

Looking back to look forward

By  Regine le Roux

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As a businessowner whose company vision is to be Africa's reputation research company of choice to build sustainable businesses, it is important to be up to date with what is happening on our continent. Trade is booming across Africa. Technically, it should be the easiest opportunity for South African companies to expand into. However, African countries are not necessarily working and trading with each other. Even though we are one continent, it is often more expensive to do business across African borders than across the oceans. We need to make it far easier to do business with each other.



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Research will be key for successful growth and expansion for organisations across the continent. At Reputation Matters, we have pinpointed three key research aspects to keep in mind for 2020:

1. **Relationship building:** With the expansion of many businesses further into Africa, building relationships with key stakeholders, including local businesses, communities and employees, are pivotal. There are many different cultural, communication and custom nuances to be cognisant of. We're definitely seeing an increase in feasibility and risk assessment surveys.
2. **Quantification of relationships:** Annually we combine all the Repudometer® results of the studies conducted during the year and compare it to the previous year. Based on the eight reputation research projects that we conducted in 2019*, the overall reputation research score is 81%, a whopping 8% increase from 2018's 73%. The overall benchmark, and what is considered a healthy reputation, is 76.6%. We do still find that the companies who are most in need of managing their reputation tend to be in denial and tend to realise much too late that a crisis scenario could have been avoided.

The percentage rating of an organisation's reputation proves the extent to which people want to do business with an organisation and how much they trust their offering. Quantification gives companies bragging rights. I believe that sharing your reputation score will become best practice and a requirement when pitching for work. Every business will know what their Repudometer® score is.

This year-on-year comparison shows that the biggest positive jumps were Operational Capability (having the right tools and training on how to do things right), which was up by 10.7%, and Internal Dialogue with employees, which saw an increase of 10.1%. This shows that improved internal communication has a positive impact on operations and the delivery of products and services.

We are definitely anticipating an increase in organisational climate surveys in 2020.

3. **Recommendations:** Research is not about 'data dumping'. I think many companies are reluctant to invest in research because of a 'once bitten, twice shy' scenario. They invested in research and were presented with a plethora of graphs but no real action plan of what to do next.

This is why I think many companies decide to conduct the research themselves. We are seeing an increase in the number of companies conducting their own research in the hope to save costs. This is great, as companies are realising the value of getting more insights into their stakeholders. However, avoid falling into the following traps:

- Being stuck with a lot of data that you don't know how to analyse. We've helped many companies out of a pickle by assisting them with analysing their raw data. If they had invested in a company to help them with their research from the start, they would have received guidance in drafting the most pertinent questions, maximising the respondent's time when answering the questionnaire. Leave the analysis to people who love number crunching instead of an employee volunteer who was good with matric maths.
- Insufficient data security: Ethical management of data is not always considered and could carry major reputational risk.
- Not covering your terms and conditions. There are a number of things that need to be included when sending out a survey. The purpose, length of and closing date of the survey, confidentiality clauses, and who to contact if the respondent has any queries are just a few of the basics. It really is quite self-explanatory, but it is often the important details that are neglected.

What will the main research trends in 2020 be?

Automation is key and people want results now! There will definitely be a continued drive towards delivering faster, cheaper, insightful research.

Voice recognition - voice prompted research and chat bot surveys will become a lot more popular (but I think the novelty will fizzle out and rather frustrate the process than further it).

The most important thing is not to dismiss research. Keep track of, build and maintain your reputation. If you treasure it, you'll measure it!

* Based on the results of eight Repudometer® surveys conducted up until October 2019

ABOUT REGINE LE ROUX

Regine is a reputation specialist. She founded Reputation Matters in 2005; where they measure and manage companies' reputations using their unique Repudometer® measurement tool.

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