They Googled You. What They Saw Made Them Walk Away — Here's How to Change Your Online Reputation in 6 Steps

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When it comes to online reputation in a digital world, it's make or break. Up to 94% of consumers say a single negative review showing up on the first page of Google can be a red flag to avoid a company. This data only pinpoints the importance of digital hygiene, and in this article, I'll break down what Search Engine Reputation Management is and what it can bring to the table through six practical steps to strengthen your online standing.

What makes SERM Special?

SERM, or Search Engine Reputation Management, is the process of maintaining how your brand appears in search engine results. Its primary goal is to make positive content more visible, push down outdated information, and ensure that your online presence reflects your current values and products.

SERM matters at all stages of growth — from launch (shaping first impressions and building trust) to times of crisis (guarding against misinformation or malicious content). The other benefit it offers lies in correcting outdated or misleading information about your business that might still linger online.

Still, SERM requires quite a lot of resources and attention as

it is an ongoing process, involving continuous content creation, media relations, customer review management and data analysis – all to ensure your reputation grows alongside your business.

Here are the five core strategies of online reputation management:

1. Promote positive content

Companies that succeed with actively maintaining their online presence see up to a 93% increase in satisfaction rates. A proactive content strategy helps push down irrelevant or negative search results by offering search engines more accurate and engaging alternatives.

This can be blog posts, brand interviews, customer feedback and media features. Your goal is to identify the key brand touchpoints that influence perception and focus your efforts there. Real reviews and opinions of your customers also play a big role here – real experiences are the most powerful validators.

Facing a dip in reputation, Nordstrom launched a campaign to generate positive content. They introduced new digital features like “Style Boards” in their app, published behind-the-scenes interviews about innovation and customer care, and asked their audience to share stories via social media. By 2025, Nordstrom had reclaimed a top-10 spot in the Axios Harris Poll of most respected U.S. brands.

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2. Manage customer reviews

People mostly prefer to trust real reviews rather than traditional marketing; moreover, 54% of consumers would prefer comments rather than feedback from their family, friends or even influencers. The other thing to keep in mind is the fact that customer reviews are highly visible in search rankings.

Use platforms like Google Business Profile, Yelp and Trustpilot to monitor and respond to feedback. For industries vulnerable to fake reviews or targeted attacks, services like Bazaarvoice, BirdEye and Reputation.com can help detect and manage suspicious activity.

Another key to success is empathy and open dialogue. Make your customers feel cherished – respond to negative feedback with respect and offer solutions, actively ask happy customers for reviews, and run campaigns or contests that reward honest, thoughtful feedback.

UnitedHealthcare, one of America's largest insurers, faced a corporate crisis that garnered quite a lot of negative feedback on social media. To manage their reputation, the company turned to Google Business Profile and specialised reputation management services to monitor and sort out across key platforms.

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3. Optimise for SEO

Brand's reputation is directly tied to visibility. With 95% of search traffic going to the first page of results and 63% of users trusting Google's findings over other sources, it's clear why your positive content must be SEO-optimised. This includes using relevant keywords, structuring articles clearly, improving metadata and sharing through reputable

platforms. Sharing your brand's professional opinions on business issues in authoritative media can not only highlight our expertise but also boost search presence.

Uber coped with their 2022-23 crisis with an open acknowledgment of errors and a CEO change, and a cornerstone of their recovery was the SEO optimisation of positive content. The company promoted optimised articles, media interviews and case studies focused on their recent changes. This, combined with transparent PR and continuous monitoring, significantly improved their image by late 2025

4. Monitor mentions

Swift responses are your secret weapon in conquering consumers' hearts. Data says 70% of clients expect a brand to respond to feedback within 24 hours. Those companies that meet these expectations see 35% more positive sentiment overall. Real-time monitoring tools such as Mention, Brandwatch, or Talkwalker analyse tone, frequency and reach of your brand's online mentions, helping to act before small issues escalate.

Starbucks faced backlash over rising prices and service issues. With real-time monitoring and prepared response templates, they addressed complaints quickly, offered rewards to dissatisfied customers, and adjusted their content strategy to make positive content more visible. As a result, they saw a 15% increase in positive mentions and a 20% reduction in negative ones within six months.

Related: How to Better Manage Your Brand's Reputation in the Digital Age

5. Be ready for crisis

70% of companies face at least one major reputation crisis every year. That's when speed and transparency become

paramount. If a public issue arises, respond swiftly with clear, factual messaging. Use official channels and trusted media to provide updates, and show empathy by offering real solutions, not just apologies.

When Ticketmaster's site crashed during Taylor Swift's tour ticket release, fans were left frustrated, and the company's slow response with no concrete tips only fuelled the backlash.

Six steps to strengthen your reputation

Here's a practical framework to improve your online reputation:

1. **Audit Current Search** Results: Step into your clients' shoes – Google your brand and see what users see. Identify outdated or negative content.
2. **Choose a Strategy**: Based on your analysis, focus on content creation, review management or SEO, depending on the nature of the issue. If you've seen too many negative reviews, address these whilst encouraging positive feedback. If there's scarce information about your business online, then creating and promoting fresh content should be your starting point. The choice of strategy hinges on your specific reputational challenges and the company's objectives.
3. **Publish Positive Content:** Share useful, customer-centric stories and case studies that address real questions and concerns.
4. **Optimise for Search:** Ensure your site and articles are SEO-friendly. Did you find the right keywords, optimised headings and descriptions, and improved page structure?
5. **Monitor Continuously:** Regularly keep track of mentions of your company using dedicated monitoring tools.
6. **Evaluate Progress:** Track search result changes, sentiment analysis, and customer feedback over time. See

customer trust growing.

