

Chapter

09

Reputation Management and Online Reviews



Pre-Launch Phase – Strategic Reputation Planning

Before “Riyadh Residential Front” was officially announced, those in charge of it from the real estate developer, the digital marketing team, and customer service met and began applying the planning function that we have learned. They realized that reputation is not built through subsequent reactions; rather, it is built through prior decisions.

First, they identified the targeted reputation: they wanted the project’s name to be associated in the minds of the public with three words: “transparency, professionalism, commitment.” They translated this into specific behavioral promises: that all information related to prices, areas, finishing specifications, additional fees, the delivery schedule, and cancellation terms would be made available clearly, without concealment or deception.

Second, they studied the competitive environment by analyzing electronic ratings of previous projects in the same area, and they found that the three most frequently repeated complaints were: “price ambiguity even after inquiry,” “delay in responding to inquiries for days,” and “the displayed images differ from reality upon inspection.” Based on this, they established an internal policy: they would not publish any image of a unit unless it exactly matched what would be delivered, they would provide an interactive price schedule that would be updated automatically, and they would obligate the response team to reply within a maximum of 4 hours.

Third, they designed prior scenarios for dealing with different ratings. Imagine, my dear students, that they sat down and wrote dozens of model responses: how would they respond to a positive rating? How would they respond to a negative rating containing exaggeration? How would they respond to a sharply emotional rating? And how would they respond to a complex technical inquiry? They also established escalation lines: if a rating was received concerning a structural defect or safety issue, it would be transferred immediately to the engineering management without passing through the administrative hierarchy. If an accusation of fraud or deliberate deception was received, it would be referred to the legal advisor within one hour.

Organizing – Building the Digital Reputation Cell

After the launch of the website and the official accounts of “Riyadh Residential Front,” the first inquiries and ratings began to arrive. Here, those in charge applied the organizing function. They did not leave matters to chance or to individual effort; rather, they formed a mini-structure that they called the “digital reputation cell,” within which responsibilities were distributed precisely.

There was a monitor responsible for scanning the digital platforms every morning, in the middle of the day, and at its end: Google Maps, the official website, the X platform (formerly Twitter), Instagram, LinkedIn, and any real estate forum or group on WhatsApp or Telegram in which the project’s name appeared. The monitor used simple tools such as alerts and keyword search, and then recorded every rating in a unified electronic table.

There was also an analyst who read every rating carefully and classified it according to the types that we have learned: was it a detailed positive rating or a brief one? Was it a negative emotional rating or a negative objective one? Was it a neutral inquiry-based rating or a comparison with another project? Was it related to the digital experience (ease of the website, loading speed), to after-sales service, or to price and perceived value? Then, he extracted the recurring keywords such as “delay,” “clarity,” “real image,” and “respectful employee,” and submitted a weekly report.

There was also a response writer whose task was to draft the official replies according to the templates that had been prepared in the planning stage, but with the addition of a personal touch for each case. He had received special training on avoiding defensive or aggressive language, and on using the pronouns “we” and “the project” instead of “the company” in order to impart a human character. There was also an improvement coordinator who linked the summary of the analysis to the operational departments: if the ratings revealed weakness in the speed of telephone response, he would go to the customer service manager. If they indicated a contradiction in the information between the website and one of the third-party platforms, he would go to the digital content team.

Directing – Instilling the Culture of Reputation in Team Behavior

As the first weeks passed, those in charge of “Riyadh Residential Front” noticed that some of the responses issued by the team had begun to vary in tone: one employee responded to a negative rating with the phrase, “This is not true at all,” while another responded with the phrase, “We are sorry that you felt that way; let us verify.” Here, the directing function intervened. A two-day internal workshop was held, during which everyone dealing with ratings was trained on the following principles:

First: separate the content from the tone; the customer may be angry or mistaken in some details, but there is often a valid core in the complaint that deserves to be addressed.

Second: do not deny the customer’s experience; instead of saying, “This did not happen,” say, “We did not detect this case in our records, but we take your remark seriously and will investigate it.”

Third: show respect even in a negative response; always begin by thanking the owner of the rating for his time, then acknowledge his feelings, and then move to the solution.

Fourth: move the conversation to a private channel when necessary, especially if the rating includes personal information or serious accusations, but do not conceal the public response entirely; leave a public trace showing that you have responded.

