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The Case for Integrated Online Reputation Management

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Why an All-in-One Platform Is Better Than Point Solutions

Your customers are always talking about you – through reviews on your website or Google My Business listing, Facebook posts, Tweets, online chat, and a multitude of other touchpoints where they give feedback. We're living in a feedback economy now, where customer reviews make or break your reputation and can influence every aspect of your operations – for businesses who have the tools to collect that feedback, respond to it, and learn from it.



Data in the Wild Affects Your Online Reputation

But managing your online reputation isn't easy. You can (and should) survey your customers to understand and learn from them. This kind of feedback is known as structured data. But **80 percent** of that customer feedback is unstructured, meaning it's bubbling up "from the wild," or sources ranging from social media to Reddit forums, out of your control. This kind of feedback can be especially valuable because it's unvarnished and immediate – a real-time assessment of how your brand is performing. But brands are struggling to benefit from unstructured data because they lack an effective platform to monitor, respond, and learn from it.

A recent Forrester [report](#) commissioned Reputation bears out this reality. Forrester surveyed 152 digital marketing or customer experience decision-makers in the U.S. The study showed that on the one hand, 84 percent of decision-makers see the value in unstructured data and consumer feedback. But only 30 percent of data collected is unstructured, which means businesses are missing an opportunity to tap into the value of unstructured customer data. They're leaving a wealth of insights on the table.

Too often, businesses are relying on a patchwork quilt of standalone software products to chase down customer feedback and manage their online reputations. Point solutions won't cut it. They track, at best, a sliver of information, leaving untapped all that data in the wild that powers the feedback economy. The answer? Embracing a single, integrated platform.

Reduce the Risk, Cost, and Complexity

In this world of proliferating technologies, many marketers are looking to reduce complexity, cost and risk by deploying platforms that combine the functionalities of various point solutions. **Online reputation management (ORM) is one area in which such consolidation is possible, thanks to comprehensive platforms such as Reputation.**

What you will learn:

In this guide, we will deconstruct the platform vs. point solution debate.

You'll learn how unifying the various aspects of ORM — namely, online reviews, business listings, surveys, social media management, ticketing, operational insights and analytics and reporting — can reduce the risk, cost and complexity of your marketing technology stack — all while helping to optimize customer experience.

Reputation Management Is a Human Endeavor

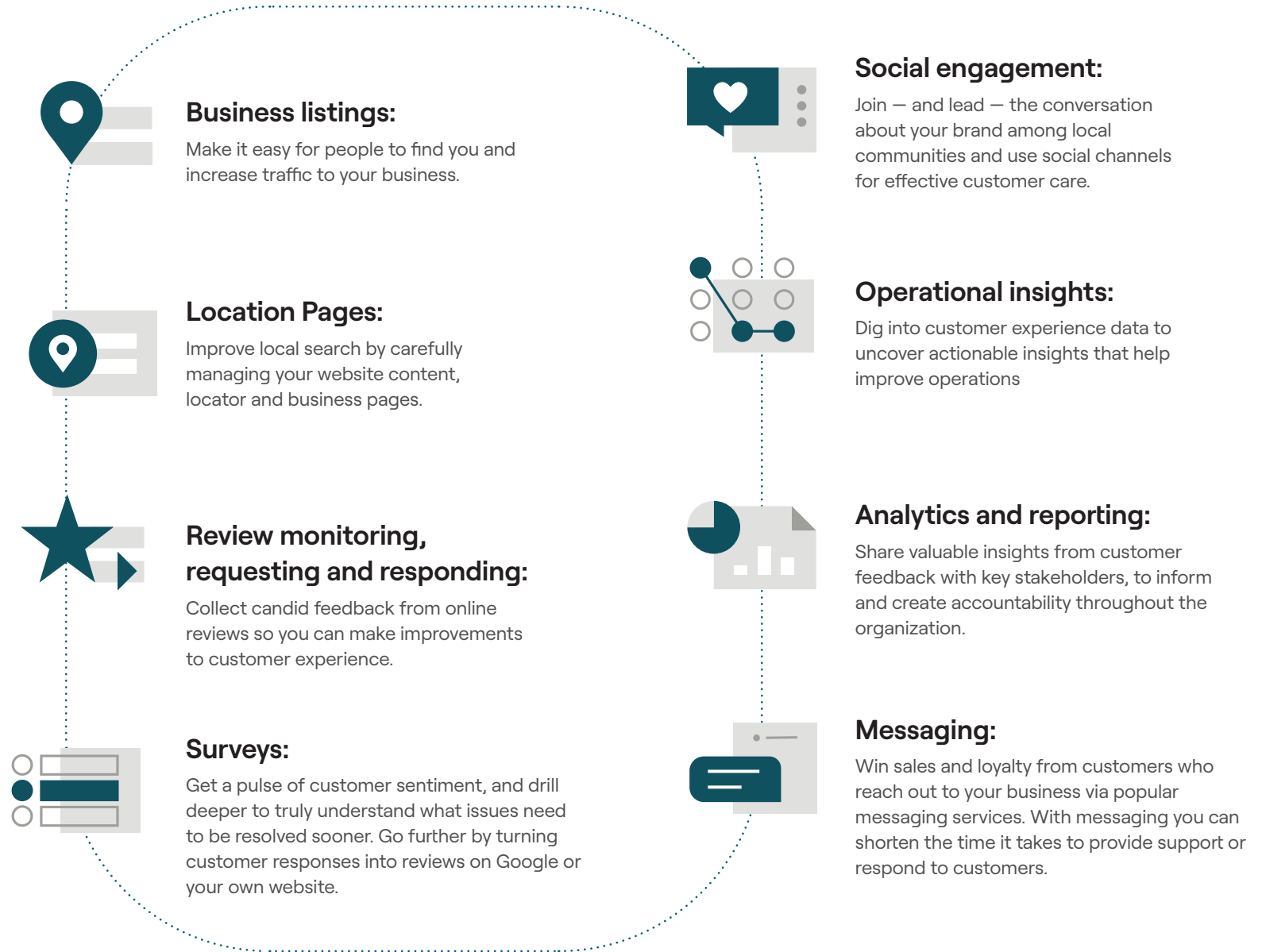
The real goal of online reputation management is to make it easy for consumers to find a local business and see enough positive reviews to become a customer.

