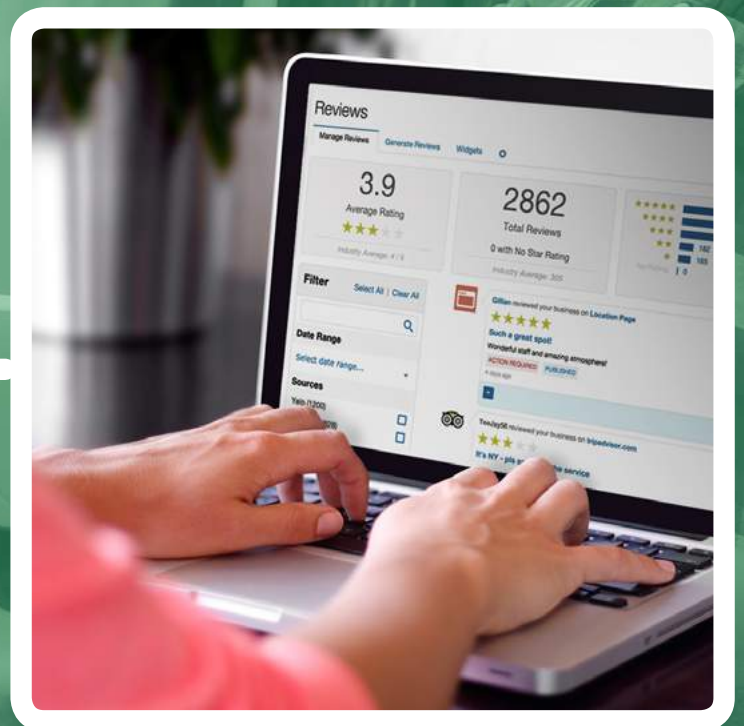


The Ultimate Guide to Online Reviews

Epidemic[™]
Creating **Greatness** Online!



Introduction

Businesses have always had to manage their reputation, all that has changed is the medium, the speed at which information is transmitted and the number of people that are reached by that information.

A business's reputation used to be what they said about themselves in their advertising and the limited reach customers had via word of mouth. Now, customers define businesses by providing real time feedback on review sites, social media, forums and other channels.

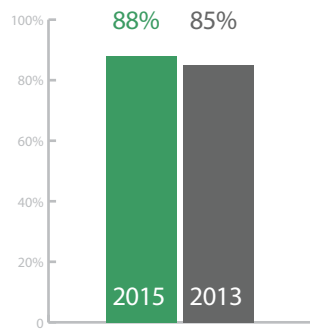
Managing a successful online reputation can be time consuming. You can use products, services or people to cut down on time expenditure, but whatever you do, maintaining the online presence of a business is one of the most worthwhile investments you can make. Of course, one of the most vital aspects of managing any online reputation is getting, monitoring, responding to and amplifying online reviews.



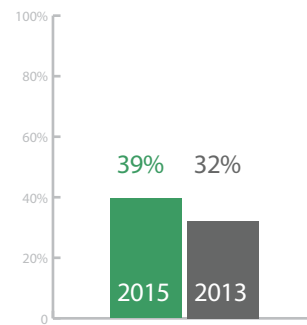
How important are online reviews?

Super duper important. Reviews were bigger in 2015 than they were any year prior. We didn't even know they could get bigger! They're bigger than Drake, The Donald and the Kardashians combined. Customer experience is the new

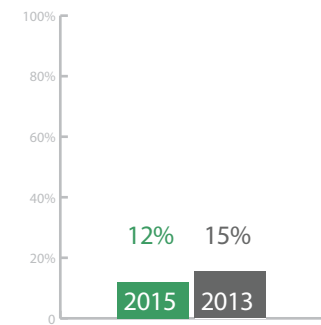
marketing. Well maybe not new, but a return to grassroots in the form of digital. The importance of responding to customers could not be more prevalent. These stats illustrate that reviews are on the minds of all consumers:



88% read reviews to determine quality of a local business (vs. 85% in 2013) ¹



39% read reviews on a regular basis (vs. 32% in 2013) ²



Only 12% do not read reviews (vs. 15% in 2013) ³

Google has given us yet another reason to put our reviews where our mouths are. In Google's markup—the annotated content that appears in search—of a company or product, reviews and ratings can now be included.

Nexus 10 review | Expert Reviews

www.expertreviews.co.uk > Tablets ▾

★★★★★ Rating: 5 - Review by Jonathan Bray

23 Oct 2014 - Google **Nexus 10** review: A brilliant tablet with a wonderful screen and an even more wonderful price. Only a middling battery life holds the ...

“When Google finds valid reviews or ratings markup, we may show a rich snippet that includes stars and other summary info from reviews or ratings”

-Google Developers⁴

Consumers control the conversation

Social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and Foursquare have dramatically changed the way businesses communicate compared to traditional media. A reputation today is more about what customers say about a business and less about what a business says about itself.

Review sites are a two-way conversation favouring the consumer—businesses can no longer broadcast the message they want people to see. There is a democratic nature to reviews; brands, consumers and trolls having an equal voice in a shared space. Customers can rave about a business or let everyone know they had a terrible experience. Earned media—like mentions, reviews and shares—has empowered consumers to advocate for brands they care about. Today, consumers can converse with brands and vice versa. This has created a world of opportunities.

Though some people think of monitoring their reputation as a scary chore or a daunting task, instant feedback is something most business owners are constantly searching for. Responding effectively to negative reviews and amplifying positive feedback is essential for success. Not responding to customers on review sites and social media is worse than having a phone line that goes unanswered, because there are thousands of people witnessing the neglect.

While review sites and social media are essential parts of managing a successful online reputation, monitoring a business's digital profile is about much more than responding to reviews and social media. It's about being proactive and creating an authentic online image with the help of customers. Consumers are complicit in marketing now.



From traditional to digital

No longer are the stories spread on televisions, in commercials or slapped on gritty newspaper print pages the truth. Businesses can tell a story—and they must!—but consumers are now part of the fabric of that story. They are complicit; they are the other half. In a lot of ways, consumers dictate the story. The story a business tells must be consistent with what a consumer experiences. Inconsistencies cause negative reviews; if a dentist promises no wait times and a patient waits for 27 minutes, a negative review could be on the horizon. The marketing needs to match the experience, because consumers see through the bullshit pretty quickly.

