



MONTHLY

News and Views from the Connecticut Association of Home Inspectors, Inc.

March 2008

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Meeting Dates

- Mar 26** *Inspection Safety* - Daniel Friedman
- Apr 23** *Radon Mitigation Systems* - Jay Dockendorff, RSA Laboratories
- May 23** *Wood Destroying Insects* - John O'Brien, Mastershield

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On-line Reputation Management for Your Small Business

The Web is full of unfiltered conversation, anonymous posting, and little accountability—and that makes it absolutely essential to take a proactive approach to monitoring what people are saying about you!

By Caroline Melberg

On-line reputation management has become the most important aspect of on-line marketing. You should incorporate this into your Internet marketing strategy today by doing the things that I will suggest in this article. If you are already doing these things, let this serve as a gentle reminder.

The fact is, anyone can go online and post anything about you or your company on any forum, blog, or user-generated website. They can even do this anonymously and you'll never know who is trying to ruin your reputation. The statements these anonymous posters make about you or your small business do not even need to be true. A lot of times, one comment can do more damage than you could ever do yourself through lousy customer service.

Some well-known examples of reputation problems online have made the news and are very high profile. Taco Bell experienced the fall-out when one customer in one New York store shot a video using their cell phone of some rats running around the restaurant. Search today online for "Taco Bell + Rats" and you'll get close to half a million results.

Several people who hated AOL bonded together and created the website, "AOLsucks.com" in an effort to disparage the online service provider.

While many people have heard of these high profile examples, they often think that it can't happen to them – "I'm just a small business," they declare, "things like that only happen to major corporations."

It's not true. Let these businesses serve as your example:

- A private physician gave advice that a patient didn't like; the patient, a blogger, posted some negative things about the physician on her blog. Since the physician did not have a website or blog of her own, the only results for that doctor when a potential patient conducted an on-line search were the blogger's negative comments.
- A construction contractor fired an employee and in retaliation the former employee posted some comments on a popular forum online. Even though the company had a website, they had not done a lot of Internet marketing and the negative comments outranked the construction company's own website.
- A small business owner who also performs charity work through a separate organization was attacked through an anonymous blog on a free blog host by

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President's Corner

Bernie Caliendo

You would think with all the foreclosures and homes on the market, that we would be busier than ever. However, it appears that owners are holding out for the best price or just don't want to put money into repairs into a house they want to leave. There are two scenarios here and both do not appear beneficial to our profession.

The first is the foreclosure market or the lack thereof. I have had a few calls for inspections for the buyer, after the fact. They already closed on the house. They bought the foreclosed property "AS IS" and assumed that there was no point to have an inspection because they were not able to negotiate with a bank or mortgage company. As Connecticut law states, banks are not required to provide a "Seller Disclosure Statement" to a buyer. The buyer is left with the feeling they are getting a deal or a steal. Not realizing, if the property was inspected and major deficiencies were discovered, they could walk away from the deal. It is pretty much too late after you own it and the bank has no legal obligation to repair your house. Thus "AS IS"!

The second deals with the somewhat stubbornness of the home owner to reduce the price of their home in a down market. This can vary when dealing with a particular location, but in general it has become a buyer's market if the buyer can get financing. And financing deals with a whole different equation that we will not get into here. All I will say is the financial institutions deserve what they are dealing with now and shame on the borrowers for not reading the fine print!

Here's the good news! Due to CAHI's financial health, we have some great free trips and seminars scheduled in March and April. You should all be taking advantage of your membership! The Factory Mutual bus trip had both dates fill up in 2 ½ days. We have a waiting list on our web site and if you are interested, we need 6 more members to sign up before we can schedule another trip. The list for the April 21st all-day Heating Seminar at ICPA filled up in 3 days. We need another 15 members added onto that waiting list to schedule another seminar. The bus trip and ICPA seminar will award you a total of 13 hours of continuing education if you attend both. What a deal for just 10 bucks.