It takes time to build your brand and grow trust, but your reputation can be lost in just a day. By investing in SERM, you’re not just protecting your brand; you’re actively shaping how the world sees your business.

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Why Every Creator Should Care About Web3 Right Now

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For decades, a few powerful groups have dominated the entertainment industry. Studios and networks have decided what gets made and how revenues are split. In doing so, many talented creators have lacked the funding or creative control to bring their ideas to life. But things are set to change. New technologies have the potential to give power back to creators and even the fans themselves.

Going beyond Netflix

When it comes to disrupting the entertainment industry, streaming stands out as the obvious example. Netflix, Prime Video, Roku and others have changed how people consume media and the type of content that is trending. As of July 2023, streaming services became the predominant medium for viewers,accounting for over 38% of total TV viewing time.

It’s not just the format that has evolved. Streaming has also changed the way people discover new shows or movies. Most famously, *Squid Game* became the most-watched show of all time on Netflix, generating over 900 million viewing hours in less than 15 days.

A South Korean series dominating English-speaking markets would have been unlikely before. Now, it’s common to see non-English speaking shows thrive on streaming. *Money Heist*, *Lupin* and *All of Us Are Dead* are just some of the non-English speaking series that have gained traction through streaming.

By having a wider range of choices for consumers, new shows can be discovered, and fan bases can be built.

But it's not all good news. With the rise in popularity, the bar for success has also increased, meaning shows that don't make the cut are quickly axed. From *The OA* to *American Born Chinese*, many shows have ended before they've even begun. It's here that we see the limit that streaming services can offer. Like the big incumbent studios of old, sooner or later, creatives get sidelined.

So if traditional streaming has reached its limit, the question becomes: What next?

Related: Web3 Is the Future of the Creator Economy

Going behind the camera

Web3 has the potential to bring creators back into the center stage. While the term automatically conjures up images of the metaverse, the reality is far more practical. Web3 – powered by blockchain, smart contracts and even NFTs – can redefine how we finance shows and movies. Instead of making deals behind closed doors, Web3 levels the playing field. Creators can raise funds directly from their audiences, build engaged communities around their IP and maintain control over their projects.

This solves a few problems with existing funding models in entertainment. Firstly, smaller creators have a greater opportunity to bring their concept to life. Secondly, creators do not have to compromise their IP or lose creative control. But most importantly, the end consumer is directly involved in the process. This means that the show has a committed following before episode one even airs.

This is not an untested approach. Crowdfunding is the standard for many creatives, with Kickstarter revealing that $2.63

billion has been pledged to Games projects alone. Using blockchain formalizes the process and makes it easier to create larger-scale productions.

Related: This Is What Content Creators and Entrepreneurs Need to Know About Web3

All about the fans

We can’t underestimate the power fandom has in modern entertainment. Indeed, while many shows are axed, it’s not uncommon to see fans help reverse the decision. For example, the *Lucifer* series was resurrected after it was officially cancelled due to fan outcry. The challenge here is one of perspective. When compared to giants like *Game of Thrones* or *Stranger Things*, smaller series may not look as successful. But that does not mean there isn’t an appetite for more.

Capturing fan support can transform a passive audience into an active community. Web3 can enable a loyal fanbase to keep a show going, removing risk from streaming giants while enabling a series to continue. Going further, fans can gain benefits through investing and even returns if the series is a huge hit. It’s a win-win.

Of course, many may argue that Web3 is redundant in this process when crowdfunding exists. While it’s true that a blockchain-funded model would have similarities with the likes of Kickstarter, there are some key differences. Primarily, the use of an on-chain model provides increased safety for investors.For all its benefits, traditional crowdfunding has been riddled with scams and false promises. A blockchain model would provide greater accountability for users.

Related: The New Creative Economy Within Web 3.0

Blockchain streaming

But it’s not for fans turned would-be investors. Through using blockchain as part of streaming, we can mitigate some of the challenges in the market. We’ve already seen how established streaming giants are increasing advertisements in the viewing experience, while still charging a basic subscription fee. In a new blockchain-based model, viewers could now “watch-to-earn” – generating money from viewing ad breaks, i.e., the revenues are fairly distributed to creators as well as consumers.

Going further, a user base can evolve into a Decentralized Autonomous Organization (DAO). This means that streamers can better understand their users, with viewers having a direct say in the voting and funding of shows they want to see. This not only keeps fans happy, but also ensures shows with a small but passionate fan base can still see the light of day.

Many assume that Web3’s application in existing well-established markets is a passing trend. But when it comes to streaming, Web3, blockchain and NFTs are a structural evolution of the entertainment industry. They can unlock new ways to fund and distribute content, challenging one of this sector’s main legacy issues. The future of entertainment is decentralized, inclusive and community-powered. And it’s already underway.

