
FEATURING NEVER-BEFORE-SEEN INDUSTRY RESEARCH

DELIVERING 5-STAR RESTORATION EXPERIENCES

*An analysis of 1000+ bad online reviews
in the restoration industry*



BY THE KNOWHOW TEAM

“

THOSE WHO DON'T LEARN FROM HISTORY
ARE DOOMED TO REPEAT IT

”

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WHY ONLINE REVIEWS ARE MORE
IMPORTANT THAN EVER BEFORE

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

WHY ONLINE REVIEWS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER BEFORE

Businesses today have more tools than ever before to spread awareness about their product or service. From billboards to commercials, search engine ads to Facebook Video, the opportunities to get the word out about the services you provide have never been more plentiful. Yet with all these options at our disposal, there's one marketing avenue that beats every other channel by miles, and it happens to be as old as language itself. We're talking about good, old-fashioned word-of-mouth.

No celebrity endorsement or Super Bowl advertisement has the same level of influence in someone's perception of a brand than a real story from a real person. Research shows that [91% of people](#) regularly or occasionally read online reviews, and 84% trust online reviews as much as a personal recommendation. It turns out that trust still goes a long way these days, and consumers are far more likely to trust real words from real people, whether positive or negative, than paid words from a brand trying to make another sale.

The internet era has done a great job facilitating these conversations, with sites like Google, Angie's List, Yelp and more giving real people an opportunity to share their real experiences with businesses, either as a



commendation or a word-of-warning to future customers. Online reviews have put customers in the driver's seat of the contractor-consumer relationship. Armed with a keyboard, your customers have the power to ruin your business more than ever before, or provide it with rocket fuel to blow past your competitors. Implementing strategies to increase the quality of online reviews must be a top priority.

These online reviews pack a serious punch, and have shifted power away from companies with the highest marketing budgets, and into the hands of ordinary people, who can use their personal testimony to either prop up a business that does an excellent job, or cut down one that missed expectations.

EVEN 1 NEGATIVE
REVIEW CAN
DRIVE AWAY 22%
OF POTENTIAL
PROSPECTS

For many business owners, especially those in the restoration industry, this isn't news. We've all seen how positive reviews can lead to a sharp increase in new sales leads, and have felt the sting of negative reviews on our ego, staff morale, and wallets. Whether a customer is complaining about a job done poorly, a bad run-in with subcontractors, or simply erratic driving from a new employee, these bad reviews can have a massive impact on your ability to win new customers, attract and retain top talent, and stay on an insurance provider's good side.

Individually, positive or negative reviews can preserve in time the admirable story of an employee that went the extra mile, or a disastrous encounter thanks to a receptionist that missed her morning cup of coffee. In aggregate, these reviews can influence tens of thousands of dollars in potential business. A report from Harvard Business Review found that every 1-star increase on Yelp led to a 5-9% increase in revenue – no small impact. This equates to roughly \$100,000 of additional income for a business accumulating around a million dollars in gross revenue.

Conversely, research shows that one negative review alone - one! - can drive away 22% of potential prospects, and the impact only increases from there. To bring this home, if your business does \$2M in revenue a year, that one negative review could cost you 29 potential jobs. If your average job size is \$8,000, then that's \$232,000 of lost revenue every year, because of one bad review.

To say that each positive or negative review could have an impact on future business would be an understatement.

KnowHow is a software tool designed to improve the consistency and quality of project outcomes. With so much at stake, we wanted to deeply understand what factors lead to bad online reviews in the restoration industry.

Was it poor workmanship? Major project delays? Bad customer service? If a restoration company understands their biggest risks, they can address, target, and eliminate issues before they arise, potentially avoiding lost revenue and creating a competitive advantage for themselves in the market.

In order to accomplish this, we captured and analyzed data from the most popular online reviews platform: Google Reviews. Over the course of our research, we collected over 1,000 1-star reviews from restoration companies in all 50 U.S. States, and then sought the perspective of some of the industry's top experts, on a mission to discover the common factors that contribute to a company being publicly shamed by former customers, and how you can avoid a similar fate.

Our analysis proved insightful, surprising, and at times more eyebrow-raising than we were expecting. During our research, we came across stories ranging from the mundane (complaints about no-show appointments) to the truly wild (public drunkenness, theft, and accusations of marital infidelity). Don't worry, we'll share all the best ones with you, and for better or worse, we've chosen to keep everything anonymous.

The restoration industry often attracts customers who have experienced stressful situations such as fires, floods, or even death. Our analysis not only provides context into the thinking, values, and desires of these types of customers, but also gives restoration companies a clear and actionable roadmap to avoid common pitfalls. By using this information, companies can mitigate risk and provide a world-class experience to customers who might be experiencing one of the worst weeks

An analysis of 1,000 bad reviews in the restoration industry

-  1,000 1-star reviews analyzed
-  Data pulled from 50 US States
-  Industries surveyed include restoration, water mitigation & mold remediation
-  7 distinct categories of complaints emerged
-  5 leading experts consulted with over 80 years industry experience

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SMART PEOPLE LEARN FROM THEIR MISTAKES, BUT WISE PEOPLE LEARN FROM THE MISTAKES OF OTHERS

of their life.

We'll unpack all the patterns and common failure points we discovered, diving deep into the eight most significant factors that led to poor reviews for restoration companies. These include delays, bad customer service, poor communication, price issues, and more. For each, we'll look at the common issues that emerged, where the process broke down that led to organizations falling into these traps, and the steps your business can take to avoid the same fate.

