



Strengthen and Protect your Brand Reputation on Social Media

You have total control over many elements of your organization's brand—things like your logo, tagline, tone of voice, and design guidelines. But no matter how carefully you curate the perfect brand identity, you can't fully control how people feel.

How is your organization perceived? Do people trust it? Are they emotionally connected to it? How do they describe it to friends? These things make up an intangible (but invaluable) part of your business: your brand reputation.

By using social media to proactively strengthen and protect your organization's reputation, you can increase your reach, establish credibility, grow your community, and build the kind of brand loyalty that will separate you from your competitors.



Why brand reputation matters

While you don't have complete control over your reputation, every decision and action (or lack thereof) can shape it for better or worse—and not just with your customers. Reputation can also be a critical factor in attracting and keeping talented employees. According to a study conducted by [Harvard Business Review and ICM Unlimited](#), it takes a minimum pay increase of 10 percent to convince candidates to take a job at a company with a poor reputation.¹

What else can your brand reputation affect? The bottom line. [Studies by Aon](#), a global professional services firm, suggest that “there is an 80 percent chance of a public company losing at least 20 percent of its equity value in any single month over a five-year period because of a reputation crisis.”²

In a survey [conducted by Harris Interactive](#), 60 percent of respondents said they would definitely purchase a product or service from companies that ranked as having strong reputations, and only five percent said they were likely to purchase or recommend businesses at the bottom of that ranking list. Simply put, people don't want products or services from businesses they can't trust.³



Brand reputation and social media

Brand reputation used to be the exclusive domain of the public relations team, who would control and manage it through carefully crafted press releases, events, and media relations. But today, thanks to the proliferation of online reviews and social media, consumers are now in charge of a brand's reputation just as much as the organization itself.

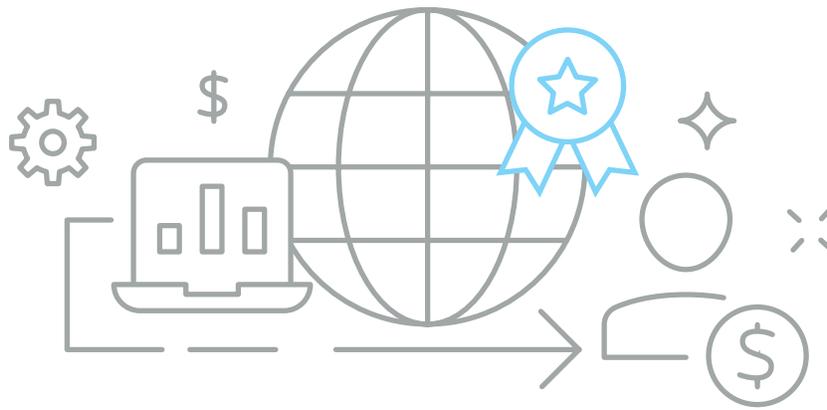
According to PWC, [nearly half of digital buyers worldwide](#) say that reading reviews, comments, and feedback on social media influences their shopping behavior.⁴ And with more than [2.1 million negative mentions](#) about brands shared on social media every day in the U.S. alone, the importance of managing your brand reputation on social media is clear.⁵

The value of brand reputation

Even though “damage to brand/reputation” was cited as the number one risk facing organizations in [the 2017 Aon Global Risk Management Survey](#), reputation is both your organization's biggest risk and its biggest asset.⁶

As Keri Calagna, leader of Deloitte Advisory's brand and reputation management services, [says](#): “Because brand and reputation risk is often tied to emotions, trust, and gut reactions toward an organization, it can pose the largest potential for value destruction. However, when managed well, brand and reputation risk can create an opportunity to influence perceptions and create value.”⁷

Building a strong reputation is also one of the best ways to protect your brand, helping your organization weather tough times or bounce back quicker from a crisis. A strong community of supporters creates a powerful line of defence against threats to your reputation—if people are passionately connected to your brand, they'll often be the first to step in and defend it.



How to strengthen your brand reputation on social

Your reputation on social media revolves around the community you build and the content you publish.

Social data is an often untapped resource for better understanding your community and competitors, which can help you make smarter decisions about the content you produce and publish. Here's how to use social data to your advantage, and tips for building trust and credibility through social content.



1. Gain a deeper understanding of your audience using social data

Social listening—monitoring social media networks for mentions of your product or brand name—is an important way to gauge how people perceive your brand. But this is a reactive tactic that only scratches the surface of what’s possible with social data.