For decades, a few powerful groups have dominated the entertainment industry. Studios and networks have decided what gets made and how revenues are split. In doing so, many talented creators have lacked the funding or creative control to bring their ideas to life. But things are set to change. New technologies have the potential to give power back to creators and even the fans themselves.

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OpenAI Executives Look For These 3 Key Traits in New Hires: ‘It’s Actually My Advice to Students’

What kinds of skills do OpenAI leaders look for in new hires?

OpenAI’s head of ChatGPT, Nick Turley, and chief research officer, Mark Chen, tackled this question on an episode of the OpenAI podcast released last week. It turns out that the two OpenAI executives don’t seek out an Ivy League educational background or AI breakthroughs in new hires. Instead, they search for more intrinsic traits: curiosity, agency, and

adaptability.

“Hiring is hard, especially if you want to have a small team that is very, very good and humble, and able to move fast,” Turley admitted on the podcast. “I think curiosity has been the number one thing that I’ve looked for, and it’s actually my advice to students when they ask me, ‘What do I do in this world where everything’s changing?'”

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There’s still so much that AI researchers have yet to learn about the technology that approaching its development requires “a certain amount of humility,” Turley said.

He explained that building AI is less about knowing the right answers and more about knowing how to ask the right questions with an innate curiosity.

Turley looks for new hires who are “deeply curious” about the world and what OpenAI does.

Related: Goldman Sachs CIO Says Coders Should Take Philosophy Classes — Here’s Why

Chen agreed with Turley and added that he looks for agency in new hires, or the ability to find problems and fix them with little oversight. He also searches for adaptability, or a willingness to adjust to a fast-changing environment.

“You need to be able to quickly figure out what’s important and pivot to what you need to do,” Chen stated.

Chen noted that agency and adaptability were more important than having a Ph.D in AI. He said that he himself joined OpenAI in 2018 as a resident without much formal AI training.

“I think this is a field that people can pick up fairly

quickly," Chen said.

Related: These Are the AI Skills You Should Learn Right Now, According to the World's Youngest Self-Made Billionaire

There are other skills that other executives have pinpointed as essential in the age of AI. Alexandr Wang, the MIT dropout who co-founded data training startup Scale AI and now leads Meta's AI efforts, noted in an interview with WaitWhat media CEO Jeff Berman last year that prompt engineering was an important skill to have. He recommended studying fields like math and physics that emphasized long-term thought.

Meanwhile, Goldman Sachs' chief information officer, Marco Argenti, wrote in a post last year in the Harvard Business Review that he recommended studying philosophy in addition to engineering.

OpenAI was worth $300 billion as of March, following a record-breaking $40 billion fundraising round, the biggest tech funding round on record from a private company.

[embedded content]

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Jack Dorsey Announces WhatsApp Competitor Called Bitchat

Twitter co-founder and CEO of Block Jack Dorsey launched the beta version of a new peer-to-peer messaging app on TestFlight. Unlike WhatsApp and others like it that rely on internet connectivity and central servers, Dorsey says that Bitchat operates entirely over Bluetooth mesh networks, promising true decentralization and privacy for its users. He made “an ugly whitepaper describing protocol” available on GitHub.

CNBC broke down the tech and its features. In essence, Bitchat allows users to communicate via Bluetooth-connected devices. But here’s where it gets interesting: “As users move through physical space, their phones form local Bluetooth clusters and pass messages from device to device, allowing them to reach peers beyond standard range — even without Wi-Fi or cell service.”

Related: Jack Dorsey Says Intellectual Property Law Shouldn't Exist, and Elon Musk Agrees: 'Delete All IP Law'

Messages that are sent via Bitchat are encrypted from end to end and do not live in the cloud – they are only stored on devices and are set to delete. The message "never touch centralized infrastructure," reports CNBC, "echoing Dorsey's long-running push for privacy-preserving, censorship-resistant communication."

Dorsey's post on X has received over 1.3 million views, with beta testers eager to jump in. The TestFlight page is no longer available after hitting its 10,000-user maximum.

> *my weekend project to learn about bluetooth mesh networks, relays and store and forward models, message encryption models, and a few other things.*
>
> *bitchat: bluetooth mesh chat…IRC vibes.*
>
> *TestFlight: https://t.co/P5zRRX0TB3*
> *GitHub: https://t.co/Yphb3Izm0P pic.twitter.com/yxZxiMfMH2*
>
> *— jack (@jack) July 6, 2025*

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Being 'Nice' Almost Cost Me My Business — Here's What I Do Differently Now

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In the early days of building my company, before team retreats, company values or anything resembling structure — I landed a client I thought would change everything. A household name. A generous budget. Access to rooms I'd only dreamed of.

They were charming, urgent and eager to move fast. "We'll work out the specifics later," they said. And I — ambitious, energized, hungry — said yes.

That was my first mistake.

By saying yes to being *nice*, I said no to setting boundaries.

Scope ballooned. Expectations multiplied. Instead of leading the relationship, I chased it — reactive, overextended and increasingly misaligned. When the contract ended, they vanished. No thank-you. No follow-up. No second thought.

The work was fine. The experience? A costly lesson.

The problem with “nice”

Nice is easy. Nice is polite. Nice doesn’t rock the boat. But when nice replaces clarity, it becomes dangerous.