Do you still have cable? Do you watch television commercials (not just during the Superbowl)? Get a newspaper delivered to your door? Have a home phone? Do you answer phone calls from numbers you don't recognize? Even if you answered yes to some of these, it's obvious to see that the world is changing and marketing must follow (or better yet, lead). You don't believe Pepsi is good because Beyonce drinks it and you don't buy from telemarketers calling at supper time. And you're a consumer.

More than 50,000,000 people signed the Do Not Call Registry in several weeks. Gone are the days of broadcasting a message to sponge-like consumers. Audiences are now segmented across multiple platforms. Companies that are authentic in their communications (and, of course, provide a valuable product or service) will win.



What makes a good online reputation?

Being present and having a good reputation go hand in hand. Not being listed on a reference site customers use is just as bad as having bad reviews somewhere else. When many of a business's online profiles have user generated content like reviews, their reputation drives tangible results. You need to maximize visibility and reputation simultaneously, building off the genuine customer experience.

Building a consistent online presence and a positive reputation is important for both consumers and search engines. Some of the most important aspects of the online footprint include:

- Number of listings
- Consistency of listing information (name, address, phone)
- Overall sentiment in reviews
- Frequency or current velocity of new reviews
- Overall volume of reviews
- Social activity and engagement (especially with reviewers)

People trust traditional advertising far less than social recommendations and review sites. Customers view this user generated content as more genuine and authentic, expecting them to mirror the actual customer experience. This means that maintaining a reputation is getting increasingly more important.

Nearly 95% of smartphone users have looked for local information online. ⁵ Google has reported that nine out of 10 of those searches lead to action, and more than 50% lead to sales. ⁶ Much of the time, a customer decides to purchase before even entering the store. If a business has a good web presence, customers will come to them rather than their competitor. This includes local listings in order to be found; reputation management in order to be chosen, and; social products for word of mouth. Once they're in the store, 79% use their smartphones inside to look at reviews, compare prices and other metrics, and 74% of them end up making a purchase. ⁷ Of course, you know all this—the trend has been obvious for years and it's likely (significantly) changed your buying habits.

Those numbers make the opportunity clear: maintain a good online reputation, get people in the door and make sales.

A top-down view of a wooden desk. In the center is a tablet with a black bezel. The screen shows a green graphic with a white border and a quote. To the right of the tablet is a spiral-bound notebook with a silver pen resting on it. In the top right corner, a white cup of coffee is partially visible. The background is a light-colored wooden surface.

**“74% of customers trust
online reviews as much as
personal recommendations”**

Reputation drives conversion

What people see online matters. 74% of customers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations—this is a huge shift in thinking that has become more prominent year over year. ⁸ This translates to dollars, as customers put their money where their trust is. A Harvard Business School study found that a restaurant that sees a one star increase on Yelp will see revenues increase anywhere from five to nine per cent.⁹ Money money money...of all the good stuff. I never knew what Biggie was complaining about.

Most businesses find that cultivating their digital profile on their own is too time consuming.

Where they see problems, you see opportunity.



Why are online reviews important?

Ninety-seven percent of consumers find local business info on the web, ¹⁰ and nearly 90% make decisions based on what online reviews say. ¹¹ Every business is constantly being put to the test, and the results of that test are being published.

Review sites like Yelp! and TripAdvisor host over a combined 270 million reviews and if you consider the billion+ users on Facebook and Twitter, there's a good chance your local business clients are the subject of much online chatter. They need to be part of the conversation.



Credibility and trust

I know my dad-joke sense of humour is already grinding your gears, but if you've been reading, it's already pretty clear—consumers trust businesses with online reviews.

When you decide to try a new restaurant for supper, how do you pick a spot? What about when your car breaks down, how do you find a mechanic? When the shower on the second floor of my 104-year-old house became a waterfall on the first floor, I turned off the taps and turned on my computer. Obviously, I'm not the only one—nearly 9 in 10 consumers have read online reviews to determine the quality of a local business, and almost 40% of them do so regularly. ¹²

Even though Jerry's Plumbing was almost \$700 cheaper than Grade A Pipes, I didn't call Jerry. He didn't have a single review and I didn't want to chance shoddy workmanship (the last owners must not have been big internet users). Being listed and being reviewed offer credibility to local businesses. There is the odd Craigslist hero who makes it through the cracks, but for most people, a business with reviews creates instant rapport.



How reviews affect SEO

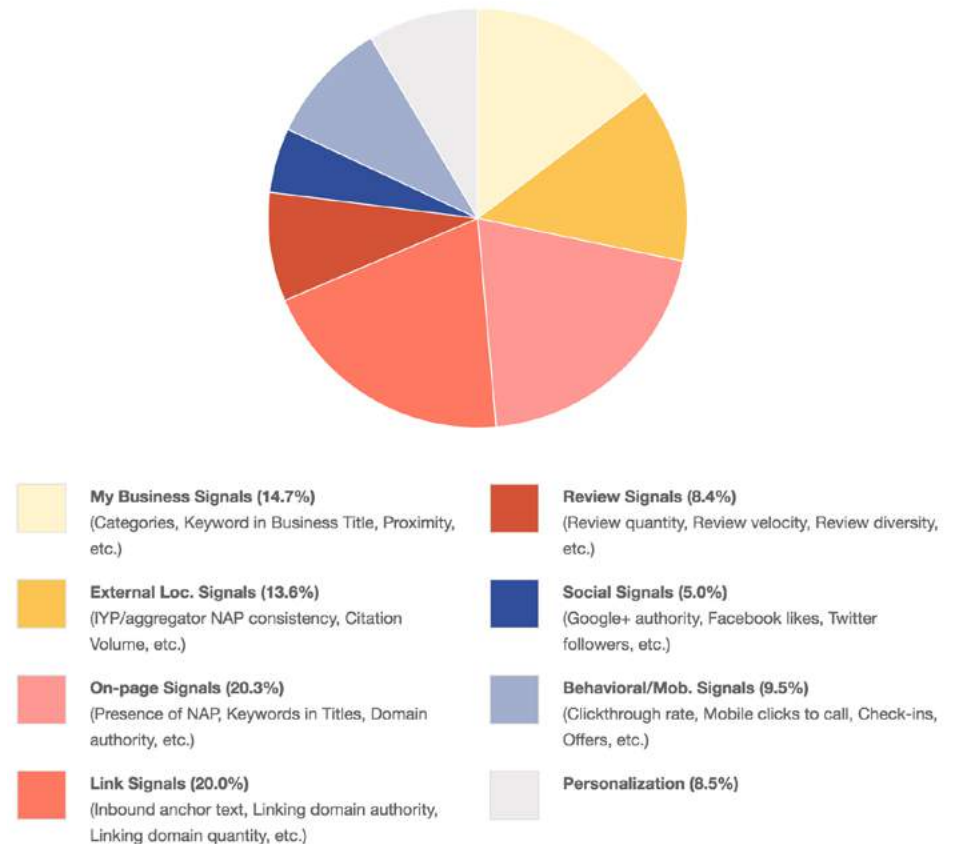
Gone are the days when all a business had to do was throw their [keyword] all over their website to score high in local search rank. For this we're all thankful.