Analysis from Brandwatch shows that [96 percent of all online conversations are unbranded](#), representing a massive amount of social data you may be missing out on if you’re only listening for specific mentions of your brand name. This data can yield insights that can help strengthen your brand reputation.⁸

To build their brand and develop lasting relationships with job seekers, Monster—a leading employment website—uses keyword, @mention, and hashtag search streams in Hootsuite to pick up on conversations from both job seekers and employers. But they don’t stop there. Using Brandwatch, they dig deeper into social data and scan over 80 million online sources including blogs, forums, news, and review sites to get insight into what customers are saying about them versus their competition.

As a result, they engage with their customers more effectively. [Their brand mentions have increased by 300 percent](#), and they gained a 30 percent share of voice among their four biggest competitors.

Use these social insights to:

- Deliver a better customer experience. Social insights give you a way to quantify and address customer frustrations, common complaints, or gaps in the purchase journey.
- Create content that is more relevant and valuable to your target audience.
- Keep your finger on the pulse of public sentiment. This will help you avoid putting out campaigns or messages that might damage your reputation.
- Learn more about what’s working (or not working) for your competitors.



5 steps to collecting and analyzing social data

1. Know the problem you're trying to solve

Do you want a demographic profile of your customers? A better understanding of their buying habits? Insight into their media consumption or pop culture preferences? Maybe you want to know more about people who aren't your current customers and what made them choose a competitor over your brand.

2. Collect the data

The type of data you collect will depend on what it is you're trying to learn, but there are a few methods you can use to gather it. You can pull demographic data of your various social media audiences or ask them questions via polls, but to find the most comprehensive and valuable insights, you should also search for keywords or phrases related to the problem you're trying to solve. You can do all of these things either natively via each social network or all in one place with a platform like Hootsuite.

3. Filter the data to find what matters

The amount of branded content and advertising on social media can make it hard to see actual customer conversations. To get past this, you can set up a stream in Hootsuite and tailor it to only show posts without links. This reveals actual human conversations.

On the other hand, you may want to see posts that only contain links. This would be particularly helpful if you're looking for competitive insights, for example.

You can also filter your results by location and language, to ensure the conversations you're finding are as relevant as possible.

Another way to filter social conversations is by only searching for questions. In a Hootsuite search stream, add a question mark to your keyword and you'll only see posts with questions. Whether you want to find common customer questions or get ideas for upcoming blog posts or social content, this filter can help you understand and engage with your customers better.

4. Analyze

Take all of your results—from demographic data to specific search queries—and look for patterns and themes. What is the data telling you?

At this point it's also crucial to combine your social insights with other data sources in your organization. According to [Vision Critical](#), 85 percent of what you hear on social comes from less than 30 percent of the social media audience.⁹ That's because a large amount of active social media users are lurkers—they may visit and consume content on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram on a daily basis, but they don't post anything. So when gathering social insights, remember that the conversations you're capturing may be from a top percentage of "super users" and therefore aren't reflective of your entire audience.

Vision Critical recommends combining social insights with transactional data, click tracking, and ongoing direct feedback from customers.

5. Act

The point of gathering these insights is to strengthen your brand reputation by better understanding who your customers are and what they want. Use insights to make strategic decisions about your campaigns, customer service efforts, new products, or competitive strategy.



2. Earn trust through high-quality content

Brands with strong reputations often excel at the same thing on social media: producing content that people actually want to consume and share.

Publishing valuable content on social media allows you to influence the perceptions and decisions of your customers, engage with your audience more effectively, and participate strategically in conversations that affect the reputation of your brand.

Great social content doesn't always require a massive budget or powerhouse creative agency—you just need to know what your audience wants. Use our tips for gathering and analyzing social data in the section above to drill down into the content preferences of your audience, and then use those insights to create a content marketing strategy.

Tips for creating high-quality social content:

- **Create content with a purpose.**

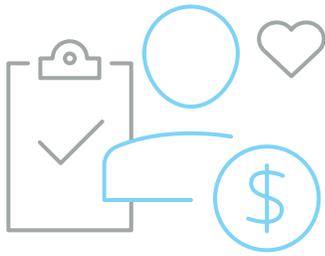
Before posting any piece of content on social media, ask: “How will this benefit our followers?” To build your brand reputation on social, you need to be a constant source of useful and valuable content, whether it's educational, entertaining, or inspiring. No matter what purpose your content serves, make it sound human and keep it relevant to your brand.

- **Use social listening as a gut check.**

Spend as much (if not more) time listening as you do talking on social media, and you'll be better able to tell whether or not your content will resonate or be appropriate.

- **Invest in social ads to account for declining organic reach.**

As more people and businesses compete for attention on social media—and networks like Facebook continue to tweak their algorithms—brands are struggling to reach the majority of their followers through organic posts alone. Putting advertising dollars behind your content is the easiest way to ensure you're reaching a large (and highly targeted) audience on social. By keeping track of your organic and paid social in one platform like Hootsuite, you can easily boost content that's already doing well organically.