Nice masks the truth in soft language. It dulls useful tension. It delays discomfort and multiplies damage.

We once worked with a DEI compliance firm that brought in a celebrity spokesperson and rolled out a complete rebrand, without looping us in. When they asked for feedback, we smiled and nodded. It wasn’t good. But they were proud, and we didn’t want to kill the momentum.

A few weeks later, they hired a consultant who told them the exact truths we didn’t. They listened. They acted. They pivoted — without us. Not because we failed, but because we stayed quiet.

Here’s the irony: they *wanted* the truth. Most clients do.

Related: Why Empathy Is a Crucial Entrepreneurial Skill (and How to Develop Yours)

What silence costs you

In a business landscape where 89% of consumers are more likely to engage with companies that respond to all reviews, silence doesn’t read as professionalism — it reads as disinterest.

In digital marketing, sugarcoating isn’t kindness — it’s negligence. It prevents the honest, sometimes uncomfortable

conversations that actually *move the work forward*.

Another client came to us with a brand-new website from another firm. It was clunky, templated, and, frankly, looked like a scam. I could've softened the feedback. Instead, I called out the red flags, shared competitor benchmarks and outlined the risks. That moment of honesty saved them tens of thousands – and earned us their long-term trust.

Truth: a strategic advantage

Honesty isn't just moral – it's strategic.

We once worked with a board game company whose leadership resisted every suggestion. We accommodated them, afraid to overstep. The result? The campaign flopped.

So we reset the relationship. "You hired us for our expertise," we told them. "Let us lead – or let us go."

That moment changed everything. Trust replaced tension. Strategy started to click. Results followed. Because that's what truth does: it realigns, refocuses and rebuilds.

Why we stay quiet (and how to stop)

Most of us were raised on: "If you don't have something nice to say, don't say anything at all." But in business? A better rule is:

"If you don't have something productive to say, wait until you do—and then say it clearly."

Honesty without empathy is blunt. Empathy without honesty is manipulation. But together, they create influence – the kind that earns trust, drives change, and builds resilient teams.

You don't have to be aggressive to be direct. But you *do* have to be brave.

Building a culture where truth isn’t taboo

This isn’t just about client service — it’s about internal culture. At my agency, we lead with candor. Not because it’s easy, but because it builds stronger teams. Teams that feel heard, respected, and empowered to speak up.

One time, a client gave feedback that stung. Before the next call, I told my team: “Watch how we address this — head-on, respectfully, without compromising our values.” On the call, I told the client their comments had landed poorly. Not to shame. Just to inform.

“Our team loves working with you,” I said. “Let’s make sure they continue to feel respected.” The result? An apology, a cookie bouquet, and a client who now leads with the same transparency.

Want to get better at telling the truth? Start here:

- **Bake it in:** Build feedback loops into your process. Don’t wait for disaster.
- **Teach it:** Direct, constructive communication is a skill. Train your team like it matters — because it does.
- **Model it:** If leadership isn’t honest, no one else will be.

Final thought

Being nice might win a smile. But being honest earns results.

Lead with empathy. Tell the truth. And build client relationships that aren’t afraid of friction, but built to grow through it.

Ready to break through your revenue ceiling? Join us at Level Up, a conference for ambitious business leaders to unlock new growth opportunities.

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'Absolute Freedom': Siblings Behind a Self-Funded 8-Figure Brand Reveal 3 Secrets Aspiring Entrepreneurs Should Know About Growth and Success

Rae and David Liu, the brother-sister co-founders behind luxury leather accessories brand Leatherology, "had the entrepreneurial bug" from a young age — but they didn't make

the leap to business ownership right away.

Image Credit: Courtesy of Leatherology. David and Rae Liu.

Originally from Dallas, Texas, the siblings' early work experiences took them to New York and elsewhere: Rae launched a career in the fashion industry while David developed expertise in advertising, marketing and sales.

In 2001, their father, David Liu, an entrepreneur himself, officially incorporated the vertically integrated ecommerce company DC International. With complementary professional skill sets under their belts, the siblings decided to start a direct-to-consumer brand under DC International's umbrella: Leatherology.

“We own our manufacturing in China, and it’s really unique because it’s ours, wholly owned, and only produces for [our brands],” David says. “So that makes us end-to-end. Leatherology is built on top of that. [Entrepreneurship] runs in our blood, and it’s brought us to where we are today.”

Related: She and Her Sister Started a Side Hustle to Help People Elevate Their Homes — Now Their Brand Pulls In Hundreds of Millions: ‘Get to Work’

Rae’s work in the accessories space sparked her initial vision for the brand. She had a deep understanding of leather products and how the industry worked, but the cost of quality goods remained a barrier for many consumers, including herself.

“I found myself in my 20s, working long hours in the fashion industry, and realizing that I could never afford the bags that I was working on,” Rae recalls. “Price point and quality were really important to me. I thought that there [had to be] a better way.”

Image Credit: Courtesy of Leatherology

Rae wanted Leatherology to provide high-quality, timeless leather designs at a reasonable price, directly to consumers, and she asked David if he could use his advertising background to help. Of course, David agreed. The duo launched the business in 2008.

In the years since, Leatherology has grown into an 8-figure brand, even amid supply chain volatility and economic uncertainty.