There are tons of factors that affect search engine ranking (SERP factors) and many of them include reviews. ¹³ Some of those are:

- Diversity of third-party sites on which reviews are present
- Authority of third-party sites on which reviews are present
- Quantity of Reviews by Authority Reviewers (e.g. Yelp Elite, Google Local Guides, etc)
- Positive Sentiment in Reviews
- Overall Velocity of Reviews (Native + Third-Party)
- Quantity of Third-Party Traditional Reviews
- Product/Service Keywords in Reviews

Aside from SEO on Google and other search engines, Yelpers can filter their search options to include "highest rated" and "most reviewed." If local businesses lack reviews, they won't show up as a local fave here. Consumers are declaring their purchase intent—71% of searches on Yelp came from mobile devices, meaning that while customers are on the move and ready to buy, they're checking reviews. ¹⁴

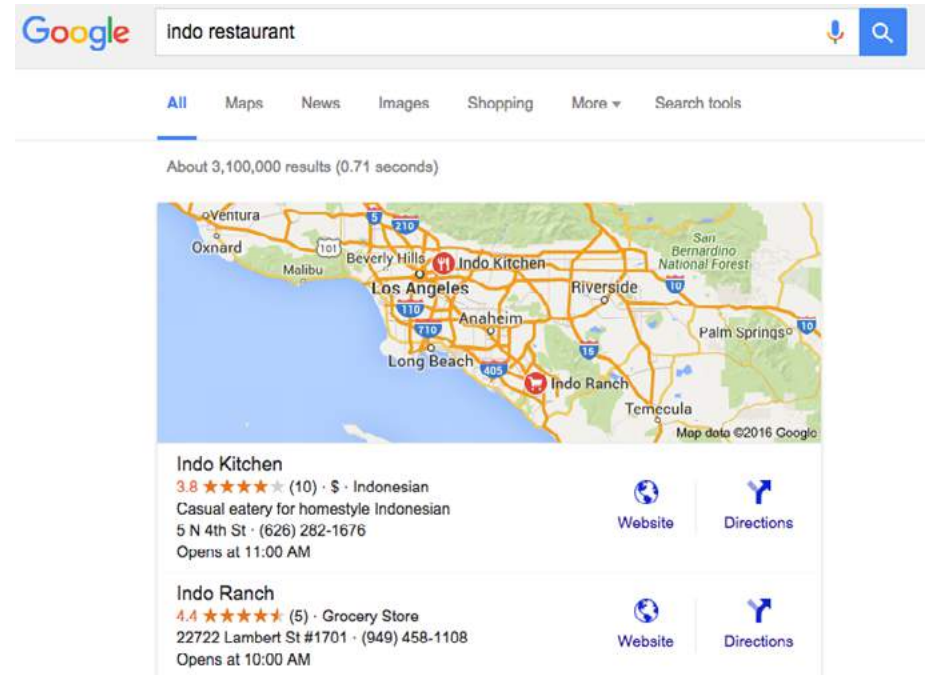
Overall Ranking Factors



Clickability

Related to SEO is what I call clickability. It's like a hotness factor for local businesses. Are you more likely to approach someone who is talking, laughing and conversing with others, or someone who is sitting in a corner with their back to the world? Weird analogy? Regardless, consumers are much more likely to click on search results that have a volume of reviews. These businesses have generated a dialogue—there must be something in there worth checking out, right?! Consumers think so, anyway.

When I visit my parents in Indio, California, and they want to head out for dinner, one of us does a quick Google search: "Indio restaurant." The star ratings pop up immediately on the top level search. Who has more clickability? The business with a better rating, obviously.



How to respond to negative reviews



✉ Albert Einstein

It may be hard to see it as such, but negative reviews can be a gift. For every customer who complains, 26 others remain silent. ¹⁵ That means if a business gets a bad review, there could be dozens of other people who had the same experience and aren't saying anything.

Business owners crave feedback, so what could be better than receiving quick criticism from someone who has tried the business? Of course, there will always be trolls and people that are unpleasable. No matter how great you are doing, there will always be a few people who wish the soup was soupier,

So like Mr. E says, every business is likely to receive the odd bad review—we just can't all be on our A-game all the time. A bad review can even be good for business, if the company responds appropriately and sprinkles a little marketing magic on it.

the rooms were roomier, or the cave was just slightly less cavernous. If you keep that in mind, negative reviews can start to feel a lot less like a kick in the gut, and a lot more like what they really are: a great source of feedback. That defensive feeling? Shake it off. Haters gonna hate. But, negative reviews can alert business owners to problems they didn't know about.

Here are a few things to remember when responding to negative reviews:

Take some time to respond. Not a lot of time, you want people to be able to rely on your quick response, but make sure you don't react purely on emotion. It is hard not to take a bad review as a personal attack, because business owners care so much about their company. While you want to ensure you don't let your emotions take charge, it's important to write with sincerity. Responders can make the situation worse by sounding sarcastic or disingenuous.

Be kind and genuine. While you are responding to one person, and your response should come across that way, remember that the audience is potentially much larger and far-reaching. Not only will other people who visit the review site see the response, but it's possible those people could share the review and response with their own networks.