The team was also trained on responding to sharply emotional ratings, such as a rating whose text read: “Riyadh Front is the worst project I have seen in my life; it is all lies and illusory promises.” The employee learned to write a response such as: “We are deeply sorry that this was the impression that reached you, and we thank you for your candor. This is not what we aspire to. We kindly ask you to share the details privately so that we may correct the course and earn your trust.” This type of response, my dear students, transforms criticism that may seem destructive into an opportunity to demonstrate maturity and a genuine desire for improvement.

Control – Measurement, Evaluation, and Correction

After three months had passed since the full digital launch of “Riyadh Residential Front,” those in charge applied the control function in a systematic manner. They collected quantitative and qualitative indicators:

Quantitatively: the average rating on Google Maps reached 4.2 out of 5, and on the specialized real estate platform, 4.0 out of 5. The number of positive ratings was 87, negative ratings 23, neutral ratings 40, and inquiry-based ratings 55. The average response time reached 3.2 hours (lower than the target of 4 hours).

Qualitatively: keyword analysis showed that the most frequently recurring terms in the positive ratings were “price clarity,” “real image,” and “speed of response.” In the negative ratings, they were “delay in follow-up after contracting” and “transfer between employees.”

Here, they noticed an important deviation: the negative ratings were not related to the quality of the product itself (finishing specifications, location, areas), but rather to the administrative processes after contracting. Customers complained that after paying the first installment, they found it difficult to reach the same employee with whom they had dealt, or were compelled to explain their file several times. This discovery would not have been achieved without continuous control.

Immediately, those in charge took corrective action: they redesigned the customer’s digital journey so that one “digital account manager” would be assigned to each customer from the first inquiry until the delivery of the unit and beyond. They also created an internal database that enabled any employee responding to the customer to review the complete history of previous interaction. One month after this correction, the negative ratings related to follow-up decreased by 70%.

Dealing with Electronic Ratings

Let us now move to live applied examples drawn from the ratings of “Riyadh Residential Front” in order to see how each type was handled in accordance with what we have learned.

The first model: a positive rating whose text read:

“I compared more than one project in North Riyadh, and Riyadh Front was the clearest in prices and finishing specifications. They even published a comparison table between the finishing options and the cost of each option. When I visited the displayed model, I found it to be exactly identical to the images. I thank the marketing team for their honesty.”

Here, the team’s response was:

“Thank you very much for this testimonial; it pleases us and confirms that transparency is one of our principles. We will convey your remark to the marketing team, and we hope that your unit will be a lasting source of comfort. Riyadh Front Team.”

Notice how the response reinforced the value by which the project wants to be known (transparency), thanked the owner of the rating in a personal manner, and added a future dimension.

Dealing with Electronic Ratings

The second model: a negative rating whose text read:

“The website is easy to use, but when I booked an appointment for inspection, the appointment was confirmed two days earlier and then they suddenly cancelled it on the grounds of congestion, and rescheduled it a week later. This is unprofessional.”

Here, the team did not deny the incident; rather, it responded:

“We thank you for informing us of this, and we apologize for any inconvenience caused by the cancellation of the appointment. We reviewed the booking records and found that there was an error in the system that caused bookings to be duplicated at the same time. We have corrected the defect, and we would be pleased to allocate an appointment for you outside the regular schedule at any time that suits you, while offering a free consultation on real estate financing options as a symbolic compensation. We hope that you will give us an opportunity to make up for the poor experience.”

This response, my dear students, acknowledged the error, clarified the reason, offered a tangible solution, and transformed a negative rating into an opportunity to build greater trust.

Dealing with Electronic Ratings

The third model: a sharply emotional rating whose text read:

“Riyadh Front are fraudsters. They said delivery would be within 6 months, and 8 months have passed and nothing. They are all liars. Do not deal with them.”

Here, the team’s response was:

“We feel profound regret for any delay you have experienced, and we respect your anger because it stems from a project you had looked forward to. Please contact us privately with your booking number or contract number so that we may examine your case accurately. If it is established that there is a delay beyond the agreed controls, we will provide you with a transparent report on its causes and the compensation due under the contract. We value your trust and strive to deserve it.”