Entrepreneur sat down with Rae and David to learn more about their successful growth strategies — and what's next for the brand.

1. Self-fund and own the process

Leatherology has been self-funded from day one; without outside investment, the founders can always make decisions that are in the business's best interest.

"We talk about it [like] we are building the house we want to live in, not the house that we're going to flip and then try to sell for the most amount of money," Rae explains. "It means that we make strategic decisions and invest very heavily in things that you wouldn't if you were looking for an exit."

In the founders' view, smart growth is "slow and steady"— and translates to "absolute freedom."

"We pride ourselves on maintaining a profitable business," David adds, "one that can weather ups and downs over the years. We've been able to turn a profit every year, and it allows us to really think about the business decisions that are going to be good for our longevity."

Related: She Used $10,000 in Savings to Turn Her Side Hustle Into an 8-Figure Brand You've Probably Seen

2. Lean into quality and what sets the product apart

From the very beginning, the founders prioritized quality craftsmanship and monogrammed personalization in Leatherology's products.

The brand first utilized blind stamping, where initials are pressed into the material, then introduced foil to its designs, expanding to include different colors and font options.

"We've been doing hand painting for years," Rae says. "A lot of people in the space do digitally printed personalization.

You usually only see the luxury houses still doing hand painting, but we've kind of stuck to our guns – [and to] this idea of craft. So that's what we're still doing. We have artisans who paint each letter, and we're actually about to expand that assortment with more fonts and letter sizes for the first time in a while."

The vertical integration model makes that attention to detail and level of personalization possible, the founders say. Leatherology is also about to launch an option for custom artworks, allowing people to upload their own designs – for example, a handwritten note – to feature on the products.

Related: How 'V-Commerce' Could Be the Next Big Trend for Startups



Image Credit: Courtesy of Leatherology

3. Don’t underestimate the value of diversified marketing

Leatherology didn’t rely on social media for its growth in the early days; instead, the founders laid the foundation for the brand, then diversified its marketing channels.

The brand has a “robust” B2B business, working with Fortune 500 companies and small businesses alike to put their logos on products that they gift to clients and employees.

“ A lot of our consumers who’ve been with us for years, their first time hearing about Leatherology was actually [when] receiving it as a gift,” David says. “That has really yielded [growth from] word of mouth, which is the most important and cheapest form of marketing you can find. So we are leaning into gift-giving. We’re doubling down on that as we go into this holiday season, creating more giftable, curated moments.”

David even recalls one time when he met with a client while at Google and mentioned his family’s brand: A woman pulled out her own Leatherology bag, said she’d received it as a gift and had been giving one to everyone — a perfect example of that “snowball effect.”

Related: This Is Why Word-of-Mouth Referrals Should Be Your Number One Metric of Success

Now, as the brand continues to grow, Rae and David are excited to pursue Leatherology’s international expansion and double down on its commitment to innovation and customization.

“ I really want to own the personalization space,” Rae says. “I want to become known as the go-to, that we’re doing things better than others in a way that is more accessible. We live in a very consumerist society, and I obviously would love for people to buy better and consume better and not buy the cheap stuff, but buy something that’s going to last longer from us.”



Image Credit: Courtesy of Leatherology

What’s more, the founders say that operating as a family

business gives them a distinct advantage, especially as their long-term goals and interests have always aligned.

“It’s funny, our father says, ‘You guys can argue about anything but don’t ever fight about money,'” David says, “[and] that’s something we just never argue about. We want to build this company, and we have the same drive and motivation to do so. As Rae said, we want to build this house. Ultimately, having that long-term alignment is hard to replicate with someone who isn’t your own sister.”

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How to Secure a Premium Domain Without Raising Prices or Attracting Competitors



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Buying a premium domain delivers a killer blow to the competition because it establishes authority for the brand. This strategy is especially useful in the current digital economy, where a company's website significantly influences its branding. Why reveal your intentions publicly for everyone to see? You will undoubtedly end up spending much more than necessary.

The most sought-after domains usually involve a great deal of behind-the-scenes dealings. Without the drama of public auction shows and media attention, these domains change hands. However, the most expensive opportunity is retained during the negotiations. This way, buyers maintain greater control financially, strategically and in other essential aspects. The following includes ways savvy buyers make it happen.

Related: How to Negotiate the Price of a Pricey Premium Domain

Exercise caution before making announcements

When someone discloses that they are pursuing a domain, prices increase immediately. Opportunistic people try to profit from them or inflate costs. For example, at one point, the purchase might have been hovering around five figures. Still, suddenly, due to miscommunication and accusations, it turns into a bidding contest that hits *seven figures.*

Perception-based domain pricing systems are very fragile. If a brand is known to be already interested in the domain, the current owner often sets a “floating price tag.” This leads to the need to remain anonymous. However, employing the techniques mentioned fundamentally alters the buyer/seller dynamic without creating unnecessary mystery.

Collaborate with a reputable domain name broker

A good broker will do more than negotiate. They serve as a privacy shield between you and the seller, keeping your identity separate from the transaction. Such secrecy is necessary for premium acquisitions.

A domain broker will have relationships in the industry, market insight and even the legal framework to ensure their dealings are discreet and value-maximized. These brokers know who owns the domain and how motivated the owner is to sell, and they work towards creating a secure deal for your business to ensure your name is hidden before the signing is finalized.