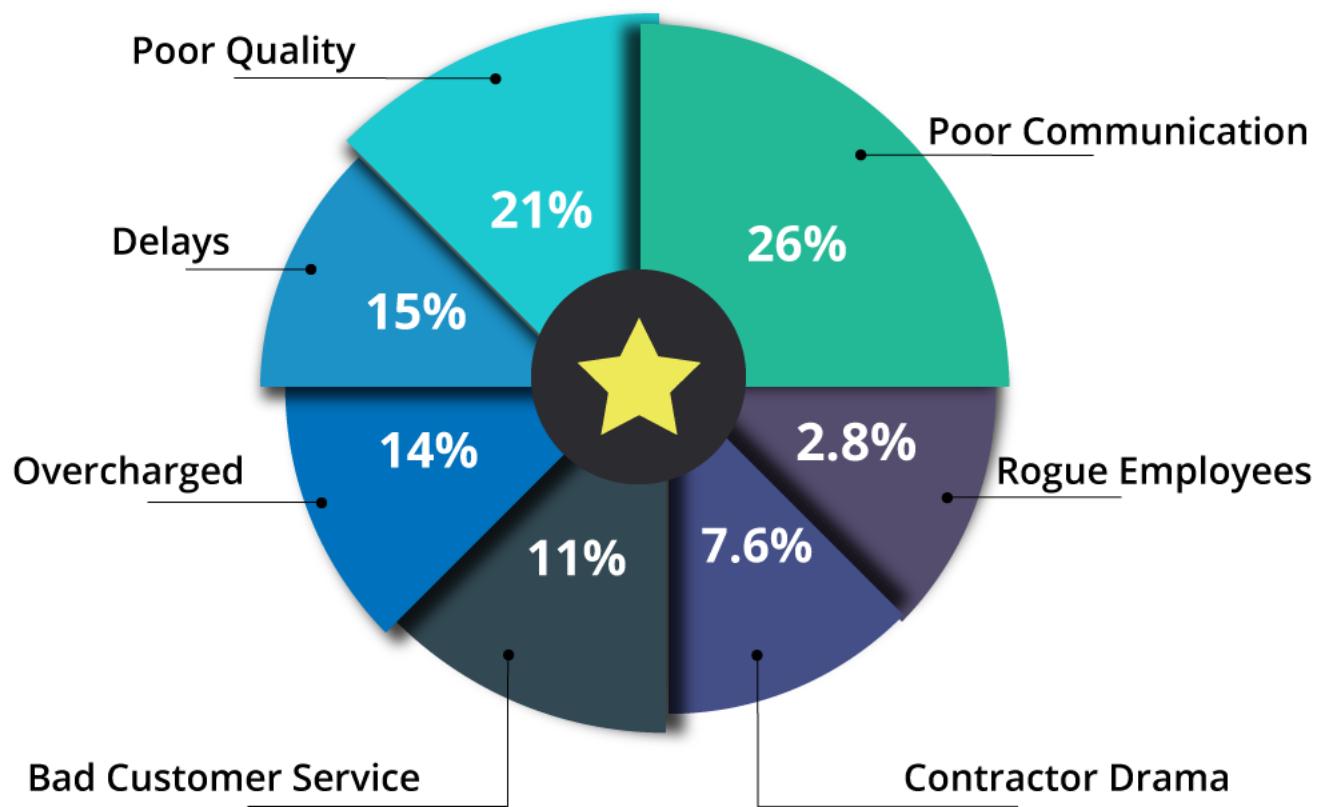
It's said that smart people learn from their mistakes, but wisdom is learning from the mistakes of others. Drawing from over 1,000 painful and expensive mistakes, we seek to offer restoration companies with a plethora of learning material, starting with how to avoid falling victim to the most common problems in the industry.

Note: a quick word on our methodology. For this report, we carefully collected data on over 1,000 1-star reviews on Google in the Restoration Industry. We pulled reviews from all 50 States and analyzed them based on content, objections or complaints listed, and more. In every case, we took at face value the complaint the customer had reported, regardless of whether it had been "responded to" by the business owner, or any subjective interpretations of our own on the legitimacy of the complaint. We chose to maintain the anonymity of the Restoration businesses that received these reviews.

Throughout this report, we quote relevant reviews directly. On occasion, these have been edited slightly for brevity, or to protect the identity of those involved.

The 7 Most Common Complaints

Among 1-Star Reviews of Restoration Companies



2



THE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS
IN THE RESTORATION INDUSTRY
(ACCORDING TO CUSTOMERS)

CHAPTER 2

POOR COMMUNICATION & WORKMANSHIP

THE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS IN THE RESTORATION INDUSTRY (ACCORDING TO CUSTOMERS)

If you had to wager a guess, where would you expect most restoration jobs to break down? Delays? Rogue technicians delivering bad customer service? Negative experiences with insurance?

According to the multitudes of upset customers on Google Reviews we uncovered in our analysis, there were two primary issues that stood out far above the rest.