Notice: they did not respond with counter-emotion, nor did they accuse the customer of lying; rather, they showed understanding of the feelings, opened a private channel, and mentioned a clear mechanism (the contract, compensation). It later became clear that this customer had purchased a unit in the first construction phase, and delivery had been delayed because of a crisis in global supply chains. However, the team contacted him, provided him with a monthly progress report, and offered him two options: monetary compensation or a free upgrade of the finishing materials. After the resolution, the customer published a new rating:

“I revised my opinion of Riyadh Front. They were delayed, but they compensated me transparently. I recommend dealing with them.”

Dealing with Electronic Ratings

The fourth model: a neutral inquiry-based rating whose text read:

“I want to know the annual maintenance fees precisely, and whether there are any additional fees upon delivery other than those mentioned in the unit card? I would appreciate a clear response.”

Here, the team saw an opportunity to improve transparency, and so it wrote a long but organized response:

“Thank you for your important question. The annual maintenance fees are 2% of the value of the unit, and they include: (1, 2, 3, 4). The only exceptions are: (1, 2). As for the additional fees upon delivery: there is a real estate registration fee of 0.5%, and a utilities connection fee of 1%. We have now also added a detailed table on the page of each unit entitled ‘Full Fee Disclosure,’ and we have attached a calculator model that allows you to enter the value of the unit and see all fees before purchase. Thank you for pushing us toward greater clarity.”

This response transformed a question that might have been a latent complaint into a lasting improvement measure.

Dealing with Electronic Ratings

The fifth model: a comparative rating whose text read:

“Riyadh Front is better than Al-Nakhlah Project in terms of prices, but Al-Nakhlah Project is faster in responding to inquiries.”

Here, the team responded:

“Thank you for the objective comparison, as it helps us improve. Regarding response speed, last week we increased the evening response team, and the average response time has become less than two hours. We hope that you will try contacting us again, and we would be pleased to receive any additional remark. We also take pride in the fact that the prices were in your favor, as this is part of our value.”

Notice how they did not attack the competitor; rather, they acknowledged the existence of a gap and announced an improvement.

Turning Ratings into Improvement Decisions

Those in charge of “Riyadh Residential Front” were not content with elegant responses alone; rather, they transformed what they learned from the ratings into fundamental changes in the project. I will give you three examples:

The first case: in the inquiry-based ratings, questions repeatedly appeared concerning the “conditions for refunding the first installment in the event of reservation cancellation.” The team noticed that these questions were being received at a rate of ten times per week. Accordingly, they decided to add an independent page entitled “Contractual Transparency” containing the cancellation conditions in clear bullet points, together with a numerical example. After one month, these inquiries decreased almost to zero.

The second case: in the keyword analysis, the team noticed the appearance of the phrase “the images are not clear” in 12 different ratings, despite the fact that the images were high-resolution. Upon verification, it became clear that the problem was not in the resolution of the images, but rather in the absence of images for certain angles (such as the interior façade of the kitchen, or the service storage room). They therefore immediately photographed 50 additional angles for each unit model, and added a “super zoom” feature that allowed the texture of the wood and marble to be seen. They then responded to every previous rating that had referred to this problem by informing its owners of the update, which transformed some of them into ambassadors.

The third case: a negative rating appeared stating:

“Upon delivery of the unit, I found that the electrical socket in the bedroom was not working; it took them two weeks to fix it.”

This was an individual rating, but the team viewed it as an indicator of a defect in the delivery process. They therefore amended the delivery procedures: they required the supervising engineer to conduct a complete inspection of the electricity and plumbing in front of the customer, and to sign a quality-control report before handing over the keys. They then published this new procedure on the website, which created an impression of professionalism. Complaints regarding finishing defects after delivery consequently decreased by 85%.

Managing a Real Crisis – A Complete Scenario

Let us move to a critical moment. On one Thursday, a rating appeared on Google Maps bearing a provocative title: “Warning: Riyadh Front is selling units on land subject to a judicial dispute,” and the rating was long and detailed, citing deed numbers and legal references. Within 12 hours, the rating had gained more than 300 interactions, and it began to spread in real estate WhatsApp groups, and was picked up by some small accounts specializing in real estate news. The reputation began to waver. Here, those in charge of “Riyadh Residential Front” implemented the crisis management plan that they had prepared in advance, which included five sequential steps:

Step One – Early Monitoring and Confirmation:

The team detected the rating within two hours of its publication. They did not respond immediately; rather, they raised an internal alert. The improvement coordinator contacted the legal department and the engineering office.