Confirm how extensively a broker has engaged in the market before you work with them. They should be individuals of verified reputation and not just a pitch on some website.

Gather your intel ahead of time

Do not make any outreach or offers before collecting as much intelligence as possible.

Essential questions to ask include: Who owns the domain? What is the selling status? Is it dormant or active? Does the owner hold any other domains?

All these questions can be answered with tools such as domain sales databases, reverse IP lookups, and WHOIS history. These tools can work together to form a solid negotiation strategy, but ensure you exercise caution. Excessive lookups can alert domain owners, prompting them to ask for more.

Another reason seasoned brokers are helpful is that they don’t raise red flags when pulling up the domain’s history in question.

Make an anonymous offer

The first offer sets the tone and prepares the parties for the rest of the deal. It must be reasonable, grounded in data and, most importantly, off the record. The seller shouldn’t know who’s buying, whether through a legal entity, a third-party broker, or another intermediary, until the contract is signed and sealed. The buyer’s identity is only revealed after the contract is settled.

If a brand or buyer that is quite well-known comes forward out of the blue, the seller will have absolute control. They understand you’re all in. They know you most likely have some assets.

And they will exploit that to no end.

Anonymous offers help in maintaining neutrality. You’re just another buyer – this is precisely the position you want to be

in.

Related: A Great Domain Name Can Add Millions to Your Business – Here's How to Get One (Even If It's Already Taken)

Don't use public marketplaces/auctions

It is easy to get tempted while climbing the GoDaddy auctions or Sedo Marketplace. However, once a domain is up for auction or public listing, the price is beyond your control.

Even if the auctioned item is a domain you are seeking, chances are you will not be able to influence the auction price. Therefore, you should refrain from participating in public auctions. Instead, consider making an offer for a direct transaction off the platform.

Some parting tips for entrepreneurs

Not every domain owner seeks to advertise their domains globally. More often than not, a private, discreet offer will close the deal quicker than a noisy auction ever could.

More patience is required for top-level domains. Premium domains don't move as quickly as one might like. Sometimes, the owner needs time to consider an offer or assess the market's peak. In other situations, logistics may cause delays.

That said, if the seller is willing to negotiate, you, as the buyer, will want to make the deal as quick as possible. Have everything on standby, from funding and legal entities to having an escrow account and a simple, concise contract. If behind-the-scenes work is done, the deal will not only be expedited, but it will also prove to the seller that the buyer is serious without overspending.

It’s not helpful for deals to hit the headlines. Keeping deals low-profile ensures that negotiations around overpriced domain quotes remain stress-free.

With the right people on your side and strategic plans in place, pursuing domains like I have with a $1 million purchase a few years back can become easier without worrying about expensive bids right from the start.

Buying a premium domain delivers a killer blow to the competition because it establishes authority for the brand. This strategy is especially useful in the current digital economy, where a company’s website significantly influences its branding. Why reveal your intentions publicly for everyone to see? You will undoubtedly end up spending much more than necessary.

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How I Turned My Hobbies Into Profitable Side Businesses With My Friends — Without Losing the Joy



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We all spend time doing things that make us feel good — going for walks, hanging out with friends, working on hobbies or just sharing ideas with people we trust. What if you could take some of those moments and turn them into something more?

For me, it's not about chasing money or killing the fun. It's about making the good things even better — more connected, more meaningful, and yes, sometimes more profitable. I'm not saying you *should* monetize your hobbies or your relationships. But I've found that when it feels right, it can bring even

more joy, depth and motivation to the things you already enjoy doing.

This article isn't about hustle culture or over-optimization. It's just a look at how a few of my everyday interests, friendships and collaborations naturally evolved into small income streams with no pressure and a lot of enjoyment along the way.

By the time you finish reading this, you'll see exactly why they call me Mr. 20% and how a few simple partnerships can turn passion into profit without eliminating the joy.

Related: Want to Turn Your Hobby Into Income? Here's What You Need to Know First.

Combining coaching and marketing skills to build a boxing course

I've been training consistently with my boxing coach, and over time, we started thinking seriously about turning our sessions into something more. He brings boxing and coaching skills. I bring experience in online business and marketing skills. We're friends, we trust each other, and it made sense to combine our strengths and build something together. That's how the idea for our video-based boxing course came up — structured, practical lessons that people can actually follow from home.

The virtual fitness market is booming, and AI-driven online training is fueling a 32.7% growth, according to CreatePT. That's why we also decided to integrate AI, not just as a trend, but as a tool to offer real-time support, guidance and a better experience for our students.

Turning friendships into partnerships

While most of my hobbies are physical or nature-related, I'm now expanding into projects with friends that mix online skills with offline businesses. For example, I have friends who run personal training studios, and I'm becoming a partner to help transform their offline operations. My role will focus on improving their local presence – optimizing their Google My Business profiles, managing and boosting reviews and enhancing how they attract clients nearby.

According to Adsy, about 75% of all ecommerce transactions are carried out as indirect sales. That also means businesses not using this method are missing out on up to 80% of their sales opportunities. That's why I see local optimization as more than just marketing – it's a way to unlock serious growth that's already happening around them. In return, I'll take 20% of the new profits these improvements bring in, turning this into a sustainable side business that delivers value on both ends.