In fact, 57% of all the complaints we analyzed fell into two categories: poor-quality workmanship provided by technicians, or poor communication between the business and the customer. This will come as no surprise to anyone who has spent time in the industry, but these issues are pervasive and have an outsized influence on whether a project was deemed a success or a failure; a 5-star project, or 1-star disaster. We'll tackle both of them in-depth, starting with the number one contributor to a bad online review in the restoration industry:

THE PRICE OF POOR COMMUNICATION

According to our analysis, the biggest issue that plagues restoration companies today is a breakdown in communication. Anyone who's ever been in a relationship for more than an hour knows that communication problems are inevitable, but the impact of poor communication on a restoration job can be particularly consequential. Narrowing in on the issues cited in our analysis, the vast majority of these complaints stemmed from one of three situations:

- Employees agreeing to meet customers at certain times and then not showing up.
- Major communication breakdowns between the restoration and rebuild teams upon hand-off.
- Management or customer service "disappearing" when a customer had complaints or questions about their bill.

For most of the examples cited in this section, the formula was the same: the restoration business would make a commitment, and then when plans changed, or when more information was needed, they would become unreachable. Countless tales were told of customers taking time off work, or cancelling plans in order to meet an employee, only to be left hanging without warning or any explanation. Oftentimes, multiple calls placed by the customer to reschedule were not returned, or worst of all, rebooked only to once again have the employee not show up. For customers who experienced these "no-shows" from the business, this perceived disrespect by the restoration company was compounded by lost income or vacation time that often accompanied the customer's decision to take the day off work to meet the contractor. In some situations, the review

“ I HAVE CALLED THEM FOR SERVICE NO LESS THAN 5 TIMES TO NO AVAIL. THE THREE TIMES THEY MADE AN APPOINTMENT WITH ME THEY WERE 4 OR MORE HOURS LATE AND DID NOT EVEN BOTHER TO CALL ME.

— Clearwater, FL

was written in real time while the customer was waiting for the contractor to show up or answer the phone, leading them to take their frustration directly to Google Reviews.

Shockingly, there was one communication issue that was so common, we had to create our own category for it: customers never being contacted after asking for a quote. Story after story was told of a customer on a tight timeline (e.g., house currently flooding), reaching out to request an estimate or assessment, only to be left hanging. Unreturned voicemails, promises to send someone out left unmet – a startling 9.4% of all 1-star reviews we analyzed cited businesses failing to follow up with their customers. Talk about losing the game before it even starts – for companies who received reviews like this, potential customers had already negatively impacted their Google Review rating without ever having had the chance to meet them. Their inability to return a phone call or follow through on a commitment lost them business both in the moment, and potentially in the future as well.

There are many reasons stories like this could emerge, from a lack of clear expectations set, to the business not being adequately prepared to handle capacity. Yet, considering how simple it is to pick up the phone, it's a shame that many businesses lose customers like this unnecessarily. Especially when we know how bad reviews can negatively impact future revenue, who knew that not following up with a prospective client could hurt you, both in the moment (lost revenue) and in the future (a bad online review repelling future customers). However, of all the communication issues we came across, these may be the least destructive in nature.

Our analysis was filled with horror stories of customers complaining about selecting a restoration company for a job, having their home quickly gutted, only to be handed off to a renovation team and receive radio silence indefinitely on how the rebuild was going. Customers described living in hotels for months on end, while struggling to maintain contact with the business in charge of reconstruction of their home. Unreturned phone calls or being passed around from employee to employee without any straight answers plagued these customers, who just wanted life to return back to normal. In many cases, usually out of sheer exasperation, the customer would finally just pay out of pocket to bring in a new company to finish the job.

It's important to note that in situations like these, even if the fault and communication breakdown was the result of a third party company in charge of the rebuild, it was the *original restoration*

“

ONCE OUR KITCHEN WAS GUTTED FOR MOLD TREATMENT OUR HOUSE SAT FOR WEEKS WITH NO ACTIVITY. OUR CONTACT WAS NOT RELIABLE, HE WOULD PUSH OUT DATES AND LIE - I WAS IN A HOTEL FROM AUGUST UNTIL DECEMBER.

Augusta, GA

“ TOOK THIS COMPANY FIVE MONTHS TO DO AN 80-SQ. FT VINYL FLOOR REPLACEMENT AND FLOOD REPAIR. I LITERALLY CALLED THEM WEEKLY FOR 2 MONTHS BEFORE IT GOT DONE. VERY SLOW SERVICE, BUT OF COURSE THEIR BILLING IS PROMPT AND THEY'RE HAPPY TO THREATEN ME WITH LEGAL ACTION ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

— North Salt Lake, UT

REGARDLESS OF
WHO WAS AT
FAULT, IT'S THE
RESTORATION
COMPANY THAT
BEARS THE BRUNT
OF A CUSTOMER'S
ANGER

company who bore the brunt of the customer's anger and ultimately the negative Google review. A job well done on the restoration side was not enough to leave a customer satisfied, and communication issues from a separate party often tarnished the entire experience for customers. This means that simply “handing off” a project once your work is complete is not enough. If your business is the first point of contact for the customer, it means they will hold you responsible for the end result, regardless of whose fault a lacklustre final product is.

One of the actions that created some of the highest level of frustration from customers (though unsurprising) is how quickly communication issues vanished entirely once it came time to collect payment for a job. Companies that were difficult to get ahold of during the restoration and construction phase suddenly were very eager to know the status of their payment. In some situations, customers told stories of jobs not even being completed and they were threatened with legal action or liens if they didn't pay up. After being evasive about timelines or progress for weeks or months prior to distributing an invoice, this double standard left customers upset, frustrated, and turning to Google Reviews to make their voices heard, warning others to avoid a fate similar to theirs.