Be specific. If a customer mentions something in particular about the business, use that in your reply. Not only does this demonstrate that you are not a robot, but it makes the complainant feel heard and understood.


Remember that feedback and criticism can be helpful. This reviewer has taken the time to invest in the business in an attempt to make it better—thank them (even if you don't agree with them). Business owners are always looking for a way to understand the customer experience, and there is no better way than a review. The reviewer may have a relevant point about the business, so it's important to consider the content without going on the defensive. If each negative review says that Zoe is the worst, maybe Timmy needs a talking to. Or a firing.

Offer to take the conversation offline. You would never want to have a less than pleasant dialogue with an unhappy customer in a physical store with other customers around, so why would you do it in front of more watching eyes online? Offering a phone number and a way to connect privately ensures the reviewer that you want to fix the situation for them, not just for the digital audience. Also, if you decide to offer a free or discounted service to make up for the bad experience, it's best not to do this in front of other customers and potential customers—that might encourage bad reviews to get free stuff. You know who loves free stuff? Me. And everyone else.

Do not ignore it. Ever! Imagine a business's competitors were taking out ads saying how terrible they were and the business just chilled. The negative review may not be written by a competitor, but chances are, more relevant people will be reading the review than would be seeing an ad in traditional media. These people have already searched the business and are deciding on a purchasing decision. Make sure local businesses are part of the conversation going on about them, online, every single day.

Remember that the reviewer came into the business to give it a shot. Then they took some of their valuable time to offer feedback. It's possible to turn a naysayer into a brand ambassador. People are not looking for perfection (that's clear when we look at our elected politicians, isn't it?). And as Salvador Dali once said, "Have no fear of perfection—you'll never reach it." Consumers want to feel heard. They want to know a brand or local business is authentic.

Here are a few examples of businesses who got it right, and were able to put a positive customer experience on a bad review.



Comment from Earnhardt Honda D. of Earnhardt Honda
Business Owner

10/4/2013 - Jay - thank you for bringing this situation to our attention. First and foremost, I would like to apologize for any inconvenience we may have caused you, as well as any miscommunication from our Service Department that has led to your distrust in our dealership. Our service technicians are highly-trained and qualified; I am discouraged to hear of your negative experience. Above all else, providing excellent customer service is our main goal and it is unfortunate you were not treated with the respect you deserve. Given the opportunity, I would like to learn more details about your case and to be able to make things right. Please contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Austin Hyde,
Customer Relations Manager
623-934-5211
ahyde@earnhardt.com [Read less](#)

This reply is the simplest and replicable. The manager gives a sincere-sounding apology, doesn't argue the reviewer's claims, and avoids throwing his staff under the bus. They provide contact information in the form of both a phone number and an email, giving the reviewer the ability to reply in a way that works best for them, as well as the ability to take the conversation out of the public eye.

Boloco

Boloco, a small fast food Mexican chain in New England, has many examples of superb review handling. John Pepper, the company's CEO, has become famous for the care with which he treats his customers. The following is an email John sent to a diner who was upset that an item was removed from the menu. The human tone and the detailed explanation regarding the decision is unlike any response I've ever seen. Prepare yourself, you don't see feedback like this every day.

—Original Message—

From: John Pepper [mailto:pepper@boloco.com]
Sent: Tuesday, January 24, 2006 8:31 PM
To: Ben
Subject: RE: Boloco.com: customer response

Ben,

First of all, thanks for your note. We always appreciate hearing from customers... even if we've done something that doesn't make them happy, it helps us a great deal.

We worried a lot about Roasted Veggies and what the reaction would be. The *reason they disappeared in the first place is because so few people actually ordered them*, and the amount of prep time and waste (because they'd sit too long and we'd have to throw them out) stopped justifying keeping them on the menu years ago... but because of the few, and outspoken, customers who lived on them, we kept them in place. You are now the 7th person that *has written about this loss since we took them off three months ago* (not including a handful of our employees who are also quite upset).

From a purely business standpoint, it didn't make any sense to keep the Roasted Veggies. From a customer loyalty standpoint, however, your note (and the others like it) makes me want to get them back on the menu

tomorrow! The challenge we always have is balancing the two... you would be amazed at the number of requests we get on a weekly basis from our customers – obviously, we can't accommodate everyone, but we do listen to everyone, and consider what they say carefully.

I don't know how this will turn out in the months to come. I know I can't promise they will return unless we start hearing overwhelming feedback that *they must. We've taken items off in the past and had no choice but to bring them back (ie. Buffalo chicken is best example where it felt like a riot was about to take place)*... so far, this hasn't been one of those items.

I hate to even suggest trying the tofu, if you are in fact a vegetarian. My wife is, and that's what she gets religiously. It's not your standard tofu, it has spice, *flavor, and people love it!*

Other vegetarians will get the fajitas, though I agree with you are far different than the Roasted Veggies.

And finally, others will just get any of the items we sell "as is", which is to say without chicken or steak. Most of our menu items start vegetarian, and only when you add chicken or steak do they become otherwise.

I am sorry I don't have the answer you are looking for. To try and make up *for this, and to give you a few visits on us to possibly find something else that gets you excited, send me the 16 digit code on the back of your Boloco card (you can pick one up if you don't have one, and send it to me then) and I'll add some Burrito Bucks on there for you to use. It's the least we can do, and maybe you'll find something that works. If not, we will hope that something we do in the future brings you back to our restaurants – we have sincerely appreciated your business and hope we'll find a way to earn it back soon.*

Cheers,
John

Here's another example from Boloco. This one is unique in that the restaurant was able to handle the criticism before the customer had even left the establishment. A customer sent out a tweet complaining that the music playing at a nearby Boloco was too loud. Marketing noticed the tweet right away and called the restaurant and told them to turn the music down, so the restaurant did. Marketing then provided a description of the woman (from her Twitter picture), and had a cookie delivered to her. They then retweeted her with the addition of the word "done."

Take a second to imagine being the person who sent that tweet out. You'd be completely wowed, right? She was. The customer sent out a tweet praising Boloco, which then many of her followers starting talking about and sharing. She then wrote a blog post on the experience, the content of which has since spread to books and other blog posts, including this e-book! Boloco turned a noise complaint into Internet fame for their restaurant.