Related: 3 Unparalleled Benefits of Starting a Business With Friends and Family

Turning nature walks into group guided hiking adventures

I've always loved being a guide in nature, leading hikes through forests, national parks and beautiful trails. Walking and exploring the outdoors is my passion, and meeting new, fresh people while doing it makes it even better. Before and during Covid, I did this as a hobby, just enjoying the experience, but now I'm ready to take it to the next level and turn it into a real opportunity. My plan is to create profiles on platforms like Booking and Airbnb Experiences, so I can

reach more people who want to join me on hikes and outdoor adventures.

According to The Janda Law Firm, over 118 million people hike globally, and the global market size for hiking is valued at $12.24 billion. That’s exactly why this feels like the right time to step forward and build something around what I already love doing.

Dog walking

The dog walking industry in the U.S. was valued at $1.7 billion in 2024, showing just how popular and profitable this field has become. I enjoy walking, and my girlfriend loves walking dogs, so this hobby has naturally brought us together. Since we both live in small apartments where having a dog isn’t possible, dog walking is a perfect way for her to spend time with dogs and for us to enjoy being outside together. She even makes money from it, and now we’re thinking about expanding this hobby by creating a platform that connects dog owners with reliable walkers, turning something we love into a bigger opportunity.

Expanding business opportunities in the transcription and translation industry

I’m partnering with a close friend who owns transcription and translation agencies, taking a 20% share as we work together to modernize and grow their business. My role focuses on integrating advanced AI tools to automate workflows and improve efficiency, while also optimizing their online presence through SEO and targeted marketing campaigns. This helps attract more clients and increase revenue.

According to Ditto, the transcription market is currently

valued at $3.01 billion in 2024 and is forecasted to nearly triple, reaching $9.51 billion by 2034. With the rapid growth driven by increasing content creation and global communication needs, I see huge potential to build a sustainable, scalable business while helping my friend succeed in a competitive industry.

Related: Make Money Doing What You Love – 10 Key Tips on Monetizing Your Passion

Building small SaaS tools

One of the things I really enjoy is buying old domains and turning them into small SaaS tools. I don't code myself, but that's never stopped me. I use AI tools to build out the core functions, and lately, I've been working with my younger cousin – he's just starting out as a junior programmer. He's learning fast and using the same AI tools to build and improve the products. It's a way for both of us to grow: I get to experiment with ideas, he gains real-world experience, and we both make money once the sites start getting traffic and subscribers.

According to ScienceSoft, more than 30,500 SaaS companies are competing for users' attention today. That's why we focus on building simple, niche tools with clear value – no fluff, just utility – and we're turning this into a fun and profitable side hustle.

In the end, it's not just about turning hobbies into income. Sometimes it's about combining your skills with the people you already enjoy spending time with. A good hobby can turn into something more when it's mixed with trust, shared curiosity and complementary strengths. Whether it's boxing with a friend, building tools with my younger cousin or helping someone grow their local business, it all starts with a real connection. The money is just a bonus. What matters most is that it feels natural, fulfilling and fun. That's what makes

it sustainable. That’s what makes it real.

We all spend time doing things that make us feel good — going for walks, hanging out with friends, working on hobbies or just sharing ideas with people we trust. What if you could take some of those moments and turn them into something more?

For me, it’s not about chasing money or killing the fun. It’s about making the good things even better — more connected, more meaningful, and yes, sometimes more profitable. I’m not saying you *should* monetize your hobbies or your relationships. But I’ve found that when it feels right, it can bring even more joy, depth and motivation to the things you already enjoy doing.

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Xbox Producer Tells Laid-Off Workers to Turn to AI For

Advice If They’re Feeling ‘Overwhelmed’



After Microsoft laid off 9,000 workers last week, 4% of its global workforce, one employee had an unusual message for those let go: turn to ChatGPT to help relieve the emotional burden.

Xbox executive producer Matt Turnbull wrote last week in a now-deleted LinkedIn post that amid these “really challenging times,” employees are “not alone” and they “don’t have to go it alone.”

Instead, they can use AI tools like ChatGPT or Copilot “to help reduce the emotional and cognitive load that comes with job loss,” Turnbull wrote. He completed the post with some prompt ideas and use cases of AI that could help if laid-off workers are “feeling overwhelmed.” The use cases included resume tailoring, networking messages, and career planning.

Related: Microsoft Claims Its AI Is Better Than Doctors at Diagnosing Patients, But 'You Definitely Still Need Your Physician'

"No AI tool is a replacement for your voice or your lived experience," Turnbull wrote in the post. "But at a time when mental energy is scarce, these tools can help you get unstuck faster, calmer, and with more clarity."

Turnbull experienced swift backlash from other professionals on LinkedIn for his post and eventually deleted it, according to *Tech Radar*. According to his LinkedIn profile, he was not impacted by Microsoft's layoffs last week.

As Microsoft lays off workers, it continues to invest deeply in AI. The company is spending $80 billion this year to build data centers for AI models.

Related: Amazon Intends to Spend Over $100 Billion on AI This Year. Here's How It Compares to Google, Meta, and Microsoft.

AI is also taking over coding at Microsoft. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella said in a sit-down chat with Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg in April that Microsoft engineers are using AI to write 20% to 30% of code for company projects.