Now for some even greater news. CAHI's membership is at an all time high! We just welcomed our 192nd member recently and want to thank all of you for your continued support. It really does mean a lot to the organization and Board. If there is anything you want, just let us know. If there is anything you can do for us, just let us know.

Bernie

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a former customer who began posting negative comments about the charitable organization as well as the business owner.

These types of attacks online are becoming more and more prevalent. The Internet gives the illusion that there are no consequences for comments that are not true. Off line, such comments would be considered slander, but online they can be made anonymously and influence potential customers to stay away from your small business based on nothing but hearsay. Once the damage is done, it is extremely hard to reverse.

The good news is you can manage your on-line reputation through an on-line marketing strategy that involves proven techniques that are not expensive or do not take up too much time. You can do it yourself or hire an Internet marketing consultant to do it for you. Either way, on-line reputation management is an absolute must for every small business owner, even if you do not have a website or do any business online.

A good blog—the essential ORM tool

Making sure your web site has a good blog is an especially important component of online reputation management.

Earlier this year, leading search engine marketer Jennifer Laycock found a need for online reputation management when she received a threatening letter from the National Pork Board of America for an \$8 T-shirt she was selling that sported the

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phrase, "The Other White Milk."

Did she spill tears over pork's attack? Did she slash someone's tires in retaliation? Did she threaten to milk the Board's corporate assets if they didn't about-face, or have her oversized boyfriend, "Porky the Milkman," pay her legal bullies a visit and "deflate their egos?" No. She did none of that.

Instead, Laycock took the bull by the horns and went social. She blogged about it. A few days later, she received a letter of apology from the Pork Board's CEO and a hand full of donations for her charity, Mother's Milk Bank of Ohio. What changed?

Nothing really. Except that other bloggers blogged about it and thousands of people bookmarked her blog post and shared it with their friends. And the Pork Board received thousands of e-mails complaining that Pork enthusiasts don't give a rat's behind about breastfeeding mothers. All of a sudden, the Pork Board was in need of a little reputation management themselves.

In this day and age, news travels faster than the speed of light. Bad news even faster. And if it's a good rumor, especially untrue, then you can expect light to look like it's standing still.

Online reputation management begins before you need it.

Laycock's example is just one. It could have been uglier, and there are many other instances I could cite where it *has* gotten uglier. What happens if a former business partner or employee gets mad enough to post negative comments about you online? Sure, you could sue, but even if a lawsuit has grounds and you win, those comments will still be there for the whole world to see. And they'll be there for a long time unless you have a strategy to push them down in the search engine rankings. That's why every business owner needs to think about online reputation management before it's necessary. But what ORM tools, specifically, do you need?

Adding to the Arsenal

Although a blog is one of the most important tools for online reputation management, it's not the only one. You also need a website to put the blog on, of course, and your website needs to be search engine optimized – for your name, for your company name, and for any special branding that you've done for the business and your products. It also needs to be optimized with particular keywords related to your niche.

After an optimized website and a blog, online reputation management needs to be carried out using other important tools, such as:

- **Articles** – Syndicate your articles online. Distribute them to article directories and promote them just as you would your website, creating valuable links for your name or company online.
- **Press Releases** – Yes, press releases are a very important reputation management tool. Make sure you write and distribute a press release about you or your company at least three or four times a year.
- **Social Bookmarking** – Include bookmarking icons on every web page of your website and your blog. Encourage your friends and readers to bookmark your items as they will appear in search results and create links for your site as they gain popularity.
- **Networking** – Online networking is perhaps one of the most important reputation management tools in every businesswoman's arsenal. Join a few networking sites like LinkedIn and Facebook. Make friends – lots of them. That way, if you need help with anything – especially counteracting an attack of negative publicity online - then you can always call on your network.
- **Directories** – Use directories to boost your online reputation. There are directories for everything, including blogs, websites, newsletters, articles, and even directories of directories.
- **Forums** – Every time you post a comment in a forum, you are building your online reputation. Make it count. Use signature links and maintain a positive relationship with as many people as you can meet there.