3. Build credibility through employee advocacy

According to the [2017 Edelman Trust Barometer](#), for the first time in history, consumers trust peers just as much as technical experts and more than CEOs, governments, and academics.¹⁰

This means the voices of employees on social media can greatly influence your brand reputation. As Keri Calagna from Deloitte [observes](#), “Employees can also serve as offence, not just defence, for a company’s brand.”¹¹

An employee advocacy program—in which employees are encouraged to have an active social media presence and supplied with on-brand content and messaging to share—can deliver your social content to more users through people they trust.

Of course, you can’t force employees to share content about your brand on their personal social profiles. To successfully encourage and enable employee advocacy, follow the four steps listed here.

Four steps to a successful employee advocacy program:

1. Create social media guidelines and communicate them to all staff.

These guidelines should clearly outline how employees are expected to conduct themselves online when associating themselves with the organization. This will help safeguard your brand reputation while also encouraging employees to share the organization’s content and messages.

2. Educate employees on social media best practices.

In addition to company-wide social media guidelines, your employee advocacy program will benefit from formal [social media training](#). Bring everyone up to speed on social media best practices—across all departments and seniority levels.

3. Appoint employee advocacy leaders.

Before you begin scaling social media use throughout the organization, identify who’s responsible for communicating employee advocacy initiatives and creating appropriate incentives. This is especially important for large organizations, where it’s difficult to ensure participation across all departments.

4. Make it easy for employees to share your brand’s content.

It shouldn’t be a challenge for employees to find content or messages they’re allowed to post on social media. A tool like Hootsuite Amplify can help make this process seamless. It’s an intuitive mobile app that employees can use to find and share relevant, exciting content from your brand.



How to protect your brand reputation on social

As you've learned, you can use social media strategically to strengthen your reputation and protect the value of your brand. But even the strongest reputation won't automatically protect your brand against risks and threats on social.

[Symantec's Internet Security Threat Report](#)

notes that "social media remains a favored target of scammers, as criminals seek to leverage the trust people have in their own social circles to spread scams, fake links, and phishing."¹² By 2021, it's predicted that the cost of damage from cybercrime will hit \$6 trillion annually.¹³

Along with cybercrime, other serious threats to your brand reputation include compliance breaches, poorly timed or offensive posts, and customer complaints that escalate into full-blown crises. According to a study by [FireEye Inc.](#), 36 percent of respondents said that their perception of a brand diminished after a security incident.¹⁴

Here are three ways to proactively protect your brand on social media:

1. Secure your accounts and shut down threats
2. Track brand sentiment to prevent crises
3. Ensure compliance with regulatory standards



1. Secure your accounts and shut down threats

Account hijacking and fraud are two of the most prevalent risks on social media. Here's how to protect your brand against them.

Account hijacking

Approximately [160,000 Facebook accounts](#) are compromised every day.¹⁵ Without strict privacy settings, hackers (or disgruntled employees) can easily take control of your brand's social media profiles and wreak havoc—sending offensive or fraudulent posts to followers or changing your profile's appearance.

To protect your brand against being hijacked:

- **Use single sign-on to reduce risk.**
The more usernames and passwords your employees have to use, the more your brand reputation is at risk. Implementing a single sign-on service allows a user to log in to a corporate network with just one username and password to gain access to all the software systems contained within (including Hootsuite).
- **Enable two-factor authentication.**
A two-factor authentication system adds a second level of authentication when you sign in. For example, after signing in with your password, you may be required to enter a code sent to your mobile phone. This adds an extra layer of security to your sign-in process.
- **Set up approvals and permissions for your accounts.**
All of your organization's branded social accounts should be protected by a clear approval system to ensure nothing goes on social media without the right approval. This significantly reduces the risk of human error or account hijacking.

Tip: If you're using Hootsuite, you can set up a [double approver system with permissions and roles for individual employees](#). That means you can control who has full access to social content, who can post content, who can submit draft content for approval, and who has limited, read-only access. If you're using third-party apps or integrations like [Brandwatch](#), you can also set up systems to flag potentially sensitive content and automatically stop it from being published.

Fraudulent accounts and phishing scams

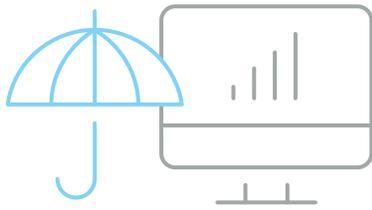
A fake account impersonating your brand on social media can be harmful in many ways. It can post offensive content that damages your brand reputation, or it can go even further and take advantage of your customers through phishing scams.