How to respond to positive reviews

You can teach businesses how to respond to a bad review, but what about a good one? Many of the principles remain the same—be courteous, thank the reviewer and take some time to develop a thoughtful response. But, there are some key differences. Here are a few things you should make sure your business clients know about responding to positive reviews. Cars.com recently conducted a study of 10,000 randomly selected automotive dealership reviews on their site. It showed that dealers who responded to ALL reviews, not just the negative ones, received the highest ratings and were the most popular.

Share the review. Put those babies to work. Of course I'm not advocating child labour, we're talking about reviews, silly. These are testimonials for the digital age, and if you ask me, more compelling than an infomercial (though I have a Magic Bullet in my cupboard). It only makes sense to use good reviews for marketing. Customer experience is marketing, and with the number of consumers who search for a business before they ever even enter it still on the rise, this has never been more true.

Determine what's of value. Let me prove my Canadian-ness with this example. A restaurant owner—Zadie— might think that the best thing on her menu is the poutine, but what if every review talks about the beaver tails? Well, maybe she should start pushing these in her marketing a little, it's obviously what

consumers want. Or, it could be an indication that not enough people know about the poutine, and Zadie might want to offer consumers a special. Regardless of how it works, business owners are often very close to their work and can struggle to recognize what consumers really like. Reviews are the no-nonsense way to decipher the true customer experience.

Get personal. Did the reviewer mention something specific about the business? Without letting the comment get too long, share a personal anecdote or offer a shared opinion. If the reviewer loves the decor in your office, thank them and tell them where the inspiration comes from. Acknowledging particular points from the review ensures the author that you read, understood and internalized their feedback.

Commend staff if they are mentioned explicitly. We're always being told how important customer service is, and our data reinforces that notion. In our database of over 1.6 million online reviews, the words "service," "friendly" and "rude" appear in 40% of reviews. It's clear that customer service is essential in setting a business apart, so reward staff who go the extra mile to make the company extra special. The ones who would walk 500 miles... then 500 more...etc. Lauding staff that exceeds expectations is good for morale and will help perpetuate the good service.

Ask for reviews. The average number of reviews written about the typical business has increased each year. While that is good news for companies promoting themselves through reviews and review sites, the average business still doesn't receive many reviews per year. The best way to get more? Ask! This can be done in many different ways, depending on the structure of the business—at the till on the way out, a follow up email, a sticker in the window or automated software. We'll dig more into that next. When a company's got a good thing going, it always pays to keep the ball rolling.

Responding to reviews, positive and negative, are key elements of modern day customer service. Good customer service is good business.



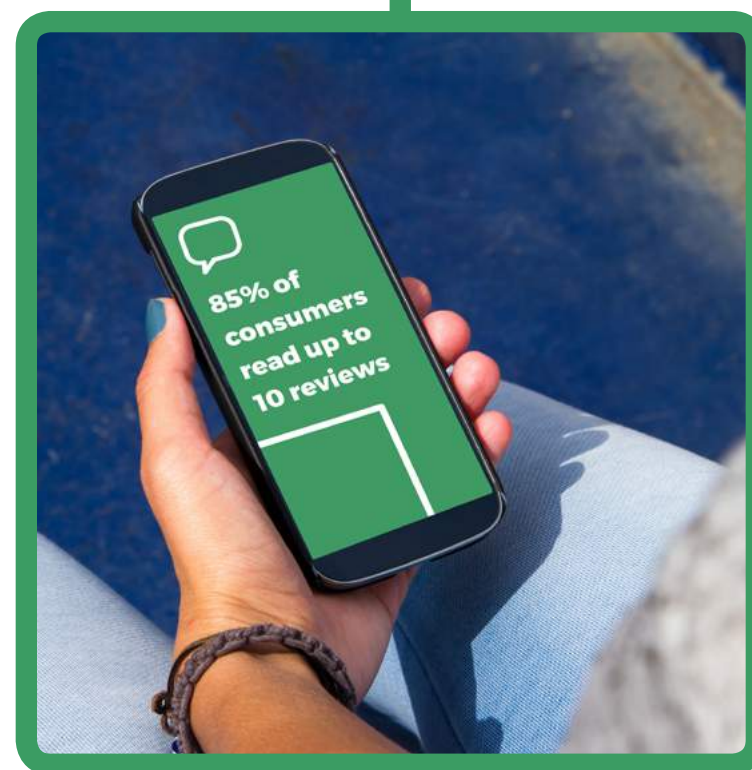
How to get more reviews

You knew it before you read (skimmed? Opened? Downloaded? Whatever, just do me a favour and pretend like you read it) this book, but now you're more convinced than ever—online reviews are mission critical for local businesses. Of course, not only do local businesses need reviews, but they need lots of them and a constant influx.

Because 85% of consumers read up to 10 reviews and there is a greater proportion of consumers who now read more than 20 reviews, it's all about that quantity. ¹⁶ According to Reevoo stats, 50 or more reviews per product can mean a 4.6% increase in conversion rates. ¹⁷ Maybe it's just because I'm a marketer, but the thought of increasing my conversion rate by nearly 5% sounds almost like winning the lottery. Of course, no one is digging back years to seek out positive reviews—whatever is at the top is surely going to be the most read. One of the best things about reviews is knowing what a business is like (from the eyes of contemporaries) right now.

So you get it. But how can you help your clients get more reviews?

Make sure their listings are accurate. When customers search a business, it should be easy to find. Don't give customers any obstacles to leaving a review—search, find, write. We, of course, offer some top notch listing services that are key to getting any business found online.



Set up profiles on multiple review sites.

If customers can't find a business, they definitely won't be leaving reviews, so make sure your local business clients are listed on a variety of review sites. The ideal list varies by industry, but Yelp, Facebook and Google are some of the basics for every industry. Picking and choosing review sites can be dangerous—you can't anticipate where consumers will search

for the information. Make sure consumers can find reviews where they are looking, not just where you think they should be. Usually it doesn't take long to set up profiles on these directory sites, so err on the side of making too many.

Ask. This is like the love story everyone knows, where two best friends fall in love and say things like "It was there all along, we just never knew it." So although painfully obvious (especially for those of us forced to sit through the rom com), local businesses who ask for reviews are much more likely to get them. No matter how much they love a business, customers are busy.

