

CUSTOMER RELATIONS

How to Respond to Bad Online Reviews of Your Business, Win Over New Customers & Grow Your Google Listing



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Introduction

"Business is never so healthy as when, like a chicken, it must do a certain amount of scratching around for what it gets." ... Henry Ford

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If bad online reviews of your business are not keeping you awake at night, then something is wrong 😊

But seriously, as you may know, being great at your business and getting terrific reviews, online and offline, is the cheapest way to drive new customers to your local business that's free, that doesn't require an incredible amount of technical skill. So, if you are not leveraging this cheap small business marketing opportunity, you are leaving a lot of money on the table.

Reviews are great for increasing customer engagement, boosting sales, and they give you free access to user-generated content and powerful testimonials that you can use to enhance your marketing of the business.

If you can stay on top of the game and win the reviews war your business will rank in the search results, which means you will get more new customers.

But you have to guard against getting bad reviews, because a bad review can kill your business. Here's why:

Today it is estimated that 90% of customers read online reviews before making any buying decisions, even for products and services they intend to buy offline. And as more and more businesses advertise online, through services such as Groupon, Yellow Pages, Living Social, and Google, this behavior is getting reinforced every day.

It used to be that when a customer was unhappy they called you. Now, they go online and post their complaints for all to see!

And, unfortunately, customers complaining online, and leaving bad reviews is happening more and more every day... and not just to "bad" places, but good businesses like yours...

And because negative reviews of your business are inevitable, as a serious business owner you cannot afford to ignore them, or to think that they are not affecting your offline business. The truth is that today the line between your offline and online brand is a very thin one, and anytime you notice that business is slow, negative reviews (unfair or deserved) could be the problem... and regardless if they are deserved or unfair, you cannot afford to bury your head in the sand...

Because, if you have a bad review that you the business owner has not replied to, you risk losing customers to your competitors. This is because a bad review makes new reviewers more inclined to post their review if it conforms to what it seems others are saying!

In short "bad begets more bad"...

You could find yourself in a situation where your business all of a sudden has a bad – and undeserved – reputation online that will end up costing you dearly to repair.

The best way I know for any business to get high-quality positive reviews is through being great at your business & providing awesome customer care.

Why respond to online reviews?

"As a small businessperson, you have no greater leverage than the truth" ... John Greenleaf Whittier

Before I proceed, I have concentrated on Google in this guide because Google is "the big elephant in the room" where online business listings are concerned, but you need to understand that what I'm teaching here applies to all the other major sites where customers leave reviews of businesses... So, why should you respond to online reviews?

Responding to negative online reviews is the ONE tool you as the business owner have complete control over. Your prompt and professional response has more to do with how the negative review(s) are seen by consumers than anything else.

Google in fact recommends to business owners that they should respond to online reviews that their customers leave on their Google map listings.

As far as Google is concerned, responding to reviews shows that you value your customers and the feedback that they leave about your business... and nobody is going to dispute that!

You can read more at this link:

<https://support.google.com/business/answer/7091?hl=en>

So, what sort of reviews should you respond to?

The short answer is that you should make it a habit to respond to both good and negative reviews. You want to respond to the good reviews too occasionally, so it doesn't seem to your customers as though the only way to get your attention is to slam you!

Additionally, this keeps you abreast of what your customers think of your business... which should point out to you where you need to improve your customer service, the customer experience, etc.

Constantly keeping tabs on what reviews customers are leaving for your business is actually good for you as it can serve as a mini-diagnostic of your entire business and your practices.

For instance, if all your customers say they'd be happy to write you a review but none follows through, that might tell you that your customers don't have as close a working relationship with you as they should.

Or if you're consistently at 4 stars, and nobody's angry with your service *but nobody loves it*; that might tell you something else.

Your reviews don't just tell potential customers about your business; they can tell you about your business.

Reviews you should always respond to

Sometimes you will get bad reviews where the reviewer does not describe personal, firsthand experience with your business and reviews where the reviewer is basing on someone else's experience with your business. These should be responded to, but diplomatically as we shall see. You should also always respond to reviews that are essentially personal attacks, rants or crusades.

Received wisdom says to Not Do the following:

- Such is business life today that a prospective customer is more likely to distrust the business, than the anonymous poster of a bad review, most of the time.

So, resist you want to resist the temptation to try and get "even" by posting equally angry and accusatory posts/comments. Posting a reply to "top" the negative reviewer will not be productive.

- Don't threaten to sue anybody, either the reviewer, Google or any other site where the bad review appeared. Most people know that no one is going to sue them for a review appearing in Google Places. So the threat is not credible.
- Also, trying to call out fake Google Places reviews publicly is unlikely to work.

According to Google:

"We do not arbitrate disputes among business owners, competitors, customers, ex-employees, or other entities. We only remove reviews when we determine that they violate our guidelines, which is extremely rare. More often than not, we leave the review up."

It's next to impossible to get Google to remove bad unfair reviews of your business and my advice is you shouldn't even try. Google of course knows that business owners want the bad, unfair review gone, and don't really care what it takes.

