



Best Practices In Responding To Online Reviews



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Reviews are all about public perception, whether the reviewer is right or wrong or even a competitor out for blood, you have the ability, with just a few keystrokes, to change the perception of those that find your business listing in the future. Fair or not, business review websites will display comments for years. Now is your chance to make it known that you care about your customers, especially if they somehow had a bad experience.

Both positive and negative feedback can be good for your business and help it grow (even though it's sometimes hard to hear). A customer who has written a review has taken the time to invest in the success of your business.

“Do I need to respond to positive reviews?”

Responding to reviews won't change your rank in yelp, TripAdvisor, etc., but it can absolutely affect the benefit these services offer your business. Research shows that when an owner responds promptly and professionally to a review, addressing any specific complaints as well as the positive comments, it can make a big impact on prospective customers. Surveys show that 78% of travelers say that a management response to a good review makes them think highly of the hotel and, when considering two comparable properties, 68% would choose the property with management responses.

Respond to happy reviewers when you have new or relevant information to share. You don't need to thank every reviewer publicly, since each response reaches lots of customers, not just one.

“HOW do I respond to positive reviews?”

Since you are doing business the right way, providing great customer service in an honest way, most of your reviews are going to be very good so this its important to have a plan for responding to positive reviews. Here are a few tips:

1. **Contribute something to the discussion.** Avoid cheery, but empty, responses. It's better to say nothing at all than to force future customers to wade through meaningless comments.
2. **Keep it short and simple.** This isn't the time to add special offers or add-ons, describe company policies, or butter them up. Simply add a personal, genuine response, such as “Thanks for the kind words, Joe. We work hard on keeping selection broad and prices low so that means a lot!”

3. **Take personal conversations offline.** If what you have to say is relevant to the commenting customer, but not the general public, take the conversation offline. Offer your email, phone or other contact information, and invite the customer to contact you personally.
4. **Take online conversations to the physical store, if you have one.** If a customer leaves a particularly glowing review, try to have somebody in your store shake this customer's hand and thanks her in person the next time they're in the shop.

“Does one bad review hurt your business?”

Yes, if you ignore the review. However the right response shows that the business cares. In fact, the negative review can actually lend credibility to the business and the remainder of the (hopefully positive) reviews on the same page.

“I got a bad review online. What do I do?”

Don't panic, it's not the end of the world! Follow these tips for responding to the occasional bad review:

5. **Never react or respond angrily. Take a deep breath.** The point is NOT to reach the aggrieved customer, but to show others who might read the interaction the type of company you run. When a company responds gracefully, it diffuses the situation and makes you look more professional. When you handle conflict well, you show that you care about your customers. Imagine you are stumbling upon this review as a potential customer and assume the complaint is a valid one. What would you want to see as a response? What would it take to show you that the business has done everything possible to right the matter?
6. **Don't argue or shut them down.** If the negative comment is on your company's Facebook page, never remove the comment. Wherever it is, try to put yourself in the customer's place and understand what they are saying without being defensive. Invite further feedback, and or resolution, by leaving information on how to contact you directly. Under no circumstances should you argue with the customer; your goal is a response that is useful, understandable and courteous. Search engines will keep this review and you reply for a good, long time, so choose your words carefully.
7. **Do kill them with kindness.** Kind, polite responses from merchants can quickly disarm hostile customers. Some even go back and edit their original comment in response to a quick and graceful response from the business.

8. ***Don't get personal.*** Keep in mind that the comment is not directed at you personally but rather that a person is giving feedback on their experience. Your response is public and permanent: make it reflect you in the best light possible.
9. ***If you screwed up, make it right.*** It happens even to the best of small businesses. Don't just say you're sorry; enthusiastically offer a solution. Responding to an online situation authentically and sincerely with a "I am so sorry we dropped the ball. My goal is your satisfaction; how can I make this right for you?" or "Can I offer you X?" Do NOT offer anything you aren't willing and able to follow through on completely. Everyone makes mistakes and people do understand that, however it's the businesses that go out of their way to make those mistakes right that stand out in the public's mind.
10. ***Don't get into finger wagging, employee blaming or "well you shouldn't have..."*** If you feel the need to explain publicly, accept responsibility for the problem. If it was an employee who wronged the customer, remember that you hired the employee and they are a reflection of you and your business. If you are explaining anything, explain how you have changed things to ensure that the problem won't repeat itself.
11. ***Use your REAL name and leave your direct contact information.*** It's very important that potential customers see that a REAL person is responding to the review and care enough to allow future customers to contact you if needed. Tell the reviewer you are the owner (or whatever your title). Tell them that you would really like the chance to make things right and that they can contact you at THEIR convenience.
12. ***Tell them how they've helped.*** Did you adjust a policy or make a business improvement based on the review? Tell the reviewer!
13. ***Be proactive and try to contact your reviewer via email or their profile on the review site.*** This part sounds painful and maybe it is, you may hear things about your business that hurt, but take this as a learning experience and use it to improve upon your service. This is also an opportunity to make an unhappy customer into a happy one. There is always the possibility that the customer will update their review to explain how you made things right for them.
14. ***Leverage your raving fans.*** If you find a negative review about your company, often the best way to battle negativity online is with positivity. Once you identify a bad or unfair review, go to your core base of customers or fans and get testimonials (written or video) and support to compensate for the others. Anyone reasonable individual will take all of the information into account.

15. **Be a friend, not a salesperson.** Your reviewers are already customers, so there's no need to offer incentives or advertisements. Tell reviewers something new about your business. Share a tip or something they might not know from their first visit.
16. **Remember the reviewer is (almost) always right in your future customer's eyes.** The negative review may be something absolutely false or even added by a competitor and there is likely nothing you can do to change that, however the goal here is to change the perception of onlookers to one that shows that you care about your customers.
17. **Can you prove that the review is wrong or filled with lies?** Contact the administrators of the review site. Be prepared to prove your case and provide details. Sites like Yelp and TripAdvisor have been known to remove falsified reviews if there is enough proof to justify its removal.
18. **Know when to leave it alone.** Sometimes NOT drawing attention to a comment is your best strategy. If the writer seems a bit 'off' or if the situation is completely isolated, steer clear. One rogue comment will read as 'off' to other readers and its negative value will be lost in a sea of rave reviews.

“Can you give me an example of a good response?”

"Dear Traveler, Thank you for taking the time to write a review on TripAdvisor. We truly appreciate your open and honest feedback about your experience at our hotel over the holiday. I'm very concerned with the comments you made specifically about the appearance of bedbugs in your guest room and I would welcome the opportunity to address your comments personally with you over the phone. Please feel free to call me personally at your earliest convenience at 360-555-1212. Your satisfaction and well-being are of most importance to us and we hope to rectify the situation as soon as possible. Thank you. —Joe Schmo, Hotel Manager"

More Reading:

<http://searchengineland.com/5-tips-for-responding-to-negative-customer-reviews-online-102136>

Video:

Seth Godin interviews Top Chef's Tom Colicchio and Food Network's Sara Moulton as they discuss how to turn failures into successes:

<http://www.openforum.com/idea-hub/topics/innovation/video/on-bad-reviews-there-is-gold-in-there-inside-the-entrepreneurial-mind-series>