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I know, I know, your mother told you that it's not nice to talk about people behind their backs. But, the truth is, people do it all the time. It would be nice if they only had nice, warm, glowing thoughts to convey about you, wouldn't it? Nice, yes, but there is no guarantee that will be the case. Too often, people are more anxious to share bad news than positive comments. In today's world where computers and Internet access are the norm, it's easier than ever for an unhappy customer to vent their displeasure where hundreds, thousands, even millions of people can see it.

We've been working recently to clean up our *Designing Strategies* database. So many have changed jobs, e-mail addresses and even closed their businesses during the recent difficult economy. While correcting database information, I was amazed to find how many small businesses have no web site, blog or other on-line presence. No control of the message about who they are, what they do and why people should do business with them. Worse yet, some had negative comments posted about their services that went unchallenged. What if the only thing potential customers find about your business on-line is negative? Not a good first impression, that's for sure.



Potential customers searching for your business, even those locally, will do a computer search before they pick up the telephone book and let their fingers do the walking to find you. The Yellow Pages section of telephone directories is a dying dinosaur. On the Internet, customers know they can find much more information on which to base their decisions than would be available in a Yellow Pages advertisement. Exactly what they find, and how much or how little it impresses them, is up to you. It is your responsibility to be sure whatever they find is positive information and casting your company in the best light.

How often do you go on-line to see what is being said about your company? How long will you allow negative comments, whether accurate or not, to influence potential customers? How many will see a negative comment you aren't even aware exists? Is everything there positive and in glowing terms that will impress new customers? There are sites on the Internet that post your company name, address and phone number without your even being consulted. These sites invite you to add information to your listing, but also welcome comments from the public about your company, products and services. Anyone at all can add reviews of service they received from you. If it's not favorable, it will be there forever, for everyone and anyone to find. It's time you found out what is posted about your firm on the Internet.



With today's advances in technology, there is simply no excuse for even the smallest business not to have a web presence painting them in the best possible light. Options abound for marketing your firm in a positive way to influence customers looking for your type of products and services. New platforms spring up all the time that allow for a basic web site or blog where you can present and control your brand. Sites like [Manta](#) and [Merchant Circle](#) provide a chance to at least be found on the Internet and let customers know how to contact you. Claim those listings and add details about your company: your products and services, business hours, even identify your staff. But, others can also post comments there. Monitor your on-line presence regularly to be aware of what is being said about you. Keep it all positive.

It is imperative to develop strategies that protect your corporate image and brand. If negative comments are posted, get busy and clear up the problems. Turn that disgruntled customer into a satisfied brand ambassador. Stay on top of things showing up on the Internet about you and your company. Sign up for a service like [Google Alerts](#) (this one is free!) to notify you when something new about your firm is posted on the Internet. Notices will be sent right to your e-mail Inbox. Make reputation protection a part of your marketing and strategic plans. You can't afford to allow someone else control your brand and reputation.

## Visualize --- Analyze --- Strategize