A strong online presence is the result of carefully managed listings across major directories and an optimized website that ranks well for SEO.

Great reviews come from great customer experience. They feed on each other and create a self-reinforcing customer activation loop, where potential buyers become customers and customers become brand advocates. This cycle drives review volume, search engine ranking and online reputation.



Managing the customer activation cycle requires a well integrated platform that includes:



The Risk of Multiple Point Solutions

Despite multiple and expensive service agreements, no single vendor will be held accountable for solving problems that originate in a different platform.



What happens when technology fails?

Say you're in the self-service checkout line at the store because you're in a hurry. The display tells you to remove an item from the bagging area — but there's no item there. Then you have to wait for an attendant to come over and punch a code into the computer before you can proceed. Do you shrug your shoulders and blame the technology? No, you're more likely to complain about your experience at the store — to friends, on social media and possibly on review sites.

Technology failures are often the result of loosely connected point solutions.

In the grocery store example, the scanner, the scales and other elements of the self-service shopping experience are broken. The fast and easy shopping trip you're supposed to have turns into a frustrating one — and possibly negative customer sentiment around the grocery store brand.

Product updates and code tweaks from the vendors for each point solution are rarely seamless — and they often disrupt operations or introduce new problems. The store manager is then tasked with fixing the problem — but must determine which technology is the culprit before contacting a vendor. Without a single point of contact, the manager may not know where to begin to troubleshoot — and fix — the problem.

Meanwhile, productivity in the store slows, checkout lines get longer, employees are irritated and the customer experience continues to degrade.

What about your data?

Beyond the risk of technology failures, there are other risks associated with piecing together multiple systems:

Data integrity

Maintaining point solutions necessitates continuous monitoring all data feeds to ensure nothing has changed on any of the systems — otherwise, you risk data corruption or loss.

Data security

In industries such as healthcare or financial services, companies are legally required to manage and protect customer data in very specific ways. Data leakage can have significant impact on the overall business — and the brand. (Experian, Yahoo, Facebook and others have learned the cost of improper data management and usage the hard way.) If your data is passing through or residing on multiple third-party servers, you may be placing your business at risk.

Data sovereignty and ownership

Would you work with a vendor that claimed ownership of your data? Some vendors in the reputation management space contractually own any data they add to yours — including location data that your business depends on. If you end the vendor agreement, your data may be reverted back to the state it was in prior to engaging with that vendor.

Integration complexity

Integrating technology solutions from multiple vendors requires constant upkeep. Problems can arise when one vendor changes their data formats or algorithms. Will you be able to recognize when data and results are inaccurate — and how will you pinpoint and troubleshoot issues in a multi-vendor situation, where vendors deny fault and point the finger at the others?