Online reputation management is a zero sum game. You must ensure that there are more positive comments about you online than negative. The way you do that is to start right now. Comment on other people's blogs. Stay active in a few forums. Post to your blog every day. Update your website regularly. Write articles and distribute them often.

Even if you do all of this, there is no guarantee that a negative comment can't rise to the top of the search engines. But for every positive comment you have that

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To the members of CAHI,

Directors are assigned months to provide articles for this newsletter, so every once in awhile we have to come up with a subject that relates to what we do as inspectors. This has nothing to do with inspecting, but everything to do with CAHI, the subject for me is easy, outlining some of what I do as your treasurer. For those of you that don't know, I am the only founding member left from the original Board of directors. I offered to be treasurer at the meeting that formed CAHI and have been in the position ever since. I tried to give it to someone else, it didn't happen, but it must at some point in time be handed off to someone, someone willing to give a lot of time and energy to the job.

When I started I had a very limited experience with bookkeeping, just having taken care of my own finances, personal and business. Since then I have learned quite a bit. At first the books were kept in a hand written journal, today everything is electronic. There is one account, all funds are deposited here, and any money that leaves is recorded. Sounds simple, it is not, but it is accurate. Whoever takes over for me will inherit a treasury that has been in the black since day one, this organization has been able to provide excellent benefits over the years, predominately in the form of education. There have been several times when we said "no" to projects because they were not in the best interest of the whole group, or just not cost effective. Because of prudent cost management our treasury is very healthy. This is by no means all my doing, although I have pulled on the reins on occasion. The system used for CAHI is that any expense other than day to day operating is presented at a board meeting, either physically or electronically, voted on, recorded, and then implemented. All seminars are given a maximum amount of funds to facilitate, we do the math and allow a cushion. Because of this system we never go over.

CAHI does not operate on a budget system. We can't. We never know what will come our way in the form of education expenses. Sure, we can budget how much we spend for meeting halls. That is pretty consistent. Telephone, web expenses, and the like are usually predictable, but nothing else is. The product that we provide is education, and the cost changes with every presentation.

One reason for me providing this information is to solicit the membership for a replacement. I am willing to stay on during the transition, but this offer is not going to be in place forever, or until someone steps up, because that may not happen. In the event that none of you are willing, or feel that you are able to take over, you may have to pay someone.

Another reason is the imminent increase in dues. The financial logic for this should be explained by me. Every year for the last 5 years the balance at the end of the year has been consistent, except at the end of 2007. We found the need during the year to take money from savings to balance out the income and expenses. If we are to stay solvent and continue to provide the level of education that we do, it is time to increase our income. Our income comes from you, our membership, in the form of dues.

The board voted at our first meeting of 2008 to increase the dues, across the board by \$24.00. This is not an arbitrary number. It is what we project is needed to replenish, over time, what was used from savings and to offset increases in operating expenses. Every year our expenses creep up. For example, we negotiate with the Holiday Inn every August for the upcoming year for the monthly seminars. We were at \$150.00 when we first started, with coffee included. Now, due to increases on their end over time, we are at \$190.00 and are charged for refills of coffee during meetings. I know it seems petty but this is just an example. This also brings to light some of the hundreds of details that are present in the life of the Board.

The increase is not for us, we are not compensated. It is needed, otherwise we wouldn't consider it. We pay our dues, same as you.

Some of the benefits of membership are outlined in the Presidents corner. We shouldn't have to convince you about its worth, you should already be aware of what you get.

Just for a moment think about what has to happen to facilitate a monthly meeting: You already know that the room will be available, as explained. I meet with Kristin at the Holiday Inn, we go over what days we need the room, and agree on the money part, we sign a contract, so that both parties have this in writing. Someone else may negotiate for Holiday Inn next year and they have a place to start. Separate negotiations are done during the year for special seminars. As you know, not all are at the Holiday Inn.