1-STAR WORKMANSHIP

The other beast that consistently reared its ugly head throughout our analysis (29.9% of the time to be precise), were customers complaining about poor-quality workmanship during the restoration or rebuild phases. In addition to turning to Google Reviews to warn others, customers would

turn to insurance providers for rectification, which often forced companies to come back and re-do work, sometimes two or three times, before work was done to a standard every party was satisfied with. These are truly lose-lose scenarios, as it left customers frustrated, obliterated margin for the restoration company, and frustrated insurance adjusters as well (potentially impacting future referrals). By the time the customer was posting their opinion on Google, the 1-star review was a long time coming, guaranteeing that the poorly executed job would continue to haunt the restoration company into the future.

Not included in this category are projects planned poorly, leading to delays, or negative interactions between customers and technicians – this means that almost 30% of all 1-star reviews simply boil down to a customer being left with a product that missed their expectations entirely.

Complaints in this category usually centered around one of three main issues:

- A final product that began to deteriorate in only a few weeks or months.
- Jobs left incomplete.
- General negligence on behalf of the contractor.

Most common among these were staff cutting corners during the repair and rebuild process, either out of laziness or not knowing the right way to do things. In many situations, contractors performed a sub-standard job, which very quickly led to cracks, chips, bubbling, or further repairs that needed to be completed (at the cost of the restorer). Instead of taking action to mitigate a potential molehill before it turned into a mountain, many customers reported restoration companies avoiding the issue, blame-shifting, or completely going silent.

Once again, in many situations it was the second half of the project where things broke down. Customers described demolition and mitigation going according to plan, only for sub-contractors whose role was to come in and “do the easy stuff” to do a poor job, leaving a place much worse than it was originally. Shoddy work, safety violations, and a rushed work job forced customers to reach out to insurance to bring things back to working condition, frustrating both them and the company and damaging the company’s reputation with referral partners in the process.

“

THEY REPLACED THE FLOORING 2.5 YEARS AGO. SIX MONTHS AFTER THE INSTALL, I CONTACTED THEM TO LET THEM KNOW THE FLOORING WAS SEPARATING. THEY TOOK MONTHS TO RESPOND, AND AFTER A SERIES OF E-MAILS AND UNRETURNED PHONE CALLS THE 2-YEAR WARRANTY EXPIRED. I NOW HAVE TO FIX THE FLOORING AT MY OWN EXPENSE. POOR WORKMANSHIP, DO NOT TRUST THIS COMPANY.

————— Fort Wayne, ID

Frequently, businesses would tackle everything but the last 10% of a job. Customers told stories of businesses “wrapping up” prematurely, leaving them with holes in their walls, exposed wiring, or dust and debris that they needed to clean up themselves. Some reviews complained about equipment being left at a customer’s house indefinitely on a job half-done, while others described employees clearly skipping critical steps. This left additional work above and beyond the original scope, to be completed by either the business, or in some cases, embarrassingly, the customer to take on themselves.

“ THEY USED SUB-CONTRACTORS ON MY JOB AND THEY DID POOR WORK; DID NOT COMPLETE AND HAD TO BE CALLED BACK; NEVER CLEANED UP DAILY. CONTRACTOR STAPLED DOWN A SUB-FLOOR WITH NO GLUE. ALL THE STAPLES CAME UP THROUGH THE TILE FLOORING AND I HAD TO TEAR IT ALL OUT AND DO IT AGAIN.

— Louisville, KY

As tempting as it might be to cut corners (or allow corner cutting) in the moment, we’ve all been around long enough to know that, it eventually comes back to bite us. Usually, this will take the form of negative Google Reviews, decreased margins, and a damaged reputation among customers and insurance adjusters. However, in some situations, the cost of negligence or laziness can be far worse. Sadly, a few reviews mentioned remarkably dangerous mistakes from restoration companies that could have ended in death, including gas leaks and carbon monoxide exposure due to inattentiveness from workers. Let these stories serve as a wake-up call on why communication and quality issues are not to be ignored.

LESSONS FOR A 5-STAR RESTORER

Thankfully, when looking at the list of communication and quality issues that make up almost 60% of the complaints on 1-Star Google Reviews, there’s one clear takeaway: none of these business problems are unsolvable.

If your restoration company is anything like those mentioned in these reviews, you can begin to make a tangible impact on customer satisfaction by taking some relatively easy steps. For example, you can reset expectations within your company by announcing concerted future efforts to return phone calls and send emails you’ve committed to send. If the problem of “communication falling between the cracks” plagues your organi-

NO PROBLEM IS
UNSOLVEABLE

zation, it likely rears its head in other areas too. Instead of viewing it as an indictment, view it as found money: low-hanging fruit (e.g., returning a phone call) that could begin to drastically impact your business' professionalism and customer satisfaction.

Of course, one reason communication problems spring up is because when things aren't going well, it's human nature to avoid uncomfortable conversations (e.g., communicating a project delay). Fortunately, in our analysis, many customers were sympathetic to plans changing on the fly,

or projects taking longer than expected, especially if it was the result of something outside the company's control (e.g., a natural disaster). However, no shows or delays without any explanation, left customers feeling

disrespected and angry, and used up any patience they might have been willing to extend to the business. Your employees likely do not love writing long essays, but teaching your staff to "just hop on the phone" when they need to give customers an update, will pay dividends in the long run. It takes a while to change the habits of your team, but implementing the practice of taking an extra few minutes to reach out to customers ahead of time will save your team headaches in the long run, and preserve the reputation of your business.