The High Cost Of Multiple Point Solutions

Beyond software license or service fees, human capital and integration expenses can quickly drain project budgets and limit your ability to scale.

Is it possible to assemble a portfolio of hand-picked point products, stitch them together and spend less up-front and in monthly licensing, maintenance and administration fees than you would spend on an integrated platform?

Yes, it is possible. But it's not likely. Hidden costs creep into the equation, especially when system- or API-level integration is required. And many point solutions overlap in some way, leading to duplication, inconsistencies and inefficient use of resources.





Hidden costs

Most cloud-based solutions have pricing models that are tied to the growth of your company and subsequent technology needs.

For example, as you add solutions, you also need **API-level integration with enterprise apps, marketing platforms or industry-specific platforms**. But these integrations frequently require you to move up to the most expensive enterprise tier of service.

Multiple niche systems also may require specialized resources to administer and operate. You'll either need to recruit specialists or train existing staff — both of which take time and money, and delay your progress toward your marketing goals. Operator costs might not be considered at the onset, but they are real and cannot be avoided. With the current unemployment rate under 4%, hiring and retaining skilled technical resources is a constant challenge.

A Single Integrated System Can Slash the Cost of Routine Tasks

Reputation.com benchmarked numerous customers who administered their own location listings on search engines and industry sites. This task requires trained resources working in a multi-system environment, and is tedious, time-consuming and error-prone.

One healthcare organization required 1.5 full-time employees working year-round to maintain location listings for its 600+ doctors.



No Scale, No Sale

Costs accrue during failures and updates of your current solutions — but even more costs arise when you have to rip and replace a solution, either because your company has outgrown it or the vendor goes out of business.

The cost of replacing software

Consider the average tenure of a point solution. If you have four or five solutions deployed, you probably anticipate swapping out one of them every 12-18 months. But if one of your vendors closes shop, they may leave you in the lurch, with unsupported legacy technology — or worse, a gap in your technology stack. Either scenario makes it difficult for new technologies to function at their best.

A platform that scales with your needs

An all-in-one platform is built to scale and grow along with your increasing ORM needs, so you don't have to rip and replace anything. Each module is built to integrate seamlessly with the others; no expensive APIs or updates are necessary. And, it takes a solid and dedicated research and development team to create a full platform so that provider is likely well-funded and in it for the long haul.

The Complexity of Multiple Point Solutions

Complexity increases exponentially with each component added to the technology stack.

Complexity, three ways

Complexity is perhaps the greatest hurdle to overcome. Within your technology stack, complexity arises in three primary areas: Data, Management and Measurement.

Data complexity

Data typically falls into two categories: structured and unstructured. Structured data consists of the rows and columns of customer or location information stored in spreadsheets, databases and CRM systems. Unstructured data consists of the comments, images and videos on review and social media.

Although you may be able to build a system from point products that does an effective job of managing and sharing structured data, this is significantly more difficult with unstructured data. It's not feasible to share huge volumes of unstructured data between systems; and it's also not practical to rely on each domain-specific platform to manage that subset of content, and perform localized analysis on it.

Imagine trying to extract insight from data across the web. Each platform first needs to perform analysis for its specific domain. Then, a third-party tool or plugin is needed to connect and aggregate the data across each solution and connect the dots. Finally, you may require another software application or platform to perform the analysis — or a lot of manual labor.

Management and administration

If one of your data feeds from a remote outpost goes down, does anyone notice? If you acquire a new company, who is responsible for effectively onboarding not just the people and the core business platforms, but the customer engagement and monitoring elements? The social team? Web team? Customer Operations? Does someone have full line-of-sight into every customer touch point?

At the most basic level, more systems means more administration tasks for everyone — more invoices for accounting to process, more research and troubleshooting of various systems, more IT administration and more reporting for upper management. And all of that work incurs additional cost — while creating added confusion, frustration and headaches.

Measurement, reporting and analysis

Point solutions not only limit your visibility into the data and make it more complex to track and manage; they make it almost impossible to analyze it in its entirety, which limits its value. You can't effectively measure everything — in real time — and report on what matters if your data is incomplete or scattered across a half dozen systems. You can't easily overlay competitive data from other organizations in your industry to glean comparative insight.