There is an education committee. They solicit speakers. Some speakers are paid, some are paid a lot, some are free except for dinner. All speakers are interviewed. We limit the subject matter to inspection related topics. We always try to screen out people that have something to sell as well as inform. We just want the information. The speaker must provide a Bio and the information is verified.

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The speaker must be approved by the State of CT. That process is we provide their Bio, the subject material, the time and place to the State. A board member must do this and get the approval in writing.

The room needs to be set up. A speaker may need a laptop for power point, a projector, the screen and the sound system. The only item that stays at the Holiday Inn is the screen. They let us store it there so that they can use it if they need it. Everything else is brought by the directors. Most of the equipment is stored in a storage bin in Wallingford. Someone has to stop and pick up what is needed.

Attendance, starting in 2008 we have to report our attendance to a central reporting center, at the next meeting the new required certificates will be used. We have always provided certificates so that you had proof of attendance. It will still be up to you to keep your own records. We will have a duplicate to verify that you attended in the event that you are audited. Keeping a record of your membership, with the dozens of changes during the year, is a challenge. We have four lists of members, the web site, the treasurer, the attendance committee, and the newsletter. We have other lists that we maintain for non-members, so we can offer, for a fee, some of our seminars.

When the meeting is over and you go home, the directors pick up the equipment and return it to where it came from. I settle with the speaker when needed. The next day I need to take care of any money that was collected, either from guests, members renewing, new members joining,

fees for upcoming events, and make sure that everyone gets credit for their money.

When someone new joins, I log in their information on my list, enter them onto the web site, inform the President by email, cc to the attendance committee, the newsletter, and the secretary. The secretary sends out the proper documents to new members such as the certificate, by-laws, logo slick, and a welcome letter.

The meetings of the Board of Directors take up a lot of time during the year, but all of the other details to run this organization probably take more. The by-laws took two years of special meetings, other than regular board meetings. After we drafted them we sent them to a lawyer for editing. When they came back, we had two more special meetings before the final draft was presented to the membership.

All of the forms that we use during the year were designed by a board member. All of the mailings that go out are done by the board. Yep, we stuff envelopes too. If you really want an earful of just what the Board of Directors does, get into a conversation with Bernie Caliendo, because I have barely scratched the surface.

Please consider the amount of work that is done on your behalf while considering what you get for your membership dues.

Faternally,

Pete Petrino, Treasurer, CAH

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ranks well for your reputation management keywords, it is that much more difficult for someone else to come along and damage your reputation. Always maintain the high road, don't stoop to a negative level yourself. Follow these suggestions, and you'll be well on your way to protecting your reputation – and that of your company – online and offline.

About the Author:



Entrepreneur and outdoor photography adventurer Caroline Melberg is President and CEO of Small Business Mavericks (www.smallbusinessmavericks.com), a division of Melberg Marketing. She's a leading expert on Internet Marketing for small businesses. Her small business columns are syndicated online, and she publishes the award-winning weekly eZine, "Small Business Maverick Secrets."

Massachusetts Home Inspection License

NEW requirements and changes.

Newly effective 266 CMR 2.00, 3.00, 4.00, 5.00, 5.00, 8.00, 9.00 and 10.00

Policy #08-01

Enacted February 4, 2008

Purpose:

New regulations governing the practice of the profession of Home Inspecting took effect on January 25, 2008. The purpose of this bulletin is to offer guidance to Home Inspectors and their staff on the implementation of the new policy.

In regulations. Order to allow a reasonable time for Licensed Home Inspectors to come into compliance with the new regulations. The board will refrain from taking enforcement actions for violations of the new regulations (where the regulations impose a higher standard) until May 31, 2008.

Discussion:

The Board, by unanimous vote, has decided to phase in the regulations.