Poor-quality workmanship is a more difficult problem to weed out, but is still possible to address, as long as the root causes are understood.

As the President of the Restoration Industry Association, Mark Springer knows the importance of ensuring that across the United States, restoration businesses are keeping their promises and performing high-quality workmanship. From his perspective, maintaining consistency comes down to two factors: "First, the workflow for each type of service must be mapped with each task and the person responsible for it clearly assigned," Mark said. "Understanding how the various business functions work together to create the end result of a satisfied customer is very important. Second, training for the execution of each step of the workflow must be prioritized with a goal of constant improvement."

In most cases, employees or contractors have the desire to deliver a high-quality final product, but lack the training or skill to deliver it consistently. With the wide variety of tasks restoration contractors are required

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EACH WORKFLOW
AND TASK MUST BE
CLEARLY DEFINED
AND ASSIGNED

to perform, from water mitigation to mold remediation, smoke damage to biohazard clean-up, it is understandable that there may be gaps in a worker's knowledge or skill set. The best restoration companies find ways to supplement their employees' expertise by standardizing their processes and internal know-how and making those available to all team members. This ensures office staff or frontline workers don't miss any steps, ensuring no customer falls through the cracks and no critical task is skipped out in the field.

In some situations, certain team members will have low ownership over the success of the business, and as a result will be inclined to skip steps or make careless mistakes. These people, in the roles they're currently in, are toxic to your organization. Their apathy may be the result of finding the work unfulfilling, a skill gap that can be easily overcome, or bigger character problems that need to be addressed. Assertive, mature discussions with these individuals are the only way to remedy this, but be warned – putting this off will not resolve the problem on its own, and will likely only make things worse.

The responsibility to address these problems starts with management. According to Chuck Violand, Principal at Violand Management Associates and leader in the restoration industry, the key is to define your expectations, and then do the hard work of holding tension to those expectations. "The best way to maintain accountability to a high-quality final product" says Chuck, "whether that product is a project, the financial performance of your company, or simply a tough conversation, is to clearly articulate what the final product should be, and then maintain the discipline to hold your team and the organization accountable to consistently deliver it. Accountability always flows from the top, and many business owners struggle with that."

DEFINE YOUR
EXPECTATIONS,
THEN DO THE HARD
WORK OF HOLDING
TENSION TO THOSE
EXPECTATIONS

Turning the ship around if you are plagued with bad reviews due to poor quality workmanship or communication issues requires intentionality and discipline, but neither are unavailable to anybody in your organization. Combine a crystal clear focus on improving communication and worker competency with the right tools and buy-in from your team members, and you'll be able to make a tangible indent into the issues that are keeping your team from providing the type of experience customers are expecting and hoping for.

Simple Ways to Ensure Quality Work Every Time

Do

-  Have expectations for the job clearly outlined to employees from day 1
-  Give employees guidance on processes and tasks they may be unsure how to complete
-  Create company wide processes that every employee must follow to ensure consistent work project to project
-  Teach your staff to pick up the phone when running late or cancelling

Don't

-  Send employees to job sites unprepared and not knowing what to expect
-  Let employees complete projects without giving them the proper guidance to do it effectively
-  Make company standards and guides difficult to access or reference
-  Avoid awkward conversations





3

THE VALUE PERCEPTION PROBLEM IN THE RESTORATION INDUSTRY

CHAPTER 3

THEY OVERCHARGED ME!

THE VALUE PERCEPTION PROBLEM IN THE RESTORATION INDUSTRY

The next most common issue that came up in our analysis were issues related to value received versus paid for. While price is almost always a sticking point, regardless of industry, theoretically one might imagine it would be less of a factor when insurance is covering all or at least a portion of the cost. However, as we'll see, customer frustrations typically had less to do with price, and were centered instead around perceived value. In this sense, the actual amount paid out of pocket was less relevant, because objections listed tended to be more principled in nature (as opposed to nickel-and-diming about the final price). Yet, when all was said and done, regardless of the underlying motivation, over 20% of the complaints we analyzed mentioned the feeling of being overcharged. Of those, 68% of the time it was the primary issue that was cited in the review, clearly leaving an impression with the customer that mired their view of the entire project.

An additional factor at play throughout reviews in this category was the suspicion of insurance fraud that existed below the surface in many reviews. In many situations, customers told stories of estimators who were intentionally vague about what repairs would or would not be covered, or

IN THESE REVIEWS,
IT WAS CLEAR AN
UNDERCURRENT OF
TRUST DIDN'T EXIST

technicians who would purposefully drag out the length of a job. Compounding this, some businesses hid aggressive interest rates in the fine print of their service agreements, which they used to put pressure on customers if they did not pay up fast enough. Clearly, a feeling of trust did not exist, which led to customers being suspicious of the pricing they received.

Typically, complaints in this category stemmed from three primary issues:

- Surprise or hidden charges on a final invoice.
- Disparities between work expected and work conducted.
- Dishonest representation of labor or materials provided.

We'll take a deeper dive into all three of these categories and unpack the common themes and failure points that led to the poor customer review, starting with surprise charges.

VAGUE OR SURPRISE PRICING

It's no surprise that an industry subject to delays, overages, and setbacks commonly sees customers complain about their final invoice not reflecting initial expectations. Yet, with so many businesses demonstrating a startling lack of transparency around their billing, many of the complaints issued were more than reasonable and customers were right to be shocked when being thrown curveballs on their final invoice. Combine this with aggressive tactics often employed by the company to demand payment, and customers had plenty of ammunition to bring to their 1-star Google Reviews.

