

# 5 TIPS FOR MANAGING ONLINE REVIEWS OF YOUR BUSINESS

Managing online reviews should be an integral part of your franchise's marketing strategy.

Sure: the thought of having to tune in regularly to review sites like Yelp, Citysearch, and TripAdvisor may leave you feeling overwhelmed — especially

if you're running dozens or hundreds of franchise locations. But like it or not, online reviews matter to your business, and how you handle them is crucial to your success.

- According to market research firm YouGov, 4 in 5 American consumers read online reviews before making a purchase decision.

- Forrester, meanwhile, found that customer-written online reviews were perceived by consumers as more trustworthy than natural search engine results and branded content on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter.
- According to search marketing news site Search Engine Land, only 13 percent of consumers will consider buying from a business that has a one- or two-star rating on online review sites.

At a time when customers can quickly become online critics, you can't let reviews crush the credibility and reputation of your entire franchise. Here are five tips for successfully managing your online reviews and building a five-star franchise brand.

## TIP 1: Claim and update your business listing on relevant review sites

The first step to successfully managing your reviews — and protecting your brand reputation — is to plant your flags on digital properties where customers may be talking about you. These include online review sites, business pages on social networks, customer feedback channels, and online yellow pages and business directories.

While you have little control over what customers post on Yelp or Facebook, you can at least maintain an active presence on these sites and share relevant information about your business. Potential customers, for example, will want to know details like your locations, phone number, or hours of operation; they won't always end up visiting your website, so it helps to have this information available on your Yelp page, say, or your TripAdvisor listing. The



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key is: be easy to find.

Also, by claiming your listing, you give yourself a chance to respond as the businessowner and turn any negative reviews around.

## TIP 2: Respond to reviews and say thank you, no matter your star rating

Internet messages are a blunt tool, and it hurts to receive a one-star review or a negative social media comment. But you can't let your initial reaction get in the way of delivering a professional, solution-oriented response. If public feedback from a customer makes your business look bad, don't do or say anything that will make the situation worse.

Train your franchisees and managers to respond to reviews proactively and with care. According to Atmosphere Research Group, businesses that are highly responsive to and engaged with online reviewers attract customers who have 30 to 40 percent more interaction with revenue-driving products and services.

It's worth replying to five-star reviews, too, even if this means just saying thank you. By letting customers know you appreciate their feedback, you can strengthen your digital reputation and reinforce positive customer experiences.

## TIP 3: Bad reviews can be good for your business, so embrace them

A negative review can sometimes feel like a personal attack. Or it can look like the bad apple that spoils the bunch. But don't waste time trying to delete it from your profile — you likely won't be able to anyway.

Instead, embrace the bad review and appreciate all the ways it can benefit your business. The two-star rating that

the angry Yelper posted last week could well add a measure of legitimacy or authenticity to your franchise brand. In fact, a Guardian report indicated that 68 percent of consumers placed more trust in reviews when they saw both good and bad ones; if a business seemed too good to be true, 95 percent would suspect that it faked its own reputation or censored what unhappy customers might have said.

More importantly, genuine customer feedback — never mind if it's mostly negative — serves as a great source of information and insight essential to improving your business.

Do the staff members in your newest branch need a few more training sessions? Are diners really happy with the new menu you rolled out recently across your locations? What are the most common complaints about your product, and is your customer service team coming through?

As far as getting these types of questions answered, opinions and experiences shared online by your most vocal customers may just enlighten you and help you see growth opportunities in your franchise.

## TIP 4: Encourage happy customers to share their feedback

It may not seem fair to have your detractors and critics regularly post reviews of your business, while your happiest customers choose to remain quiet. If that's the case, find creative ways to encourage the latter group to speak up, particularly in post-transactional situations.

Talk to these customers and ask if they would be willing to give you five stars. Ask for reviews at checkout. Conduct surveys. Mention it on phone calls. Send E-mails. In those E-mails, add a link to your Facebook Page or Yelp profile. Follow up. Make it easy for people to give



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their feedback. There is no guarantee that you will generate five-star reviews across the board from these efforts, but the wave of online activity should enhance your online visibility and strengthen your franchise's reputation.

## TIP 5: Address customer experience issues to turn critics into fans

A negative review sometimes comes with helpful suggestions or ideas on how the customer experience can be improved. Look for these suggestions and ideas and bring them up in your next meeting with the team.

By taking customer feedback to heart and addressing genuine concerns, you give yourself a better chance of turning critics into fans, who, later on, may even edit their reviews in appreciation of your attempts to right the wrong. Even if they don't, this resolution-driven approach will benefit you in the long run, because the voice of the customer is one of your organization's greatest sources of learning.

Brian Sparker is the Head of Content Marketing for ReviewTrackers, a review management and customer feedback software platform designed to help companies efficiently manage online reviews, build brand reputation, and enhance the customer experience in ways that make a positive impact on the bottom line.

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