Make customers aware. Putting up visible suggestions in the physical business is a good reminder for customers. A sticker in the window that says "Review us on Yelp," a card you can hand to people paying at the till or tent cards on the table. A gentle reminder is always better than a nagging pest.

Use automated software. Send reminders to customers via email and take the legwork out of the business's court. Doing this regularly will help maintain a trickle of reviews, which makes a business more trustworthy than surges every few months. Epidemic has built some of the best review generating software tools on the market—schedule a demo to see it in action.



Listings affect reviews, too

I read a story a while ago that really resonated with me, if you'll indulge me. The story of the Serbian Crown really drove home the significance of online listings for me, which are so closely tied to online reviews. The two are inseparable; love and marriage, peaches and cream, peanut butter and jam, gin and Nykea, listings and reviews. So here we go.

After more than 40 years in business, the Serbian Crown—a restaurant in Washington D.C.—closed its doors for good. The Crown was a place where adventurous diners could order up a plate of kangaroo, bear or even lion meat (yes, surprisingly legally). In early 2012, owner Rene Bertagna experienced a sudden 75% drop off in customer business over the weekend. Being a little off the beaten path, this was the time he did most of his business. The slump continued. And continued. Bertagna had to lay off staff and he puzzled why his lion delicacy was no longer a “mane” event.

Finally, one of Bertagna's regulars phoned him to ask why he was closed Saturday, Sunday and Monday. The 74-year old from Northern Italy had heard of the world wide web the kids talked about, but he'd never been on Google (I know, right!?). As it turned out, Google was misreporting the Crown as closed on the weekends. This was a fatal problem, as potential diners who searched the restaurant saw the listing pop up with a red “closed” sign. Bertagna hired someone to help him fix his listing, but, alas, it was too late. The Serbian Crown closed its doors for good.

An extreme example of incorrect listings gone awry, a version of this scenario takes place every day. Sometimes it's the wrong hours, incorrect address or a case of the missing phone number. Getting reviews is essential. Being listed (properly) on sites that host reviews, critical.

Why are online reviews important?

Not all reviews are created equal. While each business has vertical specific review sites they need to be listed on, there are a few sites that every company needs to be found on. Those include Google, Yahoo, Bing, Facebook and Yelp. Here's where we're going to give you some help with Yelp. ¹⁸

Yelp reviews are designed to help people find great local businesses like dentists, hair stylists and mechanics. It has become so popular over the last decade that more than 89 million users a month have been recorded reviewing local business just on their mobile device alone. Buying intent is made on a mobile—consumers are on the go and looking to consume.

Those consumers want to help others like them, hence the whole review process. Consumers who review businesses and leave business reviews on Yelp have become known widely as “yelpers.” Yelpers are gaining lots of attention—South Park produced an episode all about Yelp where they joked about some...unsavoury practices and Post Films created a documentary called the Billion Dollar Bully. Neither portrays Yelp in a particularly favourable light, but regardless of perception, there's no debating that local businesses need to be on Yelp. Yelpers leave reviews to help others in the community make purchasing decisions, and it's important for your local business clients to keep an eye on them.



71%

of **searches** on Yelp came from mobile devices across the globe.



56+%

of Yelp **content** (reviews and photos) was generated on mobile devices.

Why Yelp matters

Yelp matters because it is too-big-to-fail. I don't believe in that too big to fail nonsense, but Yelp has got the sticky factor and a core of loyal followers. As the world's largest outlet for online reviews grows, it might be time for all small businesses to start caring about what is said online; and more specifically, about their Yelp reviews. Consumers aren't going to give a small business any attention if all they see is negativity surrounding their Yelp review page.

Yelp scores nearly 30% higher than it's next leading competitor in terms of most frequently used review sites. With almost half of consumers using Yelp, local business clients can't ignore the giant. Growing over 140 million dollars between 2013 and 2014, Yelp is set to continue on its growth.¹⁹

WHICH REVIEW SITES DO CONSUMERS USE?

MOST NAME YELP AS THE REVIEW SITE THEY MOST FREQUENTLY USE TO SEARCH FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES.

#1 YELP 44%

#2 TRIPADVISOR 12%

#3 ANGIE'S LIST 8%

#4 CITYSEARCH 6%

#5 YP.COM 4%

The downside of Yelp reviews

Many small businesses don't like Yelp, as their algorithm is ambiguous, and can surface negativity towards small businesses. Yelp has been scrutinized for favoring businesses who pay for advertisements on their site and ridiculing the businesses who refuse. Ed Wells is a business owner in Jupiter, Florida (his restaurant is out of this world), who owns a local restaurant, Chowderheads. Wells contacted Yelp about his reviews, and says he was cursed out for not buying advertisements on the site. According to him, shortly after he contacted Yelp, a load of negative reviews started to pour into his business's Yelp page.



4/13/2013

I had a long day at work and I was hungry and as I was driving by I saw this restaurant. I said to myself I might give this a chance. Worst decision I made in my life was to even step foot of that store. The store was very dirty I saw flies everywhere and it smelled a lot like I was at a pet store instead of a restaurant. I sat down and looked at the menu. I ordered lobster and one of the waiters was ignoring me when I said I was done looking at the menu. After 10 minutes the waiter came and I told him I wanted lobster.

IT TOOK THEM 1 HOUR JUST TO PREPARE MY FOOD. I GOT SO PISSED OFF. AS I WAS WAITING FOR MY FOOD I SAW TWO RATS HAVING SEX IN THE CORNER

The waiter didn't even give me a fork and knife and I told him to give me a fork or I will call the manager. He told me that he was very sorry and gave me a fork.

I started to check the food and then I saw that one of the flies were in my dish and I almost accidentally ate it. Then I had to bribe to waiter to give me some money or else I would tell the manager so he gave me a good \$50.

Don't trust this restaurant, it is corrupt and there food are disgusting.