Step Two – Verification of the Facts:

Within 6 hours, the legal department confirmed, after reviewing the title deeds and court records, that the land was owned by the developer under registered contracts, and that the lawsuit referred to in the rating was a lawsuit by an old neighbor regarding a boundary line between plots of land and not concerning the ownership of the project itself, and that a final judgment had been issued rejecting it. A clear legal brief for customers was prepared.

Managing a Real Crisis – A Complete Scenario

Step Three – Defining the Core Message and Choosing the Channels:

The team decided not to respond to the original rating in an emotional or defensive manner; rather, it decided to issue a brief official statement through all official channels (the website, Twitter, LinkedIn), and to post a professional reply on the rating itself. The statement was formulated as follows:

“We thank whoever referred to this matter, as it gives us the opportunity to clarify the truth. We confirm that all lands of Riyadh Residential Front Project are owned under title deeds officially registered with the notary public, and there is no judicial dispute affecting the ownership of any unit. The lawsuit referred to concerns the boundaries of adjacent land and ended with a final and conclusive judicial ruling in our favor. Any customer may request to review the deeds at the sales office. We take any undocumented allegation seriously, and we will take legal action against anyone who promotes misleading information with the intention of causing harm.”

Step Four – Internal Coordination and Consistent Response:

All customer service and sales employees were instructed to use the same text if asked about the matter, without adding unnecessary details or entering into argument. One person was also assigned responsibility for responding to all comments received on the statement, in order to preserve consistency of tone.

Step Five – Follow-Up and De-escalation of the Crisis:

After 48 hours, real estate influencers and analysts concerned with transparency began publishing clarifications supporting the developer. A number of current customers also published images of the title deeds they had received with their units, in support of the project. The original rating declined to the bottom of the list of ratings as a result of the new positive ratings, and the average rating returned to 4.3 out of 5 within a week. More importantly, the project gained an additional reputation for being transparent and swift in confronting crises.

From the Satisfied Customer to the Digital Ambassador

With the reputation of “Riyadh Residential Front” becoming stable and public trust rising, those in charge began to think about how to transform satisfied customers into digital ambassadors without resorting to direct financial incentives that might create inauthentic ratings. They therefore devised an informal program that they called “Riyadh Front Neighbors.”

The idea was simple: 45 days after the delivery of the unit, the after-sales service team would contact the customer to ask about his experience, thank him for his trust, and then invite him to share his story if he was satisfied, without any obligation or compensation, with a promise to repost his content (a photo, a short video, or a written testimonial) on the project’s official pages while commending him. They also allocated a section on the website entitled “Real Experiences” that displayed these testimonials without editing.

The result was astonishing: within six months, more than 100 customers published spontaneous content, among them 12 customers who had published negative ratings in the past and then reversed their position after their problems had been addressed. One of these customers published a video clip in which he said:

“Honestly, Riyadh Front changed my opinion. I had a complaint at the time of delivery; they handled it seriously and compensated me. Now I recommend them to all my friends.”

This type of organic endorsement, my dear students, is priceless, because it stems from a real experience and flows without affectation.

Lessons Learned

At the conclusion of this applied example, we may derive a set of lessons that confirm the validity of the theories we have learned:

The first lesson: digital reputation is the cumulative product of every digital interaction. Every response, every image, every delay in response, and every change in any policy leaves an impact in the memory of the market. The project “Riyadh Residential Front” succeeded because it managed these small details with care.

The second lesson: negative ratings, if handled properly, are transformed from a threat into an opportunity. The project did not conceal or delete the negative ratings (which is a common mistake); rather, it used them to discover the gaps between its promises and its performance, and then closed those gaps publicly, which increased its credibility.

The third lesson: the organization of reputation management must be multifunctional. The digital reputation cell in “Riyadh Residential Front” was not merely a marketing team; rather, it was a bridge between marketing, customer service, legal affairs, engineering, and senior management. When the complaint about maintenance delay was repeated, the team did not merely respond; rather, it went to the operations management and changed the procedure.

The fourth lesson: automation and modern technologies are supportive tools, but they do not eliminate the need for human judgment. The project used simple monitoring and analysis tools, but the decisive decisions—especially in crises and emotional responses—were made by a trained and qualified human being.

The fifth lesson: the true digital ambassador is built, not bought. The program “Riyadh Front Neighbors” did not pay a single riyal to customers, but it granted them appreciation and respect, and made their positive experience visible to others; this was more powerful than any advertisement.



Thank You