



## THE WHITE PAPER

Your Guide to Life Planning

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### Business Owners: Surviving in a Social Media World

Thanks to social media, grandparents are posting photos on their grandkids' Facebook pages. Shoppers are reading product reviews online before deciding what to purchase. And disgruntled customers are sharing their displeasure with anyone who will read their rants.

#### A New Risk

The benefit of social media to small businesses is considerable. It has leveled the playing field in many ways. But it has also introduced new risks. One of the most critical is that bad reviews or negative comments could ruin your business's reputation. And that could be fatal.

#### A Proactive Approach

How can you protect your business from online attacks? Here are some suggestions:

**Join the conversation.** If you've been visible on social media, you'll have more credibility if something erupts. But that's not the only reason to have a social media presence. Even if your business is never involved in an online dustup, social media offers an opportunity to market and promote your business and engage with your customers. Smart phones and tablets are making it even easier for people to go online.

**Pay attention.** Monitor the Internet for news about your brand. Routinely check online review sites (if appropriate) and social networking sites for references to your company, and run your company's name through a search engine.

**Be prepared.** You can't draft specific responses ahead of time, but you can identify your vulnerabilities and draft a response strategy. You'll be well ahead of the game if you do this before a crisis hits rather than during one. You'll also be able to dial down your emotions and respond more objectively. There's another upside to identifying your vulnerabilities ahead of time: You have an opportunity to eliminate them.

**Respond.** Make sure you have the facts straight before you do anything. However, things can escalate rapidly online. So if you're going to respond, do so quickly and publicly. That said, not every attack warrants a public response. The complaint may not be legitimate or the person complaining may be a troublemaker, in which case responding may be a waste of time.

Any time your business is under attack -- online or off -- try viewing it as an opportunity to change some minds and bolster your reputation.

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