

DOS AND DON'TS FOR GETTING GOOD REVIEWS

Online reviews can significantly help (or hurt) your business's reputation and bottom line, so it's important to know the right way (and the wrong way) to deal with them.

In this document, you'll find helpful tips and best practices for successfully engaging customers and encouraging them to post honest, truthful reviews of your business on the Internet.



GENERATING MORE POSITIVE REVIEWS

Do ask your customers to write reviews

The best way to get reviews is to ask for them. The vast majority of people who use review sites do not write their own. Often, customers who know and trust you will not have looked at your reviews in a long time, if ever, so it helps to remind them that reviews are valuable to your business.

Do approach regular customers

You want your reviews to say something substantial, so approach people who are likely to be able to say something more than, "These guys are great!" Regular customers are also more likely to put the effort into crafting a thoughtful and genuine-sounding review. Reputation.com has tools that make it easy to ask for reviews and keep track of what people are saying about your business.

Do provide links to your reviews

On your company website, excerpt good reviews and provide links to your page on review sites. This encourages people who have had a good experience to quickly add a review or a rating. In addition, people trust third-party reviews, so showing them off will bolster the authority of your site.

Do mention reviews in your customer-facing materials

Many retail businesses now post stickers or placards in their windows directing customers to online review sites. This is a good idea, not only for the sake of getting new reviews, but because people trust businesses that aren't afraid to show what people are saying about them. These visual aids also serve as a reminder for customers

who intended to write a review but subsequently forgot. You can also mention reviews tastefully on brochures you hand out, on your business card, and in email signatures.

Don't ask all your customers at once

You want your reviews to show up organically over time. When too many reviews appear over a short period of time, people reading them sometimes get suspicious, driving business to your competitors. Instead, make it a part of your business practice to ask for reviews periodically so that you will receive a constant trickle of feedback. We can help with this.

Don't ask for a good review

Customers don't like to feel that you're trying to manipulate them. If you ask them for their honest opinions instead, they will be flattered that you trust them. This makes them more likely to put effort into the review and to write something positive.

Don't spam your customers

If you ask for reviews by email, send occasional short, polite messages and leave it at that. Aggressively pestering customers is a sure-fire way to generate negative reviews.

Don't provide your customers with canned reviews

If all of your reviews have the same or similar wording, people reading them will treat them as spam and ignore your business. Reviews should be written by each individual customer so the reviews truly reflect the customer's genuine opinion of your business.

DEALING WITH NEGATIVE REVIEWS

Do respond constructively to negative reviewers

First of all, don't take it personally. When someone posts a negative review, show that you care by trying to address the issue promptly—and in a public way. It doesn't matter where the fault lies, all that matters is that the customer feels appreciated and potential customers see how well you deal with issues.

To give an example, if the individual had a bad customer service experience, apologize on the review site, preferably as a response to the bad review. If the issue is still outstanding, show that you are taking steps to resolve it. Savvy review readers go straight for the bad reviews so they can see how the business handles criticism, so a polished and professional response to a bad review can actually earn you brownie points.

Do provide calm, factual rebuttals of people who have an axe to grind

When someone levels false accusations or unfairly maligns your business, respond calmly and factually to the situation. Never accuse the customer of anything, keep your tone neutral, and above all demonstrate respect. Show the steps you have taken to investigate the situation and describe your findings truthfully. If there is some element of truth to the accusation, admit it, but also demonstrate the errors in the accusation. Customers don't expect you to be perfect, but they expect you to recover gracefully when there's an issue, so the more thorough you can be here, the better.

Do stick to the facts

Avoid the temptation to embellish or leave out facts that don't support your side of the story. Honesty, even if you are partially at fault, is more likely to win over people reading your reviews than questionable excuses. Nothing reflects worse on a business than an insincere response that looks like it's trying to sweep issues under the rug.

Don't pick a fight

Arguing and fighting are counterproductive and among the worst things you can do to your business's reputation. Avoid accusing the reviewer of lying,

or implying such. Avoid curt retorts, sarcasm, and snobby language. Don't post a rant or vent your frustration. All of these reflect poorly on you and give the negative reviewer the upper hand. If you really can't respond in a constructive way, then it's best to say nothing at all.

Don't ask customers to take down negative reviews

You run the risk of further alienating an already unhappy customer. They may interpret your request as an attempt to buy them off, which could motivate them to post further negative comments. You should never ask customers to write anything other than their honest, heartfelt opinions.

Don't threaten reviewers with litigation

In the rare event that a disgruntled former employee or unscrupulous competitor levels a concerted smear campaign against your business, you might possibly have grounds for legal action (talk to your lawyer; we can't provide you with legal advice). In the vast majority of cases, however, reviews fall clearly under free speech protections and any threats you make will almost certainly be met with a flood of additional negative reviews.

Don't bribe your customers

Bribes or incentives undermine the legitimacy of your good reviews. You might get disgruntled customers who post reviews like, "These guys are paying their customers to write good reviews, don't believe what you read here." However, you can offer incentives that aren't related to your business. For instance, offer to make a small donation to the customer's charity of choice if they write a review, good or bad.

Don't generate fake reviews (a.k.a. astroturfing)

Fake reviews are illegal, look fishy, and drive away potential customers. In addition, review sites have gotten pretty good at weeding out the fakes. Some companies have even faced litigation for posting fake reviews. Relying on false reviews is a bad business strategy, it doesn't work very well, and it doesn't reflect the care you put into the rest of your business. Don't waste your time and money.

AVOIDING FUTURE NEGATIVE REVIEWS

Do ask for feedback offline

If you can defuse negative sentiment at your business location, it's less likely that criticism will end up online. Review cards and customer surveys are great ways to do this, or use our tablet-based kiosks to automate the process. Ask for feedback, and when you get something negative, follow up promptly. This gives you the opportunity to deal with any problems ahead of time and to prevent bad reviews from ending up online.

Do claim your business page on review sites

Most review sites allow you to provide a profile and additional information about your business. This can help you to mitigate negative reviews in advance. If a certain issue comes up regularly, you might describe your business in a way that turns that issue into a positive and offers a solution. For instance, if the wait for your restaurant is long, you can provide a description like, "Regulars consistently line up for our delicious lunch and dinner menus. Reservations recommended."

Do monitor review sites

An important part of preventing negative reviews is thorough and continual monitoring of review sites. Most business owners simply don't have time for this, which leaves them with a serious blind spot. Reputation.com can help you keep tabs on all of the reviews being written so that you can spend your time running your business instead of surfing the Web.

Do learn from accurate criticism

Sometimes you'll get a critique that addresses a genuine shortcoming in your business model. Instead of getting defensive, be thankful for this valuable (and free) advice, and use it to make your business better. Thank the reviewer for their honesty and explain the steps you are taking to improve the situation. Solving the problem is the best way to avoid future negative reviews.

Don't ask your customers to sign "will not review" agreements

Some health professionals have tried "will not review" agreements to try to combat bad patient reviews. This is a sure way to alienate loyal patients and scare off new ones. In addition, these agreements are unlikely to hold up in court. Instead, focus on measures designed to encourage positive reviews.