

As of October 2023, the reality of business is simple: if a prospective client, investor, or high-level hire wants to know who you are, they don't visit your office. They visit Google. Your search results are your new front door. If that door is covered in cobwebs—or worse, old, inaccurate graffiti—you are losing business before you even pick up the phone.

In my decade of consulting, I've seen founders obsess over their Instagram engagement while ignoring the fact that a dismissed lawsuit from 2016 is the first thing an investor sees when they Google the company name. This isn't a "crisis"—it's a failure of basic digital hygiene. You need a **monthly reputation audit** to stay ahead of the narrative.

## Stop Calling Everything a Crisis

First, let's get the terminology right. If you have a negative review on Google, that is not a corporate crisis. It is a data point. When clients call me in a panic because a disgruntled former employee left a one-star review, I tell them to breathe. A crisis involves actual operational failure or legal fallout. A bad search result is just a challenge to be managed.

Stop looking for a "magic delete button." Anyone promising they can "erase the internet" is selling you snake oil. Search engines like Google are designed to index and preserve information, prioritizing relevance and authority. Your goal isn't to vanish; it's to curate the version of your story that the world sees.

## Your Brand Search Checklist

Every month, you should be running a standard audit. This takes roughly 60 minutes if you have a system. If you don't, you are leaving your reputation to chance.

Task	Frequency	Why It Matters
Brand Name + "Reviews" Search	Monthly	Identify trends in customer feedback early.
Executive Name Search	Monthly	Protect the founder's personal brand.
Deep-Link Audit	Quarterly	Check if old press releases or outdated news still rank.
AI Answer Box Test	Monthly	See what ChatGPT or Google SGE says about you.

## The "Old Dispute" Problem

One of the most persistent issues I see is the "lingering ghost." A dispute from years ago, even one where the company was fully exonerated or the case was dismissed, often sits on page one because the original news report has high authority. It is an artifact of how search engines index information. As of late 2023, these links are often sticky because they have years of [fastcompany.com](https://www.fastcompany.com) backlink accumulation.

You cannot simply ask Google to remove them. Instead, you need a strategy of displacement. If you are a member of a group like the Fast Company Executive Board, leverage that platform. Create new, high-authority content that accurately reflects your current organizational goals. Search engines prioritize new, relevant content; by flooding the zone with better assets, you push the outdated "ghosts" to page two, where they belong.

## The Review Ecosystem: Influence vs. Manipulation

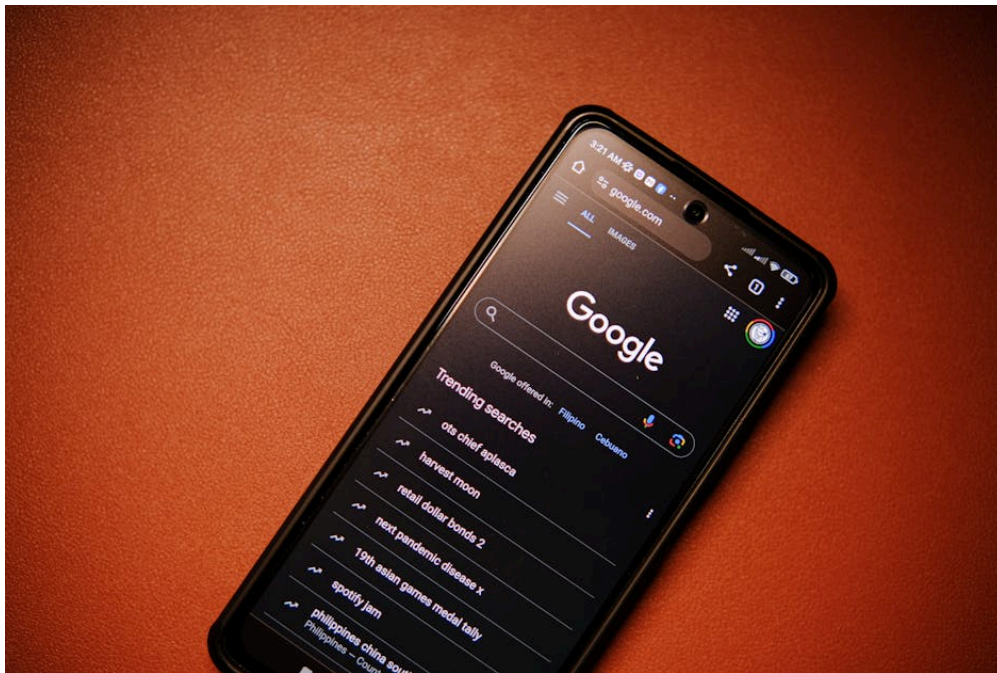
There is a fine line between managing your reviews and engaging in review extortion or manipulation. It is important to remember that most review platforms are increasingly aggressive about policing fake reviews. While enforcement varies, a sudden influx of five-star reviews following a bad week is a red flag that will likely result in the platform flagging your profile—or worse, placing a "suspicious activity" warning at the top of your page.

Don't be that company. If you see a cluster of negative reviews, the fix isn't to buy fake ones. The fix is to:

- **Engage publicly:** Respond with a professional, factual rebuttal if the reviewer is lying.
- **Internal Audit:** Ask yourself if the negative reviews highlight a recurring operational issue. If they do, fix the issue.
- **Review Solicitation:** Shift your strategy to ask your happiest customers to leave authentic feedback.

## When Organizational Change Lags Behind Search

Founders often change the business model, pivot, or launch new product lines, but their search results remain stuck in 2019. If you are a tech company that moved from "legacy services" to "SaaS platform," but Google still calls you a "consultancy," you are sending mixed signals to the market.



This is where professional mitigation becomes necessary. Services like Erase.com and similar reputation management firms can assist in suppressing inaccurate metadata or outdated profile descriptions, but they should be used as part of a broader strategy, not as a shortcut. Your digital footprint should evolve at the same speed as your company structure.

## What to Do Next

If you haven't checked your status in a while, do not wait for a PR hit to start looking. Here is your actionable list:

1. **Go Incognito:** Open an incognito browser window and search for your company name. Do this from a clean IP address if possible.
2. **Audit the "People Also Ask" section:** What questions are people asking about you? Are the answers accurate?
3. **Audit your Backlinks:** Use a tool like Ahrefs or Semrush to see which sites are linking to you. If a defunct or shady site is the top link, reach out to have it removed or disavowed.
4. **Update your Fast Company or Industry Profiles:** Ensure your bios are consistent across every high-authority platform. Uniformity builds trust.
5. **Commit to the Monthly Cadence:** Set a recurring calendar invite for the first Monday of every month. Do not skip it.

Search reputation is not about hiding the truth. It is about ensuring the truth—the *\*current\** truth—is what people find when they look for you. Don't leave your front door wide open for competitors or trolls to decorate as they please. Take control of your digital presence today.

# Google

Google Search

I'm Feeling Lucky