He stated that the amount of code created by AI varies based on the programming language. AI writes "fantastic" Python code but "not that great" C++ code, Nadella noted.

Other tech companies are spending heavily on AI and using it in daily operations, too. Google CEO Sundar Pichai said on an earnings call in April that Google was using AI to write "well over 30%" of new code, while Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said in January that Meta is developing AI to write code on par with a mid-level engineer. Google is spending up to $75 billion on AI this year, while Meta is spending up to $65 billion.

Microsoft is one of the most valuable companies in the world

at the time of writing, second only to Nvidia, with a market cap of $3.7 trillion.

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How to Utilize AI in Your Business While Minimizing Environmental Harm



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The use of artificial intelligence is on the rise across almost every industry, and the ways it can be used are expanding as we speak. AI can be tremendously beneficial across a variety of fields, but it can also have drawbacks — one of them being a substantial impact on the environment.

The energy consumption required to power AI is significant. Power-hungry AI processors burn through a lot of energy quickly. Creating an image, for example, can use as much power as it takes to charge your phone.

The infrastructure that supports this process also requires the use of other resources, such as water, to cool the systems and prevent overheating. An AI prompt uses as much water as a 16-ounce bottle for every 5-50 interactions.

Despite the negative impact AI use has on the environment, it is not going away. It is becoming a necessity to be competitive in just about any market, so avoiding AI entirely

isn’t a practical option. The key is to be intentional: knowing when and how to use AI is vital to your business and to the planet.

Related: World Environment Day 2025: Can AI Fix the Energy Problem It Helped Create?

AI policies: What they are and how to use them

We recommend implementing an AI policy in your company to guide your organization on when to use AI and when not to. This ensures your team’s usage will align with company values, standards and legal requirements in order to maximize benefit.

While providing this type of framework will not mitigate the environmental impact of your AI usage, it can give you more control over when you’re making the environmental tradeoff of using AI.

When and how should you use AI?

AI is a part of the modern business environment, and there are a few ways in which it can have a maximal impact on your business, keeping you competitive while being selective about how you’re impacting the environment.

1. Use AI to increase efficiency

AI can drastically increase the efficiency of your team if used correctly. When used to take on mundane tasks, AI can eliminate human error and increase productivity. When entering data, for example, humans can easily make costly mistakes. AI does not make those types of mistakes and can also flag errors made by humans. The amount of efficiency that you can gain back using AI is critical to staying competitive in the market, so this is the best place to use AI in your business.

2. Use AI to enhance your team and client experience

The use of AI to enhance the workplace experience of your team and the service experience of your customers can increase satisfaction for all parties involved. By reducing the time it takes to deal with the nitty gritty, humans can move on to more satisfying things that can increase happiness and productivity while giving your clients the seamless experience that your competitors will be rivaling via their use of AI-enhanced tools.

AI-enhanced customer service experiences are becoming increasingly standard, with clients expecting quick and tailored service and responses. This is something that companies broadly will have to keep up with to stay competitive.

On the team side, AI can help increase satisfaction in the workplace by streamlining communications, scheduling and resource management. While face-to-face teamwork is important, most employees would agree that too much of their time is spent in unnecessary meetings. No one will complain when your AI policy helps take the drudgery out of their day.

Related: **When AI Meets Climate**

When should you not use AI?

When choosing how to implement AI into your business operations while minimizing your environmental impact, there are some key situations where using AI does not make sense.

1. Avoid AI simply “for fun” or for tasks that can be easily done without AI

Most people would agree that AI has some fun uses, but it just isn’t worth the environmental impact. For example, using AI to create images or videos that are not necessary is not a good use of resources.

Using AI for basic research that could be found using other resources is not an efficient use of the technology, so rather than asking AI for help with every small task, your team's training should include the type of tasks that can be done without AI. Generating an entire presentation with AI, for example, rather than using existing templated slides, may not be the best environmental tradeoff.

2. Don't use AI for anything that requires nuanced communication or emotional intelligence

AI doesn't yet understand how to handle delicate situations. Though the communication it generates can sound conversational, since AI is purely input-driven, it can often miss the context that sensitive matters require. Rely on your team's ability to handle these situations with tact, and therefore reduce your use of AI.

3. Don't use AI when it takes away from the human experience

As valuable as AI is, your team is more valuable and should be your top priority. If your company's use of AI is taking away from the experience and learning of your humans, that is counterproductive.

Your human team members should have the opportunity to learn how to do tasks before handing them over to AI. If they don't have the chance to build the skills foundational to their job, they are missing out on experience that could benefit their future, your company and the field at large. For example, while doctors with years of experience can benefit greatly from using AI to look at medical scans, a resident should have the opportunity to develop an eye so that they know what to look for when making a diagnosis.

Related: Your Electricity Bill Is Going Up Thanks to AI — Even If You've Never Used ChatGPT: 'Higher Bills for Everyday Households'

The AI field continues to grow and change by the day, so plan to regularly monitor and educate yourself on the ongoing impact of AI on the environment, quality of the tools and the competitive landscape of AI use in your industry, and update your AI policy accordingly.

If you implement AI use in your organization in an intentional way, you can reap the benefits and avoid overusing the technology, which will help reduce your company's environmental impact while staying relevant.

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