Was this review ...? [Useful](#) [Funny](#) [Cool](#)

[Bookmark](#) [Send to a Friend](#) [Link to This Review](#)

Comment from Edwin W. of Chowderheads 4/16/2013 [Hide](#)



There is no way this person eat at my restaurant. This review is totally out of line. We don't have flies and we don't have rats having sex in the corner. Nobody waits 1 hour for a meal especially this time of year.. With season over my staff has been cleaning everything in site. The place is pristine clean, our seafood is flown in fresh every other day from Boston.

In addition to this, like the claim of other small businesses, there was reason to believe that the positive reviews about his company were being filtered out.²⁰ Although Yelp denies there is any truth to this scenario, there are many stories similar to Ed Wells' story in Florida. Cliff Biggers, who had enjoyed a 4.5 star rating on Yelp, said: "Our ratings began to drop on Yelp soon after we declined the advertising package that was strongly promoted to us by Yelp. Suddenly all of our favorable ratings were filtered out, and favorable customer reviews stayed up on the site for a few hours or less before they, too disappeared into the NOT RECOMMENDED section."²¹ Small businesses feel out of control in maintaining their review portfolio on Yelp because they don't understand it. Nobody does, for that matter.

Darnell Holloway, head of Yelp's business outreach offers some insight on Yelp's algorithm. "How it works is that it's a computer algorithm and it analyzes every single review that gets written based on quality, reliability, and each user's activity on Yelp. So it can actually see a lot of back-end data about what each person who's writing reviews does on the site and what their habits are." Good in theory doesn't always play out as good in practice, and business owners are often not thrilled to find positive customer reviews sink to the non recommended section.

Still, as Yelp becomes a more dominant social-local platform for online reviews, it's time for businesses to recognize the power of Yelp reviews. With over 142 million users on Yelp each month and a major influence on google's local search engine results, Yelp can really help or hurt small businesses. Recognizing the significance of a positive presence on Yelp can give a small business an advantage over the businesses who refuse to pay attention to their Yelp reviews! Browsing online reviews is the first step for many consumers in the buying process, and Yelp has proven to be the starting point. Pay attention to online reviews, and let Yelp help.

The Top 10 Review Sites

These review sites are relevant for almost every business in nearly every vertical. Where possible, companies should claim their listing, as well as being aware of customer chatter on all sites. Aside from these 10 key sites, each vertical needs to address industry specific reviews, like TripAdvisor, DealerRater, Cars.com, etc.

Site	About
Google My Business	Google My Business puts business data on Search, Maps and Google+ so that customers can easily find a location from desktop, mobile or anything in between. Google reviews show up in search and are known to bolster SEO, so they are essential to the credibility of all businesses.
Yelp	Founded in 2004, Yelp has become synonymous with online reviews. Yelp had a monthly average of 86 million unique visitors who visited Yelp via their mobile device in Q4 2015, which is a clear indication of purchase intent.

Facebook	Consumers increasingly interact with brands through social channels, and there is no social platform more prevalent than Facebook. It follows, then, that the reviews on Facebook are seen and shared by many potential customers. x
Glassdoor	On Glassdoor, employees share what a company is like on the inside, so it's a great resource for potential hires and new customers.
Bing	As well as being a place where users can leave reviews, Bing aggregates reviews from other sources. So although it may be easily forgotten, Bing reviews are still relevant.
FourSquare	With 55 million monthly active users, Foursquare is still a powerful force to monitor customer loyalty and feedback.
Amazon	We may think of it as a virtual library, but Amazon is for much more than book reviews. For companies who do any amount of e-commerce, Amazon is a key source of information.

<u>Angie's List</u>	Angie's List is a service listing and review site that offers user-based rankings and reviews of service professionals in local areas. Because it is not a free site, Angie's List is known to be less filled with rambling reviews and spam.
<u>Aabaco</u>	Formerly Yahoo! Local, Aabaco allows users to post reviews of businesses using the well-known five-star rating system. Although (definitely) secondary to Google, Yahoo! still receives about 10% of search engine share, so definitely worthwhile.
<u>Better Business Bureau</u>	Company profiles on BBB contain a short company bio and a history of complaints made about the business, as well as an A - F rating.



Stats about online reviews

1. 92% of consumers now read online reviews vs. 88% in 2014 ([Bright Local](#))
2. 40% of consumers form an opinion by reading just one to three reviews vs. 29% in 2014 ([Bright Local](#))
3. Star rating is the number one factor used by consumers to judge a business ([Bright Local](#))
4. 44% say a review must be written within one month to be relevant. This highlights the importance of recency in reviews! ([Bright Local](#))
5. Only 13% of consumers consider using a business that has a one or two star rating ([Bright Local](#))
6. 68% say positive reviews make them trust a local business more vs. 72% in 2014 ([Bright Local](#))
7. 43% of consumers search a business by reviews at least one time per month vs. 38% in 2014 ([Bright Local](#))
8. 60% of consumers have searched a business at least six times per year vs. 56% in 2014 ([Bright Local](#))
9. There has been a considerable decrease in those that “never” search for a local business online, down from 22% to 9%, and an increase in those that search for a local business every day, up from 7% to 14% ([Bright Local](#))
10. 73% have read online reviews on a desktop ([Bright Local](#))
11. 38% have read online reviews on mobile internet vs 24% on a mobile app ([Bright Local](#))
12. 29% have read reviews on a tablet ([Bright Local](#))
13. 33% believe all local businesses should have websites designed for mobile vs. 25% in 2013 ([Bright Local](#))
14. 61% are more likely to contact a local business if they have a mobile optimized site ([Bright Local](#))
15. 40% of consumers form an opinion by reading one to three reviews, vs. 29% in 2014 ([Bright Local](#))
16. 73% of consumers form an opinion by reading up to six reviews ,vs. 64% in 2014 ([Bright Local](#))
17. 88% of consumers form an opinion by reading up to ten reviews vs. 84% in 2014 ([Bright Local](#)). This means it’s important to have a large body of reviews, as customers are reading more reviews now than in all years past.
18. Only 12% are prepared to read more than 10 reviews vs. 16% in 2014 ([Bright Local](#))
19. 26% of consumers say it’s important that a local business responds to its reviews ([Bright Local](#))
20. Only 14% of consumers would consider using a business with a one or two star rating ([Bright Local](#))
21. 57% of consumers would use a business with a three star rating ([Bright Local](#))
22. 94% of consumers would use a business with a four star rating ([Bright Local](#))
23. 51% of consumers will select a local business if it has positive reviews ([Bright Local](#))

