



Responding to Online Reviews Simplified

Templates included

newmediamanagers



Introduction

Businesses have always had to manage their reputation, the only thing that has changed is the medium, the speed at which information is transmitted and the number of people that are reached by that information.

Your business's reputation used to be what you said about themselves in your advertising and the limited reach customers had via word of mouth. Now, customers define your business by providing real time feedback on review sites, social media, forums and other channels.

Managing a successful online reputation can be time consuming. You can use products, services or people to cut down on time expenditure, but whatever you do, maintaining the online presence of your business is one of the most worthwhile investments you can make. Of course, one of the most vital aspects of managing any online reputation is getting, monitoring, responding to, and amplifying online reviews.

Why are online reviews important?

Ninety-seven percent of consumers find local business info on the web, and nearly 90% make decisions based on what online reviews say. Every business is constantly being put to the test, and the results of that test are being published.

When you decide to try a new restaurant for supper, how do you pick a spot? What about when your car breaks down, how do you find a mechanic? Nearly 9 in 10 consumers have read online reviews to determine the quality of a local business, and almost 40% of them do so regularly.

Being listed and being reviewed offer credibility to local businesses. There is the odd Craigslist hero who makes it through the cracks, but for most people, a business with reviews creates instant rapport.

Review sites like Yelp! and TripAdvisor host over a combined 270 million reviews and if you consider the billion+ users on Facebook and Twitter, there's a good chance your local business is the subject of much online chatter. You need to be part of the conversation.

Not all reviews are created equal. While each business has vertical-specific review sites they need to be listed on, there are a few sites that every company needs to be found on. Those include Google, Yahoo, Bing, Facebook and Yelp.

Gone are the days when all a business had to do was throw their [keyword] all over their website to score high in local search rank. There are tons of factors that affect search engine ranking (SERP factors) and many of them include reviews.

What people see online matters. 74% of customers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations—this is a huge shift in thinking that has become more prominent year over year. This translates to dollars, as customers put their money where their trust is. A Harvard Business School study found that a restaurant that sees a one star increase on Yelp will see revenues increase anywhere from five to nine per cent.

Consumers control the conversation

Social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and Foursquare have dramatically changed the way businesses communicate compared to traditional media. A reputation today is more about what customers say about a business and less about what a business says about itself.

Review sites are a two-way conversation favouring the consumer—businesses can no longer broadcast the message they want people to see. There is a democratic nature to reviews; brands, consumers and trolls having an equal voice in a shared space. Customers can rave about a business or let everyone know they had a terrible experience. Earned media—like mentions, reviews and shares—has empowered consumers to advocate for brands they care about. Today, consumers can converse with brands and vice versa.

Though some people think of monitoring their reputation as a scary chore or a daunting task, instant feedback is something most business owners are constantly searching for. Responding effectively to negative reviews and amplifying positive feedback is essential for success.

Not responding to customers on review sites and social media is worse than having a phone line that goes unanswered, because there are thousands of people witnessing the neglect.

While review sites and social media are essential parts of managing a successful online reputation, monitoring a business's digital profile is about much more than responding to reviews and social media. It's about being proactive and creating an authentic online image with the help of customers. Consumers are complicit in marketing now.

How to respond to positive reviews

You can learn how to respond to a bad review, but what about a good one? Many of the principles remain the same—be courteous, thank the reviewer and take some time to develop a thoughtful response. But, there are some key differences. Cars.com recently conducted a study of 10,000 randomly selected automotive dealership reviews on their site. It showed that dealers who responded to ALL reviews, not just the negative ones, received the highest ratings and were the most popular.

Share the review. Put those babies to work. These are testimonials for the digital age, and if you ask me, more compelling than an infomercial. It only makes sense to use good reviews for marketing. Customer experience is marketing, and with the number of consumers who search for a business before they ever even enter it still on the rise, this has never been more true.

Determine what's of value. A restaurant owner might think that the best thing on the menu is the meatloaf, but what if every review talks about the chicken and dumplings? Well, maybe the owner should start pushing these in her marketing a little, it's obviously what consumers want. Or, it could be an indication that not enough people know about the meatloaf, and the owner might want to offer consumers a special. Regardless of how it works, business owners are often very close to their work and can struggle to recognize what consumers really like. Reviews are the no-nonsense way to decipher the true customer experience.

Get personal. Did the reviewer mention something specific about the business? Without letting the comment get too long, share a personal anecdote or offer a shared opinion. If the reviewer loves the decor in your office, thank them and tell them where the inspiration comes from. Acknowledging particular points from the review ensures the author that you read, understood and internalized their feedback. The only exception to this is if your business must adhere to HIPPA or PIPEDA guidelines.

