



Managing Review Sites As A Small Business

by Emily Reeves 7.2013

Overview

You are a small business owner. You have limited resources. Your life is all about running your business. You have poured your heart, your soul and all your money into making a business that you feel passionate about. And then your new customers — the ones you are working so hard to please — pepper review sites like Yelp, Google Places, Foursquare, etc. — with negative reviews. It is heartbreaking and maddening. Your customers are talking about you — and the whole world is listening. This digital whitepaper provides advice for managing negative reviews.

First, DO NOT do these things:

- **Pay/reward customers for writing positive reviews.**
- **Hire a company to write positive reviews.**
- **Respond to the negative reviewers with a canned “apology.”**
- **Respond to the negative reviewers with more negativity.**
- **Go in the bathroom and cry.**

All of these things are tempting to do and likely your first instincts after reading the negative reviews. Don't panic. It is going to be okay.

A few facts about online review sites.

- “Yelp has more than 30 million reviews. For every five new notices that are submitted, one is determined by internal filters to be so dubious — either highly favorable or highly critical — that it is banned to a secondary page, which few users bother with, instead of appearing on the business's profile page. Many of the reviews tagged as fake are written by people new to Yelp.”

- Research shows that online reviews strongly influence buying behavior, with nearly half of American consumers stating that they are more likely to visit a business after reading a positive online review.
- According to a survey by the Opinion Research Corporation, 84-percent of Americans say online reviews influence their purchasing decisions.

Do these things:

- **Try to see your business through the eyes of a customer.** Indeed, customers increasingly shop with their browser. Do a vanity search of your business name and see what comes up. Are you easy to find? What is the first impression? Do you have a website and blog, and are they kept up to date? Is your business reviewed in online forums or blogs?
- **Monitor your online reviews.** Review sites allow businesses to “claim” their location through various verification methods. Once you claim the location, you can upload photos, opt in to receive email alerts of reviews posted and get weekly summaries of activity on your location page.
- **Develop a customer email database.** Sure, you have Facebook, Twitter and Google+. But you don’t “own” those lists. Any one of those channels could disappear without notice. Businesses need to own their own customer databases. Include a sign-up form on your website, add a sign-up tab to your Facebook page, put a sign-up book and pen on your front desk, add a table tent with a QR code for sign up at locations in your business customers spend time. Use this database to communicate a couple of times a month to your customers with specials, new offerings AND requests to review your business. Keep in mind that you can’t request only positive reviews and you can’t provide incentives for completing reviews. But there is no harm in asking for a review in general and providing an easy link to the review site.
- **Create a “read my reviews” button is displayed on your website and on social media pages.** This provides a compelling call-to-action for customers to read and also write reviews. To get started, create a separate web page that lists your reviews, preferably updated automatically or linked directly to your business’ profiles on reviews sites. You can also add links to your reviews in the customer enewsletter.
- **Create a policy for responding to negative reviews and designate one person to act as the spokesperson in these situations.** When a negative review appears, respond in a timely fashion, ideally via a private message, assuming you can determine the reviewer’s identity and contact details. Acknowledge their dissatisfaction, describe how you plan to resolve the cause of it, and invite them back for a discounted or even a free service. Even hostile critics sometimes are mollified by a polite response from the merchant.
- **Look for patterns.** Are people consistently complaining about poor service? Are they constantly praising something that you can emphasize to differentiate your business? If you are seeing the same comments over and over again, realize that these things are probably true of your business and are things you should fix or leverage.

Final thoughts.

People weigh the opinions of others heavily, even when they don't know them. That said, they are more likely to trust a business owner who takes time to respond to reviews with the goal of improving their service. Customers will naturally gravitate to businesses that display a human element. Remember, when it comes to managing customer reviews and promoting your reputation, the best defense is always a good offense.

Interested in learning more?

Contact Emily Reeves at ereeves@stoneward.com for help planning your brand's digital engagements.

About Stone Ward

Stone Ward is a full-service ad agency. Established in 1984 by Larry Stone and Millie Ward, today the agency employs 52, with capitalized billings exceeding \$40 million. The agency's offices are in Chicago and Little Rock.

About Emily Reeves, Director of Digital Innovation & Insight Planning

As the agency's digital champion, Emily Reeves proves that Stone Ward has the offerings, expertise and alliances to bring sound, measurable digital innovation to our clients' marketing efforts. A seasoned communications strategist with a passion for all things digital, Emily has distinguished herself as an avid blogger, social media speaker, industry observer and moderator. In her role as digital thought leader for Stone Ward, Emily collaborates with our team of agency leaders in creative, brand management, public relations, media, digital technology and video production to create relevant ways to tell our clients' stories in the digital space and to provide meaningful measurement and analytics as a tool for calculating our efforts. Emily's focus on measurement extends to her duties as the agency's research leader, where she works with Stone Ward clients to develop and execute research plans that inform integrated client marketing efforts.

Sources

[4 Ways To Manage Online Reviews](#)

[Managing An Online Reputation](#)

[Yelp Tries To Halt Deceptive Reviews](#)