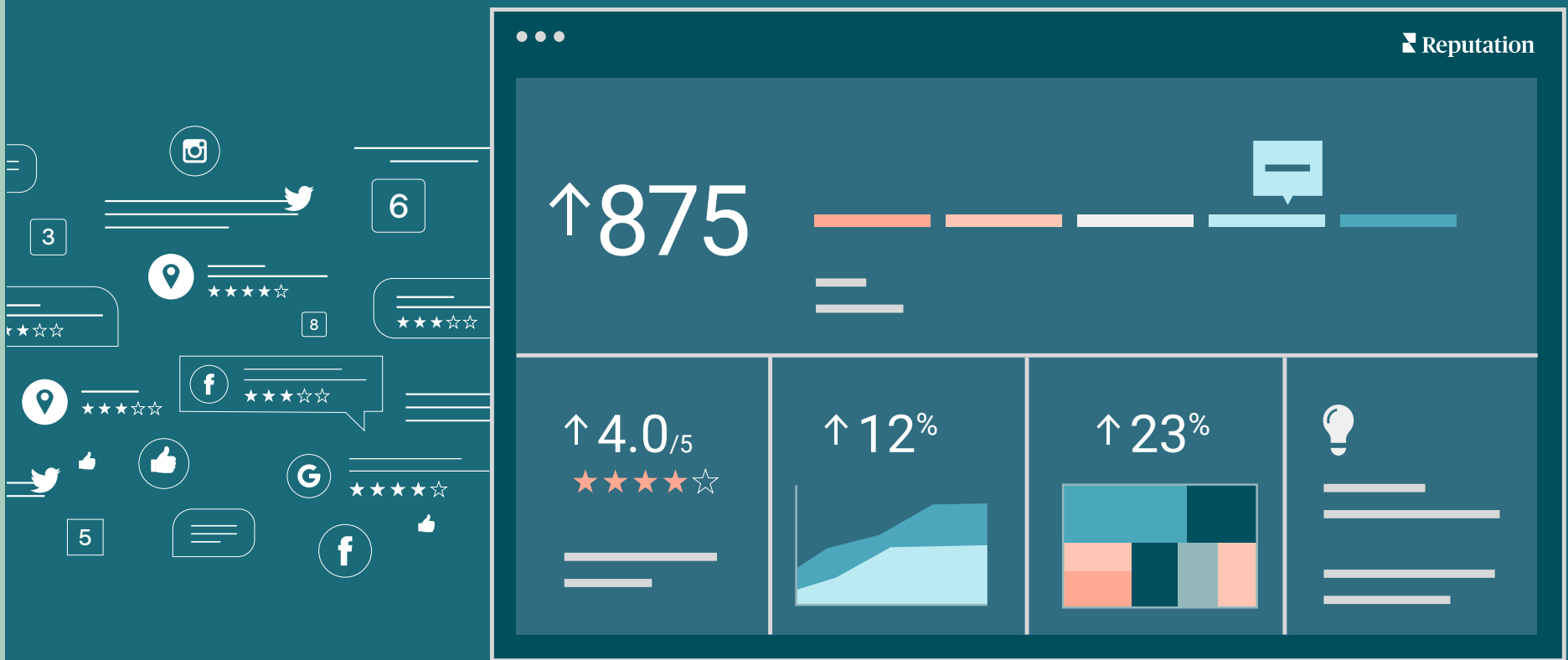
A Unified Solution

Insight makes it possible to adapt your marketing strategies for maximum impact.

Without insights, how will you know if you need more social engagement or reviews? How will you understand which categories of service experience your competitors are beating you at? How will you know which locations are falling behind in various aspects of ORM?

Only a unified solution can automatically aggregate data from all sources, in real time, allowing for a comprehensive 360-degree view and reporting that's meaningful, insightful and impactful.

Reputation helps customers view data from surveys, review sites and social media platforms on a single dashboard, and create reports for different groups of stakeholders across an organization.



Conclusion

Assembling a comprehensive solution for online reputation management from a loose federation of point products is possible — but can be risky and, in the long run, ineffective.

The long-term expense and complexity of purchasing, implementing and maintaining multiple systems far outweigh any upfront cost savings.

If your business requires that you engage with a large audience of customers and prospects across many locations, you need the ability to scale and expand the ways in which you manage the customer experience. Rather than bolting on additional point solutions later, start with a modular platform that has everything you'll need — and is built to scale.

Contact Reputation: the All-in-One Platform for the Customer Journey

The Reputation platform is truly a one-stop shop for managing the customer journey, helping you transform your customer feedback into your competitive advantage.

Reputation's patented technology and expert managed services can help you generate and manage online reviews, optimize your social media presence and ensure business listings accuracy — and drive more traffic to your site. [Schedule a demo](#) or [contact us](#) to discover how [Reputation](#) can deliver phenomenal business results.