

SEE INSIDE
an exclusive preview
of how to "respond
to your reviews"

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Respond to your reviews.

In the previous sections, we've discussed the fact that many sites probably already have a listing of your business—whether it's correct or incorrect—and we've gone over the ways to update (or create) that listing. Now that you can be found, you're going to start getting reviewed...and, thus, it's time for us to have a slightly uncomfortable chat about responding to what's being said of you.

What we've found time and again is that most companies are incredibly scared of this process. They feel that they don't have the time or resources to monitor everything being said about them and, as a result, they feel overwhelmed by it all. They also are afraid to engage with an anonymous reviewer—especially when the business doesn't have the luxury of being anonymous itself. A company has to put itself out there and once it's "out there," it's out there for good. It's scary to think that an anonymous person could drag you through the mud, but even scarier to do nothing about it.

For many companies, it's daunting to think of all the different places online where people may be dishing out reviews. (For instance, far beyond Yelp and CitySearch, a random blogger may be trashing your business, and that would be a good thing to know.) Thus, a "cottage industry" (of sorts) has developed, with a host of new experts.

"Online Reputation Management" is a whole practice that has recently emerged to address the ways a company is seen and responded to on the web. Really, it's just a disciplined approach to noting what is being said about a business—and where—and then choosing whether or not to engage in the social discussion.

It doesn't take an expert to manage your online reputation, though. The bottom line is this: You have the power to respond...to both negative and positive reviews.

You know you need to respond, but what's the best way to respond?

You want to have an authentic voice, not come across as a lawyer, a robot, or a PR rep. Respond in your own voice in order to come across as "real." Of course, once you've crafted a thoughtful, personable reply, have someone else look it over before you post. Remember: once it's "out there" it's out there for good.

Take a deep breath, press the "send" button, and start the discussion.

My advice is to treat your reviews as if they were a suggestion box. If you had a suggestion box in your lobby, naturally, you'd want to read every slip in there. Then, you would choose how you wanted to respond to your customers' comments, ideas, suggestions, or critiques—without necessarily committing to contact every single customer.



Online reviews are really no different. In every individual circumstance, you actually have three choices.

1. Don't respond.

You can choose to do nothing. (You need to realize, however, that choosing to do nothing is, in fact, a choice.) That's not necessarily a bad thing—as long as you're engaged on your end by reading the reviews and making adjustments in your business.

2. Respond to positive reviews— either publicly or privately.

Reviewers are generally thrilled to get a response. Thus, replying to praise with a simple "Thank you, Mrs. Smith, for taking the time to write a positive review about us," can help strengthen the bond with your existing customers and, if you choose to post this response publicly, is likely to make you seem like a kind and caring business to new customers.

Once you respond to a review, you're doing exactly what the Internet does best. That is, you're being interactive. You've started a discussion. And that is the cornerstone of social media.

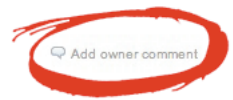
3. Respond to negative reviews—either publicly or privately.

It's natural to feel upset or angered by a negative review and it's easy to take it personally. No matter how hurtful a negative review may be, however, it's up to you to squash those feelings of fear and rejection and put a helpful comment up in response.

If you've remedied a problem or addressed an issue, then it's worth posting publicly to let potential customers know that you've overcome what may be their objection. Perhaps it's as simple as, "Thank you for bringing the state of our restrooms to our attention. We've added extra towels and are now monitoring cleanliness on an hourly schedule." Or maybe it's more vague, like, "We listen to all of our customers and have an open-door policy. We encourage you to come talk to us to resolve your issues."

You can always answer in a professional way so that it elevates your reputation. As long as you show you're willing to make amends, it goes a long way with potential customers. It may even put you above a business with 100% positive reviews.

Regardless of which tack you decide to take, there are specific steps to follow. They're a little different for every site. On most review sites, you have the option of setting up a business owner's account. With this account, you can contact reviewers directly and/or respond to reviews with "owner comments." For example, in Yelp, on the bottom right hand side of every review is a little button that says "Add Owner Comment." On other sites, such as Yahoo Local, anyone is able to respond to a review with their own comments—including you.



Al listened to Abigale and took serious action on the suggestion. He also instituted a checkoff policy by employees to ensure the bathrooms were always clean. He decided no further message was warranted.

Private Message to Don: "Don, its so nice serving fantastic customers like you.

- Thanks for telling the world that you love Al's Pizza" **And/OR Public Message to Don:** "Thanks, Don! We love seeing you on \$2 Tuesdays. Now on Tuesdays we're serving up 2 for one buffalo wings, too!" *Note how the public message also touts a new special to those viewing other than Don.*

Abigale writes



Even though the pizza was kick ass, I don't think I'll be coming back anytime soon. The bathroom was, shall we say, unappetizing

Don writes



\$2 draft beer, super buffalo wings and the pizza is divine. I'm a fan...

Indigo writes



I guess for pizza to be chic these days it needs to be burnt. It was truly awful. The service is friendly and professional.

Stacy writes



Al is fat and gross. It disgusts me that he handled my pizza. Never coming back here!

Suggestions for Al's Pizza

Al's public message to Indigo: "That sounds awful. I wish I was made aware of the problem while you were here, because I would have gotten you a fresh one on the double. Indigo, please ask for me in person next time and I will personally deliver the delicious pizza we are known for." **and/or Al's private message to Indigo:** "Please give us another chance. We'd love to wow you with our famous pizza. Ask for me and remind me of this comment and I will upgrade your pizza to a large for no extra charge!"

Al contacted the site owner to alert them of the inappropriate comment and it was removed ("Stacy" turned out to be Al's ex girlfriend Donna!)

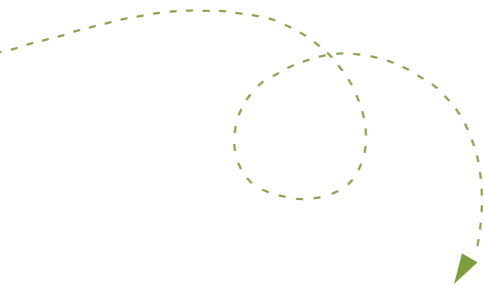
This is the real power of the review. Although they may seem unmanageable at first, you are really in control of your reviews—both good and bad. You may not be able to control what people say about you, but you can absolutely control how you respond.

Actually, you have a fourth option, as well. It's a rare circumstance and can be difficult to address. If a review is truly fraudulent or severely inappropriate, however, you may need to take action.

Contact the site owner to remove the comment completely from the system.

Perhaps an inflammatory remark comes from a competitor, a former employee, a spammer, or an ex-girlfriend. Regardless of the source, each site has their own way of dealing with these issues. The best thing to do is simply contact the site owner directly. Either they'll point you to the right channel or investigate the issue personally.

You've taken some huge steps in the last five tips. You'll be listed higher in search engines, be found on local searches, create lasting bonds with your customers, and start discussions with new prospects online. You are now in control of your online reputation. So, pour yourself a glass and celebrate!



"Little bits of change, over time, add up to big bucks. Along those lines, I advise businesses to continuously make little, actionable, easy-to-implement changes in order to increase their bottom lines. Thus, I offer tips, tricks, helps, and hints to make a meaningful difference in the way you do business. It's all about starting small to eventually create a meaningful 'Chunk of Change.'" @olgamizrahi



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