24. 80% trust reviews as much as personal recommendations, vs. 83% in 2014 ([Bright Local](#))
25. 48% will visit a company's website after reading positive reviews ([Bright Local](#))
26. 23% will visit the business premises directly after reading positive reviews ([Bright Local](#))
27. 9% of consumers will phone a business after reading positive reviews ([Bright Local](#))
28. Reliability (27%), expertise (21%) and professionalism (18%) remain the most important attributes to consumers ([Business2community](#))
29. More consumers are interested in "good value" than before, while less are concerned about the "expertise" of a business ([Bright Local](#))
30. Word of mouth is still the most popular method of recommendation for consumers despite a 2% drop year over year ([Bright Local](#))
31. On average, a consumer will look at over 10 information sources before making a purchase ([Bazaarvoice, 2012](#))
32. Over half of young people aged 18 to 34 say they trust online reviews more than the opinions of friends and family ([Bazaarvoice, 2012](#))
33. 88% of online shoppers incorporate reviews into their purchase decision ([webrepublic](#))
34. Consumers who read reviews on a smartphone are 127% more likely to buy than those who read reviews on desktops ([webrepublic](#))
35. Reviews are especially important for local searches as they influence up to 10% of the ranking ([webrepublic](#))
36. Only reviews from friends and family are trusted more than online review. Reviews from experts and celebrity endorsements are less trusted than online reviews ([webrepublic](#))
37. 30% of consumers assume online reviews are fake if there are no negative reviews ([webrepublic](#))
38. The three online platforms dedicated to reviews with the most global traffic are: yelp, tripadvisor, foursquare ([webrepublic](#))
39. 58% of consumers said they have recently (within the past five years) began leaving more and more online reviews based upon customer service ([reprevive](#))
40. 100% of customers who make over \$150,000 annually claim to leave reviews when it comes to a poor customer service experience ([reprevive](#))
41. Reviews of 50 or more, per product can mean a 4.6% increase in conversion rates ([Econsultancy](#))
42. 63% of customers are more likely to make a purchase from a site which has user reviews ([Econsultancy](#))
43. 105% customers are more likely to purchase while visiting, when site visitors interact with both reviews and customer questions and answers, and spend 11% more than visitors who don't interact ([Econsultancy](#))
44. Reviews produce an average of 18% uplift in sales ([Econsultancy](#))

- 45. 64% of consumers would read online reviews when purchasing technology items ([Econsultancy](#))
- 46. 68% of consumers trust reviews more when they see both good and bad scores ([Econsultancy](#))
- 47. Between one and three bad online reviews would be enough to deter the majority (67%) of shoppers from purchasing a product or service ([Econsultancy](#))
- 48. 86% of people will hesitate to purchase from a business that has negative online reviews ([business2community](#))
- 49. Number of reviews posted every minute by Yelp users is 26,380 ([business2community](#))
- 50. If a business resolve its issue quickly and efficiently, 95% of unhappy customers returns back to your business ([Social Media Today](#))

Tools and resources

Each review site is unique and takes care and attention to list and maintain properly. Here are review guidelines for some of the most critical platforms:

- Google My Business
- Yelp
- Foursquare
- Citysearch
- YP.com

Manually maintaining listings and monitoring reviews on every site is daunting. My boss always harps on me to not bring a problem to the table without a solution, so of course, I wouldn't dream of doing that to you. We built our reputation on building reputations, developing software to help.

- **Reputation Management**
 - » Reputation management software to help local businesses monitor all aspects of their online reputation.
- **Review Monitoring**
 - » A vital piece of Reputation Management is review monitoring. Online comments can be broken down into two categories: structured and unstructured mentions. Our system hunts for both, making it simple to track what people are saying wherever they're saying it.

- **Review Generation**
 - » Review Generation empowers our clients to generate new reviews, showcase testimonials on multiple platforms, manage customer feedback and monitor valuable review statistics. You can request reviews individually or in bulk, add a widget to your website and amplify on relevant third party sites. More reviews more money!
- **Listing Visibility**
 - » Remember how I said listings come hand in hand with reviews? Reputation Management monitors a majority of online directories, review sites and social networks. Sources are specific to the business's category, so whether your clients are restaurants on Zomato or car dealerships on DealerRater, they'll be sure to get the data they're looking for.
- **Dedicated Account Manager (concierge)**
 - » We will do all the work for you. You will have a dedicated account manager to coordinate all Day to Day work and be your single point of contact (no hard to reach call centers here). Our hands on approach guarantees your success.

Conclusion

Online reviews have moved from “nice to have” to essential. As customers look to these sites for feedback, updating profiles, responding to reviews and engaging customers becomes increasingly more important. Maintaining positive word of mouth online is digital age customer service.

In 2017, local businesses will spending \$80B on digital marketing solutions and services, with reputation management boasting \$1.3B of that chunk, up 216% from 2015 (Borrell). Social media marketing will be up a 248% from last year, taking up \$2.2B of the pie. While online reviews have been prevalent for many years, business owners and consumers alike are now recognizing the gamut of challenges and opportunities.

Reviews are the new black. Generating reviews, responding to reviews and engaging consumers online is essential for the success of local businesses.



About the author and designer



Nykea Behiel is the Managing Editor of the marketing team at Epidemic. With a passion for driving leads through content marketing, Nykea curates content for the blog, website and social media. Having been in the local digital space for a few years now, she can throw around slang—SERP, API, SMB—and have a vague idea of what it means. She's been retweeted by Margaret Atwood, photographed with Snoop Dogg and allegedly ate in the same restaurant as JFK. She has a very poorly behaved miniature golden doodle that occasionally makes his way to the office. Hard to say how any of these things are relevant.

"Nykea? Name sounds familiar. I think she works on the third floor."

—Steven Hancock, works at Epidemic



Cara Dand is the Lead Graphic Designer of Epidemic's marketing team. Cara is responsible for the design direction of all marketing communications materials. Translating content writing into imagery and combining the text and images into a complimentary layout/publication is what really gets her excited.

"Cara? I once bribed her to make a logo in exchange for a sandwich"

—Rylan Morris, also works at Epidemic