The Board will fully enforce the new regulations on June 1, 2008. This policy will allow applicants to utilize the existing regulations until June 1, 2008. Inspectors are encouraged to use the new Standards of Practice prior to the June 1, 2008. Should any inspector decide to take advantage of this option they should understand that if a Board complaint is filed against them the complaint will be adjudicated by the Board under the new Standards of Practice. All complaints regarding home inspections completed on and/or after June 1, 2008 will be processed and adjudicated in accordance with the new regulations.

Until May 31, 2008, all applications for Home Inspector or Associate Home Inspector Licensure will be processed under the standards set forth in the regulations that were effective until January 25, 2008.

Discussion:

At the January 30, 2008, Board meeting the Board voted to direct its staff to process application using the standards that existed until January 25, 2008 until May 31, 2008.

Home Inspectors are required to complete 12 Credit Hours of Continuing Education by May 31, 2008.

Discussion:

At the January 30, 2008, Board meeting the Board voted that the provision of the new regulations reducing the number of hours of continuing education required from twenty-four (24) to twelve (12) will take effect immediately. In the interest of fairness, the Board will not enforce the provision requiring four (4) credit hours on the standards of practice and one (1) on ethics until the renewal period that takes effect on June 1, 2008. Consequently, all licensees must have completed four (4) credit hours dedicated to the 266 CMR standards of practice and one (1) credit hour dedicated to professional ethics between May 31, 2008 and May 31, 2010 in order to meet the renewal requirements set forth in 266 CMR 5.01.

REGISTRATION FORM

CTAMB Annual Golf Outing June 19, 2008

Team Contact: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ email _____

GOLFERS' NAMES

1) _____ 2) _____

3) _____ 4) _____

\$169.00 per member / \$180.00 per non-member

\$45.00 - Dinner only

\$750.00 - Special company sponsored foursome that includes a tee sponsor sign. (This is a savings of \$75.00)

Amount Enclosed \$ _____ check/credit card, Visa__ M/C__, AMEX ____

Credit Card Number _____ Exp. Date _____

Billing Address _____

Name on Card _____

Signature _____ Date _____

The heating system has been converted to gas, the old oil tank is gone, but the filler is still intact, ALWAYS CALL IT OUT, AND MAKE THEM REMOVE IT.

By John Valenti

A fuel oil deliveryman mistakenly pumped 200 gallons of home heating oil into the basement of a Bellmore home Monday, causing a nightmare mess that forced the evacuation of the homeowners -- launching an investigation by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

The owners of the home on Regina Avenue in Bellmore, identified by officials as Gregory and Angela Kramer, could not be reached for comment.

But Michael Pantony, president of Affordable Fuels of 2061 Bellmore Ave., Bellmore, said the incident was "very traumatic" for the homeowner and said: "We truly regret that this occurred." As Pantony said Tuesday: "I have tried to put myself in their place. I'm sure it was a devastating occurrence . . . It's very traumatic. I want to rectify the situation as soon as possible."

The incident occurred late Monday afternoon when a deliveryman apparently mistakenly delivered the fuel at an incorrect address. Compounding the situation, state DEC Region 1 spokeswoman Aphrodite Montalvo said, was that though the fuel tank had been removed from the Bellmore home, the fill pipe was still in place. Montalvo said Nassau County fire code requires the pipe be removed with the tank. The Nassau County Department of Health also requires that the homeowner send notification that the tank has been removed.

It is not clear at this time, Montalvo said, if the Department of Health was notified, but officials are certain, she said, the fill pipe was not removed as required by code. "The situation is under investigation," Montalvo said.

Pantony, the fuel oil company president, said he learned of the incident late Monday afternoon and said company officials immediately contacted the DEC, as well as the company insurance carrier. A remediation company was hired to clean up the mess -- and is doing so under the supervision of the DEC, which sent a "Spills Response Unit" to the scene.