Commend staff if they are mentioned explicitly. We're always being told how important customer service is, and our data reinforces that notion. In our database of over 1.6 million online reviews, the words "service," "friendly" and "rude" appear in 40% of reviews. It's clear that customer service is essential in setting a business apart, so reward staff who go the extra mile to make the company extra special. Lauding staff that exceeds expectations is good for morale and will help perpetuate the good service.

Ask for reviews. The average number of reviews written about the typical business has increased each year. While that is good news for companies promoting themselves through reviews and review sites, the average business still doesn't receive many reviews per year. The best way to get more? Ask! This can be done in many different ways, depending on the structure of the business—at the till on the way out, a follow up email, a sticker in the window or automated software. When a company's got a good thing going, it always pays to keep the ball rolling.

Responding to reviews, positive and negative, are key elements of modern day customer service. Good customer service is good business.



How to respond to negative reviews

Every business is likely to receive the odd bad review—we just can't all be on our A-game all the time. A bad review can even be good for business, if the company responds appropriately and sprinkles a little marketing magic on it.

It may be hard to see it as such, but negative reviews can be a gift. For every customer who complains, 26 others remain silent. That means if a business gets a bad review, there could be dozens of other people who had the same experience and aren't saying anything.

Business owners crave feedback, so what could be better than receiving quick criticism from someone who has tried the business? Of course, there will always be trolls and people that can't be pleased. No matter how great you are doing, there will always be a few people who wish the soup was soupier, the rooms were roomier, or the cave was just slightly less cavernous. If you keep that in mind, negative reviews can start to feel a lot less like a kick in the gut, and a lot more like what they really are: a great source of feedback. That defensive feeling? Shake it off. Haters gonna hate. But, negative reviews can alert business owners to problems they didn't know about.

Here are a few things to remember when responding to negative reviews:

Take some time to respond. Not a lot of time, you want people to be able to rely on your quick response, but make sure you don't react purely on emotion. It is hard not to take a bad review as a personal attack, because business owners care so much about their company. While you want to ensure you don't let your emotions take charge, it's important to write with sincerity. Responders can make the situation worse by sounding sarcastic or disingenuous.

Be kind and genuine. While you are responding to one person, and your response should come across that way, remember that the audience is potentially much larger and far-reaching. Not only will other people who visit the review site see the response, but it's possible those people could share the review and response with their own networks.

Be specific. If a customer mentions something in particular about the business, use that in your reply. Not only does this demonstrate that you are not a robot, but it makes the complainant feel heard and understood.

Remember that feedback and criticism can be helpful. This reviewer has taken the time to invest in the business in an attempt to make it better—thank them (even if you don't agree with them). Business owners are always looking for a way to understand the customer experience, and there is no better way than a review. The reviewer may have a relevant point about the business, so it's important to consider the content without going on the defensive.

Offer to take the conversation offline. You would never want to have a less than pleasant dialogue with an unhappy customer in a physical store with other customers around, so why would you do it in front of more watching eyes online? Offering a phone number and a way to connect privately ensures the reviewer that you want to fix the situation for them, not just for the digital audience. Also, if you decide to offer a free or discounted service to make up for the bad experience, it's best not to do this in front of other customers and potential customers—that might encourage bad reviews to get free stuff.

Do not ignore it. Ever! Imagine a business's competitors were taking out ads saying how terrible they were and the business just chilled. The negative review may not be written by a competitor, but chances are, more relevant people will be reading the review than would be seeing an ad in traditional media. These people have already searched the business and are deciding on a purchasing decision. Make sure you are part of the conversation going on about you, online, every single day.

Remember that the reviewer came into your business to give it a shot. Then they took some of their valuable time to offer feedback. It's possible to turn a naysayer into a brand ambassador. People are not looking for perfection. Consumers want to feel heard. They want to know your business is authentic.

Effective Review Response

Take charge of your online reputation by skillfully responding to both good and bad reviews. It's time consuming but worth every minute.

To speed up the process, we've created review response templates to get you started.



