6 Tips for Managing Online Reviews

If you think online reviews don't affect your business, think again. A 2017 BrightLocal survey on local consumer reviews revealed that:

- 73% of consumers have increased trust in a local business after reading positive reviews.
- 49% of consumers require at least a four-star rating before they'll use a business.
- 30% said that companies should respond to reviews.
- 68% of consumers left a review for a local business when asked.
- Consumers usually read about seven reviews before trusting a business.
- Survey respondents listed Yelp and Facebook as the most trusted review sites, followed by Google and BBB.org.

Online reviews clearly play an essential role in how consumers evaluate and choose businesses. To succeed, you'll want to increase positive reviews and reduce the effects of negative reviews. To help you, we've compiled some tips and strategies for managing your online reviews.

Tip 1: Actively Manage Listings Where Online Reviews Appear

Be sure to claim, maintain, and regularly review the listings for your business for the "Big Three" (Google, Yelp, and Facebook), as well as any industry-specific review sites related to your business.

- **Google My Business.** This listing appears when customers search for your business or businesses like yours on Google Search, Maps, and Google+. Your Google My Business listing lets you post updates, respond to reviews, and add photos.

- **Yelp** is a crowd-sourced review site synonymous with online business reviews. Yelp is the largest outlet for online customer reviews for all types of businesses, which means paying attention to your Yelp page is critical. On your business's free Yelp page, you can update business information, upload photos, add categories and service offerings, respond to reviews, respond to appointment or quote requests, and create a Yelp Deal or Check-In offer. You can pay to upgrade your page, and Yelp also offers advertising opportunities.

- **Facebook** accounts for 42% of monthly social media visits in the U.S. Because any Facebook user can review a business, businesses can't afford to ignore Facebook reviews. Companies can be reviewed on Facebook in two ways—on their business page and as a place. However, you can claim your place listing and then actively manage it on your page. If you don't do this, your business will still be listed and reviewed as a place.

- **Niche Industry Sites.** Reputation management experts recommend actively managing your listing on any niche industry sites. For travel-related businesses, this means sites such as TripAdvisor.

Tip 2: Proactively Request Reviews from Customers

Asking your customers is the best way to get online reviews. Although you should never pay for reviews, it is smart to encourage customers to review your business. Here are some ways to do this.

- Link to a review site on your website and ask customers to leave a review there.

- Provide a direct link to review sites in any emails you send to customers and ask them to leave a review.

- When dealing with customers directly, ask them to review your facility and let them know where to go.

- Regularly ask customers to review your facility on your social media. Be sure to provide links.

Tip 3: Respond To *Every* Online Review—Positive or Negative

Although it takes time, customers perceive businesses that respond to online reviews as attentive, engaged with customers, and concerned about customer service.

Engaging with online reviewers helps minimize the damage of negative reviews (more on this in the next section) and demonstrates that your company cares about its customers and reputation.

Your response doesn't need to be lengthy. A simple message will suffice: *"Thank you for your feedback. We value your business."*

Monitor and respond to *all* customer reviews—not just the bad ones. It is just as important to thank customers for positive reviews as it is to respond to negative ones.

Tip 4: Learn How to Respond to Negative Reviews

Every business gets negative reviews, and your business is no exception. However, you can mitigate the effects of negative reviews by how you respond to them. Engaging positively with dissatisfied customers can lead to repeat business—almost 70% of unhappy customers will give a company another chance after receiving a thoughtful response to a negative online review. So how do you do turn a negative review into a positive? Follow these steps.

- **Step 1: Don't respond in the heat of the moment.** It is normal to feel angry and defensive. Don't let these feelings affect your response! Instead, head off emotion by

preparing responses ahead of time. However, don't send the canned response; it is just a starting place. You also need to personalize it. Read on for advice on doing this.

- **Step 2: Consider which type of reviewer wrote the review.** BrightLocal wrote an article that describes the different types of online reviewers and how to best respond to them. From first-time reviewers to serial complainers, each kind of reviewer is looking for something different. However, all responses need two things—politeness and empathy, which brings us to the next step.

- **Step 3: Respond politely and make sure the reviewer knows you heard them.** Although you may be upset, your communication must be professional and polite. Let the customer know you listened to their complaint *without* making excuses. In other words, empathize—don't explain. Sometimes people just want to know that they've been heard. By acknowledging their complaint (but NOT making excuses for it), you've provided what they need. Of course, you still need to go one step further.

- **Step 4: Offer a solution.** The solution should be suited to the specific situation. The goal is to defuse tension and win back the customer's business. You don't need to provide specific details (unless appropriate), but you do need to offer to make amends. This helps repair the relationship and shows anyone reading the review that you value your customers. At the same time, the specifics of exactly how you'll fix the problem don't need to be shared in a public forum, which brings us to the next step.

- **Step 5: Take the conversation offline.** As quickly as possible, move the discussion offline. You don't want to go back and forth with an unhappy customer in a public forum. Instead, say something like: *"I'm sorry to you weren't happy with [our service/policy/bill]. I want to discuss this issue with you to find a solution that meets your needs. Please call me at xxx-xxx-xxxx or email directly at name@emailaddress.com at your earliest convenience."*

- **Step 6: Have an impartial person review your response.** Now that you've crafted a polite, empathetic, and personalized response, have a neutral person review it. When dealing with an emotional situation like a negative review, defensiveness may have crept into your reply. An impartial person will pick up on this and help you correct it.

- **Step 7: Once the situation is resolved, politely ask the reviewer to modify or update the review.** If you've done the work to win back their business, they'll be much more inclined to update their review to reflect this.

Tip 5: Feature Reviews on Your Website

Featuring reviews on your site provides credibility for your business. Experts suggest showcasing reviews from Google, Yelp, and Facebook because they are the most trusted. You can share reviews as testimonials, with review badges/widgets, as featured reviews with attribution, or via review management software like Grade.us and Embed Social. Whichever method you choose, follow this advice from reputation management experts.

- **Showcase reviews "above the fold" (*e.g.*, the part of the web page visible without scrolling).** Prominently display a badge or icon linking to your review page on your site's homepage. Also, include a review badge where visitors make purchasing decisions. A case study by WikiJob found that testimonials featured more prominently on a page increased sales by 34%.

- **Never use fake reviews or solicit reviews from friends and family.** Fake reviews can damage your credibility. If well-meaning friends and family members want to review your business, that is their choice. However, never solicit reviews from them. Consumers can usually detect when reviews are fake or from non-customers.

- **Showcase specific and detailed reviews that can be linked back to the source.** The most personal and powerful reviews document specific interactions with an employee. Specificity and detail provide credibility and authenticity—making these reviews more valuable than "generic" reviews that say things like "Great place." By linking reviews back to the source, you'll prove that the review is real.

- **Link to your Google My Business listing or Yelp page to make it easy for customers to review your business.**

Tip 6: Use Information from Online Reviews to Improve Your Business

Information gleaned from online reviews can help improve your business. Realize that customer complaints may be highlighting problem areas or "blind spots" your business needs to address. Perhaps a policy is unclear and causing confusion, which is why a customer complained about it. If so, this might be an opportunity to review the policy and make it clearer. Always be open to using negative reviews as a springboard to improve your business.

Conclusion

By using these tips, you'll harness the power of online reviews to help grow your business. The time spent on review management will be well worth it—as you'll gain more customers, increase your revenue, enhance your company's reputation, and gain insights directly from your customers.