they make each photo as artistic and beautiful as possible, showcasing the potential photos that can be taken from of their very own products

In the “RepTrack” study done by the *Reputation Institute*, Google’s reputation ranking increased the year that they created their Instagram account (2014) by two slots. In years prior, Google ranked 6th overall in 2012 and 4th overall in 2013 (Appendices A and B). However, in 2014, the same year they created their initial account, Google increased to 2nd overall and remained there through 2015 (Appendices C and D) (Rankings, 2019). The creation of this account and the results of it may not be the sole cause of this jump in reputation, since their reputation has always been very good. However, this may have played a role in the perception of the younger generations at the time, thus helping push Google two spots higher in the rankings.

Overall, Google’s strategy for use of Instagram is one of the most effective methods that can be used. Not only is the company able to share what its latest developments and values, but also market itself to consumers in a modern and effective manner. In fact, Google tends to lean away from direct advertisements for their products and services. This makes the company’s message, goals, and values seem very built in to its identity.

Google Blogs

For this portion of the analysis, we have decided to focus on one of the many blogs Google updates weekly, the Google AI (Artificial Intelligence) Blog. The main purpose of including this blog in this analysis is to include all user groups of the company. While much of online presence is marketed through larger platforms to everyday consumers, such as Facebook and Instagram, it is also important to consider the professionals who utilize Google’s services.

The Google AI Blog is a series of articles on the advances that Google has made in the Artificial Intelligence sector, informational tutorials on how Google AI technology works and selective news from the company. Back when the blog first started, the administrators posted sporadically but as the number of authors are expanding, the blog is more consistent, usually posting at least once a week. Though not stated in the blog, one of its purposes is a result of what Google has promised in their mission statement. By providing this information on a free and public platform, they are showing their users the same level of commitment they promised.

Beyond being an extension of their mission, the blog is also a way to cater towards a specific audience and build trust. By reading the content, it is inferred that the blog is targeted towards industry professionals, business people, educators and researchers. These users are interested because they can create new ideas for their own developments or stay ahead of the market. With the blog, Google also can build trust between them and the reader. Naturally, consumers like to know what they are buying and writing an in-depth explanation on the science behind their technology helps build trust between the user and the company (Standberry, 2018). Though many of Google's AI articles don't specify a direct application or relation to the user, the effort put into the blog shows that Google is a company that is knowledgeable and experienced in the field. As a result, consumers not only understand how the technology works but may also determine why they need the product or service Google is providing.

Though it is important to recognize the purposes and effects of the blog, it is also important to analyze the effectiveness of the Google AI Blog. Although specific engagement information is inaccessible, there are many third-party search engine optimization analyzers that will not only look at the infrastructure of the site but also show its popularity and followers. According to Nibbler, and SEO optimizer, Google AI blog has recently received a surge of traffic. Overall, after analyzing many of the other blogs, Google is receiving more views (2018). In contrast, Google's AI Facebook page only receives 2-4 likes per post but only because of its recent account creation. By looking at these two metrics, it is easy to conclude that the blog has a good following but could be increased.

The benefits of maintaining a blog may be motivating but without actual engagement, they are non-existent. To increase engagement, Google AI should open a comments section to facilitate a space for discussion. According to the Pew Research Center, 72% of people get news from friends and family, making word-of-mouth the most popular channel for sharing (GetAmbassador, n.d.). This strategy allows for more people to talk and be engaged rather than just sharing it on social media.

LinkedIn

Google also has a presence on the popular business-oriented platform LinkedIn as a means to connect employees and employers. It has four accounts associated with its brand on the website. Google is a relatively active member on LinkedIn, posting on most of their accounts approximately three times a week. Their posts usually promote projects within Google, but they also occasionally talk about employees at the company. They rarely post about the same topic more than once. This is conducive to the environment of LinkedIn, in that it is used primarily as a marketing tool for potential employees rather than a platform for current workers and sustains a professional manner across the board. Its primary stakeholders are primarily consumers and possible employees, and secondarily, shareholders and other investors.

There are only a few accounts for Google on the platform, as opposed to other networking sites and their successful pillar system, however they do not all have the same level of activity. Notably, while there is a profile for Google Play, it does not contain any content. Google Ads and Google Cloud, Google's other two accounts, post only about relevant information to their respective profiles. It would therefore stand to reason that it has no additional monetary value for the company, instead existing to offer pertinent information for its stakeholders. All of the information posted, as well as much more can easily be found on any of the company's other social media platforms. Google also maintains a very up to date section on available jobs within many different parts of the company. Comparatively, Yahoo, another search engine website with a LinkedIn profile, does not post about their job opportunities or maintain a homepage.

Google's page on LinkedIn is very similar to what the average "googler" would expect to see. Their online presence is very structured so as to not overwhelm a viewer with dozens upon dozens of posts every time they log on. This is a great technique especially on a platform such as LinkedIn where people are typically looking for more of a business oriented organizational layout. According to the PEW Research Centre, as of 2016, 24% of all American adults are using LinkedIn (or 29% of adult Americans who actively use the internet). It also remains a top platform for adults with college degrees (50% of American graduates are users).