And so they have erected many roadblocks to making that happen.

The best way to respond to a negative review

"If you don't drive your business, you will be driven out of business." ... B. C. Forbes

Here's the recommended way how business owners should respond to negative reviews to avoid embarrassment, and gain the most positive effect.

Special Note: Make sure if it's your business's mistake to say that you're sorry the reviewer had a problem. "Owning" the issue can cool down the sentiment of the viewer.

The business's response should immediately make them feel that when someone has a problem with their product or service, the business wants to hear them.

A good reply can be an opportunity to market your small business by describing measures taken to avoid that issue in the future and explaining how future customers will not face that issue. And you should never miss this opportunity to create relationships with your existing customers... and to leave a positive impression to new customers.

Here's a bad owner response example:

"Your statements are pretty much all LIES, plain and simple. You cannot even prove you were in our restaurant and you know it. Having a picture of some supposedly 'bad food' doesn't prove anything. Any person with a camera phone can do that. Your comments about the service I cannot verify, as we have no "tall African American server" working on the day you claim you were here. Like much of your "story" it doesn't seem to add up. Try someplace else next time, since we don't sound like your kind of place."

Signed, Owner Fed Up With Lies

Not too good! You want to avoid sounding arrogant or uncaring so avoid sarcasm and avoid direct accusations about the reviewer. This business owner above has made himself look foolish in the

eyes of anyone who reads this. This approach is not recommended, though it probably would make you feel good!

Whether the negative review is unfair to your business you should attempt to come off diplomatic, not so much for the benefit of the reviewer, but for those who are bound to come across this review as they make buying decisions online.

Here's a better follow up response example

Here's an example where a reviewer changed his negative review after receiving a respectful positive message from the business owner:

"I had reviewed The Cake Shoppe in Springfield a couple days after they opened, and they had very poor service, and I detailed the experience in my review.

I also gave them the benefit of the doubt that it was a new store and probably just needed to get the service personnel up to speed. Then, about a month later, I got a PM [private message] from the owner inviting me to come back. He said they had taken my comments very seriously and wanted me to see the difference. I went back and now I have to adjust my review to note the big improvements- much better, I would rate them between 3 and 4 stars!"

As you can see in this example the customer revised his opinion of the place after he was "wowed" by the "diplomacy" of the business owner.

Here's an excellent response example

(the owner/manager responded to an unhappy customer):

"Thank you for your comment. One of my assistant managers talked to the guest the day they checked out. He discussed the issues she had in her room. He asked her, why she didn't tell us about these problems as soon as she checked into the room? He told her we could have moved her to another room or sent someone to re-clean her room. After all, the guest was here several days. The guest said she was just too busy."

"The assistant manager apologized to her and also extended a 50% discount off her room charges. She was apparently still not happy with that. We can only fix what we know about at the time. It only takes a couple of minutes to let us know of a problem. Our maintenance and housekeeping staff are here every day, 18 hours a day. I would be happy to speak with the guest further."

Signed, Alex James, General Manager"

In my opinion, the above answer really is the template for how to respond, if you're going to respond... and really you should respond...

The comments show the concern of the business owner, but also emphasize that the hotel employees are there, in person, to hear from a dissatisfied guest, ready to find resolution right then and there... no need to go to a computer just to have your say.

Prospective customers who read this response will form a positive impression of the place and their dedication to providing a good service. You can see how he has used the opportunity to almost advertise the place... they have maintenance and housekeeping staff on call 18 hours a day, plus the manager is ready and available to discuss problems the guests may have, etc.

Here's what Google advises, in **"Tips for writing a public response"**

- Ignore minor complaints and resolve issues privately when possible.
- Address problems constructively.
- Don't use responses to advertise. Do not ask reviewers for anything or offer them anything.
- Be professional and polite. The world can read your response

And remember, your goal in business should be to be great at your business and to provide excellent care to your customers – the good reviews, positive feedback, and referrals will come automatically.

In closing...

Enjoy this report? Did you receive value?

This is actionable information that will grow your business if you take action on it. Here's what marketing legend Dan Kennedy said:

“For most small business owners their number one job should be chief marketing director. Because almost nothing else matters if that is screwed up.”

Dan Kennedy is called the “millionaire maker” in business marketing circles. His marketing advice, training and advertizing copy has made more millionaires than he cares to remember.

Become chief marketing director for your business. We'll show you how... We have put together a “Stealth Marketing Power Pack” to help small business owners like yourself double their profits without a lot of hard work – through “marketing leverage”, referrals, and simple strategic interventions such as the ones in this report.

[Get the “Small Business Stealth Marketing Power Pack” Here](#)

Recommended resources

[Local Listings service providers on Fiverr](#) – Find quality outsourcers on Fiverr to set up your local listings on websites such

as Google, [Bing's Business Portal](#), [CitySearch](#), [Yelp](#), [UrbanSpoon](#), [Manta](#), etc for just \$5. Only hire "highest rated" providers.