Arrangements were made to send the homeowners to an area hotel, officials said. It is unclear how long the remediation and clean up will take to finish, Montalvo said. Meanwhile, Pantony said company officials were conducting their own investigation -- trying to determine what caused the delivery mix-up.

He said he was sympathetic to the homeowners and went to the site Monday to meet with them. "I just wanted to assure them," he said, "we are doing everything possible."

john.valenti@newsday.com

Submitted by Pete Petrino

ICE FORMATION IN CORE GAPS OF TEXTURE 1-11 SIDING

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APA TECHNICAL TOPICS

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apawood.org

Form No. TT-099A
January 2008

From time to time a question has been raised as to the possible deleterious effects that might result from water freezing in exposed core gaps of Texture 1-11 plywood used as siding. Although freeze-thaw exposures were included in the studies of prototype panels conducted in 1953, additional examination of freezing water exposures was undertaken in 1972 by APA to better answer the question.

Study Procedure

Two series of five Douglas-fir Texture 1-11 specimens, 8 inches by 10 inches in size and manufactured with grooves 4 inches on center were processed. Specimens were selected to include core gaps ranging from 5/16-inch to 7/8-inch wide. In order to retain water in the openings, each gap was sealed at one end with a synthetic wood patching material.

The first series of five specimens was subjected to a water soaking cycle consisting of immersion in water in a pressure vessel in which a vacuum of 15 inches of mercury was drawn for 30 minutes. The specimens continued to soak for 4-1/2 hours at atmospheric pressure.

The second series of five specimens was vacuum-soaked for 4 hours, followed by 4 hours of water immersion with water pressure of 65 to 70 psi.

After removal from the pressure vessel, all specimens were immersed in a water tank to fill the core gaps and then placed in a freezing chamber at about minus 4 °F temperature for 24 hours. Next, the specimens were removed from the freezing cabinet and thawed overnight. The gap-filling immersion and freezing cycle was then repeated several times.

Tests Results

In the first test series exposed to the milder vacuum soaking, it was impossible to retain liquid water in the core gaps for the freeze cycle. The water rapidly diffused into the wood, leaving the gap open at time of freezing. Ten cycles of freeze-thaw showed no adverse effects on the panel or its glue-line.

The second series of five specimens that were completely saturated in the severe and extended vacuum-pressure soaking cycle permitted filling of the capped core gaps when the specimens were oriented with the gap vertical. The ice that formed in the gaps expanded slightly at the gap end or opening at each freeze cycle, but did not visibly distort the face veneer along its length. There was no evidence of delamination, veneer splitting or other degradation in any of the specimens.

Conclusions

Unless a Texture 1-11 panel is thoroughly saturated under vacuum-pressure condition, it is virtually impossible to accumulate enough water in core gaps to produce ice plugs. Even when completely saturated, core gaps would need to be sealed at one end and oriented vertically to retain water.

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Regardless of the orientation of the panel on a wall, water normally would drain from the core gaps.

Should ice formation be rapid and tend to fill or seal the gaps in any way, resultant ice expansion should not adversely affect the panel or its glue bond. The inherent resiliency of wood, particularly softwoods, easily accommodates the ice expansion without harm.

Technical Services Division

DISCLAIMER

The information contained herein is based on APA – The Engineered Wood Association’s continuing programs of laboratory testing, product research, and comprehensive field experience. Neither APA nor its members make any warranty, expressed or implied, or assume any legal liability or responsibility for the use, application of, and/or reference to opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations included in this publication. Consult your local jurisdiction or design professional to assure compliance with code, construction, and performance requirements. Because APA has no control over quality of workmanship or the conditions under which engineered wood products are used, it cannot accept responsibility of product performance or designs as actually constructed.

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The Licensing Board meetings are held at 9:30 am,
Department of Consumer Protection, Room 117, 165
Capitol Avenue, Hartford.

The public is always welcome.

E-mail Bernie Caliendo for the latest meeting schedule
at bsurehomeinspect@juno.com