

Toy or Tool? Google Alerts

Are your alerts set for FYI or TMI?

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What is it? Long before we had computers we had something called a “clipping service.” Companies would comb newspapers and magazines for mentions of a business and send the client binders full of “clips.” Professionals and companies could keep track of their public reputations and what was being said about them in mass media. Fast-forward to the Google era... A [Google Alert](#) is a notice that comes directly to your email inbox whenever a new mention of your keyword(s) appears on the web. Whether you’re a solopreneur or corporation, you must have a Google Alert set up for your name, your company’s name, and possibly your main competitors’ names. You can select how often you want to receive alerts and what combination of keywords you want included.

What’s the value? First, Google Alerts enable you to view (and respond to) your online reputation. You can monitor what is being said about your business, easily find where you have been mentioned in media, and alerted if someone wrote a review of your product or service. You can also stay abreast of industry trends and competitors’ activity. The alert is coming to you, saving you time searching daily for mentions. In short, it’s a clipping and research service without the scissors. When you are alerted to positive mentions, you can leverage them immediately in social media, on your website, and via e-newsletters to customers and prospects.

What’s the downside? As with any technology-powered search, you may need to sift through the alerts you receive to eliminate irrelevant mentions. For example, we have one client (a real estate company) whose name is the same as that of a race horse. Although I enjoy seeing how the able steed is doing, only a percentage of the mentions we get are for the property.

Sifting between essential and actionable information and interesting tidbits can also be a challenge for some business people, who may feel a need to respond to everything they receive. The solution is to focus on those keywords that are truly relevant and business critical, set aside a particular time each day to review your Alerts, and not freak out at every mediocre mention you receive. Human intelligence, assisted by tools like Google Alert is a good combination in this case.

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