How to respond to a good review (4 steps)

1. Thank the client and be specific.

Ensure the reviewer knows a real person is behind the reply by thanking them for something specific they said, even repeating it back. *"Thanks for leaving a review and mentioning our receptionist, Jodi. You're right, she is always smiling."*

2. Use the business name and keywords.

Connecting your business name to the good review will help it appear in search results. *"The team here at (Your Business Name) is thrilled to hear such good feedback and we are proud to be one of the friendliest (your business type) in (your city name)."*

3. Add a little marketing.

Your reply is public and will be read by others, including future customers. While you have the exposure and the audience, throw in some marketing! Mention a behind-the-scenes reason they had a great experience, or a new feature or promotion. *"Did you know we're now open on Saturday mornings?"*

4. Invite the client to do something.

Ask the client to return, use another service or spread the word. *"Next time you're here you should try (insert product here)!" "We hope to see you again soon - and bring a friend!"*

Templates



Respond to Good Reviews

Use these templates as a starting point.

Make sure to include something personal and make it your own.

Hey (Customer Name),

Thank you for the review, (Business Name) appreciates when our customers take time to leave a note about us! We are glad you experienced our world-class [insert something the business is best known for], and hope to see you again with your friends!

- (Business Name / Manager Name / Owner Name)

(Customer Name),

We take pride in giving outstanding service to every customer here at (Business Name). We are happy to hear that your visit was no exception, thanks for leaving the wonderful review! Did you know we offer [discount or promo for next visit]? Look forward to seeing you next time!

- (Business Name / Manager Name / Owner Name).

(Customer Name),

We're thrilled you enjoyed [something specific they mentioned], we like making our customers happy at [business name]! Next time you're here, you should try the [insert a feature or special]. Thanks for leaving the positive review, I hope to see you again soon.

Regards, (Business Name / Manager Name / Owner Name).

Hello (Customer Name),

Everyone at (Business Name) loves to hear from customers like you! Thanks for spending your afternoon with us. Next time you're here, ask for [Manager's name] - I'd like to say thanks in person :)

- (Business Name / Manager Name / Owner Name).



How to respond to a bad review (4 steps)

1. Apologize and sympathize.

Acknowledge the client's concerns. Even if they are unfounded, show some sympathy that they had a bad experience. *"I'm sorry to hear about your bad experience."*

2. Insert a little marketing.

Explain what your clients usually experience. *"We're normally known for our exceptional attention to detail, and we regret that we missed the mark."*

3. Keep it simple, short, and kind.

Don't go into too much detail or ask any questions. Three sentences is a good rule of thumb.

4. Continue the conversation offline.

Provide contact info with someone at your business so they can discuss problems in person. *"My name is (name) and I'm the (Owner/Manager). If you'd like to discuss this further, please contact me at (phone number/email)."*

BONUS TIP: Don't use your business name or keywords in your response. You don't want that bad review to show up in the search engines do you?

TEMPLATES



Respond to Bad Reviews

Use these templates as a starting point. Make sure to include something personal and make it your own.

[Customer Name],

Sounds like we didn't provide you with the same customer service that many have come to know us for. I'm sincerely sorry. We pride ourselves on [typical customer experience]. Please contact me, I would like to fix things, if possible? My name is [name], and I'm the [job title]. Please give me an email [email address] or call [phone number] when you have a free moment. Thank you.

[Customer Name],

Thank you for your comments. I'm sorry to hear about your experience. This is definitely not a usual occurrence at our business, [state what usually happens]. Please contact me, I would like to make things right.

[Name, Job Title, Email Address and/or Phone Number]

[Customer Name],

Thank you for bringing this [issue/incident] to our attention. I sincerely apologize for [name the main issue voiced] and we understand your frustration. We try to maintain the highest standards of service, but it's clear we fell short in your case. Please contact me at your convenience, I'd like to find out how I can earn back your business.

Regards, [Name, Job Title, Email Address and/or Phone Number]

[Customer Name],

We're really sorry to hear about what happened. I'd like to make sure mistakes like these don't happen again. If you can contact me directly at [Email, Phone Number] I will personally make sure this situation is made right.

Regards, [Name, Job Title, Email Address and/or Phone Number]

Conclusion

Online reviews have moved from “nice to have” to essential. As customers look to these sites for feedback, updating profiles, responding to reviews and engaging customers becomes increasingly more important. Maintaining positive word of mouth online is digital-age customer service.

While online reviews have been prevalent for many years, business owners and consumers alike are now recognizing the gamut of challenges and opportunities. Generating reviews, responding to reviews and engaging consumers online is essential for the success of local businesses.

These templates are a great starting point to help you respond to reviews on the behalf of your business. When you are ready to get some help with managing your online presence and get an analysis of where your stand - what’s working for you and what needs your attention - we can help. We can tailor a solution that’s just right for you.

Call us today or drop us a line at: info@newMediaManagers.com



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