Many customers told stories of businesses that would quote one cost during the estimating phase, secure the contract, and then issue a final in-



THEY PULLED SOME CARPET AND PADDING... ABOUT 3.5 HOURS. LATER, THEY SENT ME A TEXT WITH AN AMOUNT OF \$1780 DUE. NO INVOICE, NO EXPLANATION OF WHY 1 MAN AND LESS THAN 4 HOURS COST ALMOST \$1800. I ASKED FOR AN INVOICE AND HE SAID I WOULD HAVE TO TALK TO ACCOUNTING. HEARD NOTHING UNTIL I GOT A LETTER FROM A LAWYER SAYING THEY'RE SENDING ME TO COLLECTIONS.

— North Salt Lake, UT

voice two or three times that amount once the job was completed, without any warning. When customers would try to prevent this by requesting itemized quotes or invoices, businesses would be evasive, preferring to bill in a lump sum without a detailed breakdown of how they got to the price they arrived at. Typically, when pressed by customers to explain their billing, the company would simply move them over to collections, threatening legal repercussions or filing a lien on the house when they realized they weren't going to get their money easily.

In other cases, businesses would take advantage of a customer's ignorance of the insurance process, combined with their fear, anxiety, and stress, to misrepresent what would be covered by insurance, to pressure them into a quick decision. These customers were told that they wouldn't have to cover any costs personally, and it was more important to begin the remediation process. Trusting the "experts", customers followed their instruction, only to be told days or weeks into a project that insurance actually wouldn't

cover their expenses, and they would be on the hook themselves. Occasionally, after significant complaining, the restoration company would relent and cut the price by 30-40%, but in other examples, customers were just handed off to collections for payment.

“

WE HAD A SEWAGE BACKUP AND FLOODING IN OUR BUILDING AND UNFORTUNATELY CALLED THIS COMPANY. THEY REPEATEDLY SAID INSURANCE WOULD COVER THE DAMAGE WITHOUT KNOWING IF IT ACTUALLY WOULD (IT DIDN'T). THEY DID NOT GIVE ANY ESTIMATION OF COST DESPITE ASKING SEVERAL TIMES. THEY WERE AT OUR BUILDING FOR LESS THAN 24 HOURS AND WE GOT A BILL FOR \$20,000.

————— Portland, OR

DISPARITIES BETWEEN WORK EXPECTED & CONDUCTED

The most common issue that arose in this category, however, was not customers being subject to exorbitantly high bills, but instead customers *feeling* like they got ripped off, agreeing to pay a certain amount, only to observe very little work actually being done. In this case, the complaint wasn't centered around a price being too high, but instead around the amount of work observed not being reflective of the price, in the customer's eyes.

This was surprisingly prevalent throughout our analysis, with many customers taking to Google Reviews to complain about workers being on site for less than an hour, or just dropping off equipment and leaving. This led to suspicion over the true cost of what they were paying for, trying to reverse-engineer margins in their head and then feeling like they were being overcharged for the

“ THIS COMPANY IS A RIP-OFF, CHARGES \$5,000+ FOR AN HOUR OF WORK PROVIDING AN ELECTRIC PORTABLE HEATER AND BLANKET. BEWARE!! THEY WON’T GIVE A WRITTEN ESTIMATE OF THE WORK AND JUST SEND A BILL.

————— Denver, CO

services provided. As mentioned above, vague quotes that didn't break down into detail the costs of materials and labor only compounded customer suspicions, forcing them to come to their own conclusions about what they were actually paying for.

The easy response to this, is that most customers are not experts in the restoration industry, and will (hopefully) be in a situation where they need restoration services only a few times in their life. Without knowledge of the industry or familiarity with labor costs, they are stuck trusting the prices given to them by their estimators, without context of the costs of delivering the quoted service. When this blind faith was combined with what appeared to be a relatively simple restoration job, customers were often left wondering if they were taken advantage of.

WHETHER A PRICE
IS JUSTIFIED OR NOT
IS IRRELEVANT IN
GOOGLE'S ALGORITHM.
A FRUSTRATED
CUSTOMER IS
A FRUSTRATED
CUSTOMER

In a few examples that appeared throughout our analysis, the pricing a customer complained about would likely hold up quite well to scrutiny, when accounting for labor, materials, fixed costs, etc. Unfortunately however, in many cases, estimators clearly benefited from customers not having a proper frame of reference for what the cost of a restoration job should be, and used that to inflate the price. This shortsighted tactic for short-term gain created major long-term pain for the offending restorers. Being a 5-star restorer requires a long-term commitment and a steady hand when temptation arises to exploit a customer.

Most importantly, the sad reality is that whether the price was justified or not is irrelevant in Google's algorithm. A frustrated customer is a frustrated customer, and a customer irrationally upset can do the same amount of damage to a business' ranking online as a customer rationally upset. Thankfully, this is no reason to throw your hands up in helplessness – there are plenty of opportunities to prevent 1-star reviews of this nature before they happen. We'll come back to this in our Lessons Learned.

DISHONEST REPRESENTATION OF MATERIALS OR LABOR

Sadly, this issue was far more common than it should be in the industry today. While complaining about the price of a job, customers told stories of costs that were clearly inflated, companies padding the time billed, weird or suspicious line items, and materials and equipment left at job sites for days or weeks longer than necessary, only to bill insurance for use of these materials and equipment later.