Conclusively, Google has a strategic, well planned account on LinkedIn. Sharing information relevant to those interested in the business aspects of the internet conglomerate as well as providing updated statistics and job profiles allow for a more cohesive feel to the profile. It both looks and feels more well-rounded than that of its competitors. As a decisively built-in company, Google has done a superior job in utilizing the platform to the fullest of its ability.

Recommendations

Based on the above analyses of Google's online presence, the following recommendations are being made.

Platform Specific Recommendations

- *Twitter*: Improve customer outreach through the introduction of "giveaways" aligned with the release of new products. It will act as promotional material to users who would not normally look at Google's social media and could potentially convert them to regular followers.
- *Google Blogs*: Open a comment section to facilitate a space for discussion. It will allow people to discuss and engage each other rather than solely share content, which in turn might prevent concerns from going unanswered and ideas unnoticed.
- *LinkedIn*: Add more employee testimonials. Once a week, feature a new employee and have them talk about how they got hired, what they do, and what advice they can offer

someone looking to apply to Google. It will offer potential employees an inside look into the company's culture and give them a more relatable image of Google.

Overall Recommendations

- Addressing problems in ad campaigns to be strategically dispersed through various social media platforms: Recently, companies that have undergone scrutiny from the public have followed up with publicity campaigns in which they address the issues they face and discuss the steps they will take to remedy the situation. We recommend that Google adopt this practice, own up to its mistakes, apologize, and genuinely try to improve so as to maintain or restore its reputation amongst its stakeholders. It could help the company with its transparency issues.
- Hire a Chief Reputation Officer to monitor and maintain the company's reputation: A CRO would be able to track and report directly to the CEO on things such as corporate social responsibility strategies and Return on Investment of reputation (Reputation Institute). With the help of a CRO, Google would be able to recover from negative public opinion, and perhaps avoid it in the first place.

Conclusion

For a long time, Google's corporate reputation relied heavily on its corporate social responsibility (CSR), that is on its commitment to sustainably "delivering economic, social and environmental benefits for all stakeholders" (Financial Times Lexicon, n.d.). As measured by the Reputation Institute, CSR is composed of 3 out of the 7 attributes that constitutes a company's reputation quotient: citizenship, governance, and workplace (2016, p.12-13). And, for a long time, Google's CSR served as a buffer for more or less important reputational risks to the company (Angelovska, 2018). However, Google's recent challenges were concerned with issues of governance – i.e. lack of transparency and unethical behaviors – and of workplace – i.e. employee walkout over gender inequalities and sexual harassment – which puts Google's overall reputation in danger.

The company now needs to mitigate the repercussions of the recent scandals it faced so as to reinforce its CSR as it has long been the pillar of its overall reputation. The most efficient way to do that it seems is for Google to adapt its online communication strategy in order to appear more transparent and to alleviate stakeholders' concerns. Indeed, while the decline in Google's reputation is too recent to have had dramatic consequences on the company's performance yet, it has the potential to erode stakeholders' trust and in the long term to harm the company.

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Appendices

Appendix A: (Reptrack Rankings 2012)

Appendix B: (Reptrack Rankings 2013)



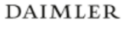



	Logo	Name	RepTrak Pulse 0	Last	SyncForce Customer
1		BMW Group	80,08	4	
2		Sony	79,31	6	
3		Disney	78,92	3	
4		Daimler	78,54	7	
5		Apple	78,49	2	
6		Google	78,05	1	

	Logo	Name	RepTrak Pulse 0	Last	SyncForce Customer
1		BMW Group	78.39	1	
2		Disney	77.76	3	
3		Rolex	77.23	-	
4		Google	77.15	6	
5		Daimler	76.58	4	
6		Sony	76.30	2	

Appendix C: (Reptrack Rankings 2014)

Appendix D: (Reptrack Rankings 2015)

	Logo	Name	RepTrak Pulse 0	Last	SyncForce Customer
1		Disney	77.3	2	
2		Google	77.3	4	
3		BMW Group	77.2	1	
4		Rolex	77.2	3	
5		Sony	75.9	6	
6		Canon	75.7	8	

	Logo	Name	RepTrak Pulse 0	Last	SyncForce Customer
1		BMW Group	78.98	3	
2		Google	78.26	2	
3		Daimler	77.85	8	
4		Rolex	77.68	4	
5		Lego	77.55	9	
6		Disney	77.11	1	

Authors

Bailey Allan researched Google's Instagram presence and wrote the corresponding analysis, as well as set up the Appendices.

Camille Malka researched Google's corporate reputation and wrote the introduction, background and methodology, and conclusion.

Emily Sears researched Google's LinkedIn presence and wrote the corresponding analysis, as well as the recommendations.

Michael Silvey researched Google's Twitter presence and wrote the corresponding analysis, as well as set up the Table of Content.

Sarah Tse researched Google Blogs and wrote the corresponding analysis, as well as set up the Executive Summary.