According to [ZeroFOX](#), over one third of all social media impersonators send their targets to phishing pages to steal social media account credentials, credit card details, and personal information.¹⁶

Phishing attempts on social media skyrocketed by [500 percent in 2016](#)—largely attributed to fraudulent customer support accounts targeting customers on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn.¹⁷

To protect your brand (and your customers) against these fraudulent accounts:

- **Have your accounts verified.**
Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram all offer ways of verifying profiles so that your customers can be sure they're engaging with your brand and not an impersonator.
- **Identify and shut down fake accounts.**
With Hootsuite's industry-leading security integrations, you can monitor your accounts, hashtags, and other brand assets and issue takedowns for malicious profiles and content.

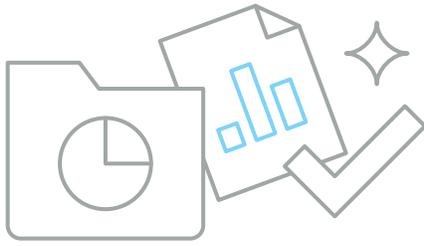


2. Track brand sentiment to prevent crises

Social media allows anyone to openly criticize your brand. Handling this criticism appropriately can lead to healthy dialogue. It can even turn vocal critics into brand advocates. When it's not handled well—or worse, not handled at all—it can spiral into a PR crisis on social media.

To reduce the chances of negative sentiment damaging your brand reputation:

- **Monitor @mentions, keywords, and hashtags.**
Set up streams in Hootsuite and monitor mentions of your brand name, keywords related to your products or industry, and any hashtags associated with your brand. By having search streams for all your social networks in one place, you'll be able to catch and address negative mentions before they spiral. Make sure you're also tracking indirect mentions and any potential misspellings of your brand name. For example, we track all mentions of our @Hootsuite handle as well as indirect mentions of "hootsuite," "hoot suite," and so on.
- **Use a logo detection tool.**
A logo detection tool can help you find posts that include your logo but don't necessarily directly mention your brand. [Brandwatch](#) collected two months of image data for a global shipping company and found that 92 percent of images that contained the company's logo didn't mention the company's name in the accompanying text. During this time period, if the social media managers at this company were only listening for mentions of their brand name, they would have been missing out on 251 posts (and important sentiment) every single day.
- **Find your brand's biggest detractors and monitor them.**
Using a platform like Brandwatch, you can identify and make a list of your most vocal brand detractors. Monitoring these accounts helps you stay on top of negative conversations that could harm your reputation.
- **Address negative feedback openly and honestly.**
When people are being critical of your brand, social media gives you the chance to gain control of the situation. Deleting reasonable complaints on your social profiles is a surefire way to create bad buzz around your brand and hurt your reputation. Responding to complaints—regardless of the issue—demonstrates that you're listening. Address concerns to the best of your ability, apologize if necessary, escalate if required, and move on.



3. Ensure compliance with regulatory standards

If your organization operates in a regulated industry such as health care, financial services, or government, you're familiar with the compliance requirements that your marketing and communication efforts must follow. Social media compliance is still a relatively new area, however, and failing to comply has serious consequences.

To avoid paying costly fines or damaging your brand reputation, you need to have the right social media platforms and processes in place. Hootsuite has industry-leading integrations with Proofpoint, ZeroFOX, Smarsh, Global Relay, Nexgate, and Actiance that help you stay compliant with bodies like FINRA and HIPAA.

Like many health care organizations, Spectrum Health System was tasked with quickly responding to patient inquiries and connecting communities with the information they needed on social media while remaining compliant. Their team of social media specialists [set up a dashboard in Hootsuite](#) to monitor conversations from a dozen social media contributors across their hospital network. Using our compliance partner Nexgate, they were able to identify any unauthorized profile changes or posts that included sensitive patient information, and then immediately lock down or adjust the accounts for compliance.

For more guidance on keeping your brand reputation safe and secure, check out our guide: [How to Protect Your Brand on Social Media](#).



Conclusion

From compliance breaches and fake accounts to account hijacking and fraud, your brand faces many different risks on social media. Using social to strengthen your reputation can both increase the value of your brand and protect it against these risks.

But a strong brand reputation can't be created overnight—and it can't exist in a silo. Your entire organization needs to think about reputation as a competitive advantage, a driver of growth, and a strategic asset that can be harnessed through social media.

Ready to see how Hootsuite can help strengthen and protect your brand reputation?
[Request a demo today](#)

Endnotes

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About Hootsuite Enterprise

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Hootsuite is the most widely used platform for managing social media, loved by over 16 million people around the globe and trusted by more than 800 of the Fortune 1000. Hootsuite Enterprise empowers organizations to execute business strategies for the social media era and scale social media activities across multiple teams, departments, and regions. Our versatile platform supports a thriving ecosystem of social networks complemented by 250+ business applications and integrations, allowing organizations to extend social media into existing systems and programs.

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