Another common issue was businesses rounding up liberally when charging for time, contractors taking exorbitantly long lunch breaks, or two or three contractors showing up, but only one doing work (yet the invoice stating charged labor for all three).

Occasionally, customers would voice their suspicions or doubts, but doing so quickly triggered an aggressive anti-insurance stance from the business that, from their perspective, seemed to justify their dishonesty. Believing that insurance companies were out to screw them, in their mind, gave them permission to overstate the size of the rooms they were restoring, the amount of debris they were removing, and add extra equipment to their bill.

Honesty violations like this, both big and small, understandably eroded the trust many customers had in these businesses, and fractured their relationship with insurance. When a company is defensive towards insurance and willing to blur ethical lines, they have a difficult time convincing customers they operate with integrity, and are likely to make more enemies than allies over the long-term.

“

THEY THOUGHT WE WERE FILING A CLAIM WITH OUR HOMEOWNERS INSURANCE, SO THEY BILLED FOR ALL SORTS OF BOGUS ITEMS SUCH AS THE \$104/DAY COST OF “RUNNING” A NON-WORKING MACHINE, 10 PAIRS OF DISPOSABLE GLOVES AND 6 PAIRS OF BOOTS FOR 1 OF WORK BETWEEN TWO GUYS. HOPEFULLY THEY ARE ABLE TO IMPROVE BOTH THEIR HONESTY AND QUALITY OF WORK IN THE FUTURE.

— North Salt Lake, UT

“ BEWARE: DO NOT USE THIS COMPANY!!! WHEN I INQUIRED ABOUT COST, I WAS TOLD I'D ONLY HAVE TO PAY MY INSURANCE DEDUCTIBLE. AN HOUR LATER, EMPLOYEES CAME AND RIPPED UP FLOORING AND PLACED 20 FANS WITHOUT TALKING TO ANYONE, AND THEN LEFT. 3 DAYS LATER, OUR ACCOUNT MANAGER CAME OVER WITH A BOOK “DELAY, DENY, DEFEND” ABOUT HOW EVIL INSURANCE COMPANIES ARE. HE TOLD ME I'D PROBABLY HAVE PROBLEMS WITH INSURANCE, BUT THEY ARE REQUIRED BY LAW TO PAY THE FULL PRICE. HE TOLD ME I'D PROBABLY HAVE TO FIGHT THEM, AND SHORTLY AFTER INSURANCE DENIED MY CLAIM. I LATER RECEIVED A THREATENING E-MAIL DEMANDING PAYMENT OF NEARLY \$10,000.

Lehi, UT

LESSONS FOR A 5-STAR RESTORER

Similar to previous issues we've seen, of all the failure points mentioned in this category, very few of them are outside of your control as a business owner or manager. From overages to shady pricing tactics, customers rarely expressed *genuine disagreement* for the cost of goods or services provided. Instead, it was the *feeling* of being deceived or manipulated that led to their 1-star review. It's been said that frustration is the distance between expectations and reality, and nowhere in our research was that more clearly on display than when it came to pricing.

This means that the biggest impact you can have in this category is to correctly manage expectations. Do this properly, and most customers will be at worst, disappointed when the price is higher than expected, but hopefully understanding. However, our study shows that failure to do this leads to sticker shock, the feeling of being manipulated, and distrust of the entire process, which is unlikely to lead to a positive experience for either party.

THE BIGGEST IMPACT
YOU CAN HAVE IS TO
CORRECTLY MANAGE
EXPECTATIONS

What does managing expectations well look like tangibly? It starts with providing transparent pricing to your customers, at the beginning and throughout the restoration job. Breaking down material and labor costs for customers allows them to understand why the costs are what they are, and disarms opposition they might have about how you arrived at that number. There will always be curveballs on complex projects, but it

can be assumed that, after experiencing significant trauma such as a fire, flood, or a natural disaster, your customers may not be at their most rational. As a result, the onus is on you to over communicate with customers as your project comes together, keeping them in the loop as delays happen and costs increase. Explaining why you'll need to charge them higher than agreed upon is never an easy conversation, but it's far less damaging than a scathing Google Review and a complaint to the Better Business Bureau because a customer feels blindsided by an overage.

In an attempt to preempt conflicts with insurance, some businesses would warn customers about pushback before the process even began, hoping to win the customer over ahead of time. This is unwise and is a classic example of biting the hand that feeds you. The vast majority of consumers will do business with whoever their insurance adjuster recommends.

Actively recruiting customers to be mercenaries in the insurance versus restoration war leads to frustrating experiences for both your customer and insurance provider, both of whom you need to advocate for you to secure future work. You want to shape the experience of your customer as much as possible, and give them little reason to hop on the phone with insurance. Stoking an adversarial relationship between a client and their insurance provider does the opposite, giving them reason to believe that either you or their insurance agency is not to be trusted. As much as making the insurance provider out to be the villain in the project may appear to position you on higher ground, our research shows that this is shortsighted, and will bite you in the butt in the long run.

The best way to avoid ending up in this category though is also the most obvious: be ethical.

According to Phil Rosebrook, Owner of Business Mentors, and a 30-year veteran of the industry, the money you make in the short-term is not worth the price of your integrity, and will eventually come back to haunt you anyway.

"Contractors that include unnecessary items or items that will not be completed are causing damage to their personal integrity, their company and the industry," Phil notes. "It is essential that all listed items are com-

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Establish a Scope of Work and Create an Estimate

Garyd Rosebrook
Project Manager, Blue Restoration

+ Start Process

Establish a Scope of Work and Create an Estimate

1. Meet with the customer 0.5 hrs

2. Establish a scope of work 2 hrs

3. Document any pre-existing damage 0.5 hrs

4. Set up a workstation area 0.5 hrs

5. Complete walkthrough of all items 1.5 hrs

6. Notify customer of price 0.5 hrs

7. Confirm the work upon return to the warehouse and meet again 0.5 hrs

Show completed

YOUR GOAL IS TO
GIVE THE CUSTOMER
AS LITTLE REASON
AS POSSIBLE TO HOP
ON THE PHONE WITH
INSURANCE

DEFINE YOUR
EXPECTATIONS,
THEN DO THE HARD
WORK OF HOLDING
TENSION TO THOSE
EXPECTATIONS

pleted, and if the price is not appropriate, then either increase the price or stop working for that client. Long-term success requires that contractors understand their costs and take credit for the quality work completed. If the work needs to be completed, then include the items on the estimate, and if they are not necessary, then leave them off. Failure to follow these steps will eventually backfire and result in lack of payment or removal from programs or approved vendor lists.”

In short, don’t take advantage of customers in an emotional state with no frame of reference of what an appropriate/inappropriate price for your services are. Don’t lead them to believe that insurance will cover something if you’re not 100% certain. Don’t pad your material or labor costs and justify it because “insurance is trying to screw you anyways”. As a manager or leader, you are responsible for the integrity of your business—the buck stops with you. In an era of Google Reviews and hyper-connectedness, the consequences of shaky ethics are too great. In addition to complaining on Google, many customers filed complaints with the Better Business Bureau, advocated for blacklisting from insurance providers, or even reached out to the Attorney General and filed lawsuits. Chasing higher margins at the cost of your business’ integrity always ends up backfiring, and these Google Reviews are just a small example of that.

Avoid Complaints In Your Pricing Process

Do	Don't
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Provide transparent pricing right from day one	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Inflate final invoice by tacking on hidden charges <input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Provide a clear breakdown of all costs on invoice	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Refuse to explain charges to customer clearly <input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Communicate with your employees expectations for hours worked	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Allow your employees to run up labor costs unnecessarily <input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Have consistent estimating processes in place	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Leave it up to guess work <input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Be honest with the customer if pricing needs to change	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Avoid tough conversations <input type="checkbox"/>



4



DELAYS AND THE MINEFIELD OF CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

CHAPTER 4

LONGER THAN EXPECTED

DELAYS AND THE MINEFIELD OF CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

Following along the theme of expectations not matching reality, 16.6% of all 1-star reviews in our study mentioned project delays as a contributing factor in their bad review. Of course, construction is an imperfect science, and with variables such as weather, employee availability, build issues, and other factors proving predictably unpredictable, in our research it surprised us that delays weren't an even bigger contributor to 1-star reviews. Customers are usually sympathetic when treated respectfully, and most are willing to be flexible when necessary. But as we'll see, delays combined with poor communication and the feeling of being neglected or ignored led many customers helpless and voiceless, turning to Google to vent their frustration. This category is filled with stories of customers living in purgatory while continuing to be sloughed off by restoration companies, but the majority of complaints about delays boil down to three main issues:

- Restoration businesses starting a job, and then focusing on new clients
- The construction division dropping the ball
- Overpromising on timeline.

IN THESE REVIEWS,
IT WAS CLEAR AN
UNDERCURRENT OF
TRUST DIDN'T EXIST

NEW SHINY OBJECTS

The most common problem we saw in our analysis of all the complaints surrounding delays was restoration companies starting a job, and then walking away indefinitely while pursuing better, larger projects. In many instances, they would fail to communicate with the customer that their priorities had shifted, and instead would leave customers expecting work to resume, only to have nobody show up for days or weeks at a time. When calling to look for information or updates on when their home would return back to normal, customers would get the runaround, or simply be told “we’re too busy right now”, without any clarity on when work would resume.

Occasionally, when provided the context on why a company was busy (e.g., fighting natural disasters), customers were frustrated, but understanding. Yet the majority of the time, companies didn’t provide this. Instead, they gave customers the impression that a better paying job has come up, and left them in limbo living in hotels, rentals, or half of a house while they pursued work elsewhere.

A number of reviews mentioned customers deciding to terminate their contract prematurely, before the work was actually completed. In some cases, this meant customers were on the hook for paying the difference out of pocket, and in others, they successfully petitioned the insurance company to pay out only for the work done, inevitably damaging the business’ reputation with the insurance provider in the process.

CONSTRUCTION DROPPING THE BALL

Unfortunately, this persistent issue rears its ugly head again. As with the



“ DESPITE THE MONTH AND A HALF WAIT TO HAVE THEM FIX A PIPE ISSUE IN MY APARTMENT, I HAVE YET TO HAVE IT FIXED. AFTER 3 WEEKS I HAVE HALF OF MY CEILING REMOVED IN THE KITCHEN. WHENEVER I TRY TO GET IN CONTACT I AM TOLD THEY HAVE EMERGENCIES TO DEAL WITH. I’VE HAD APPOINTMENTS CANCELLED, CALLS NOT RETURNED, AND AM TOLD MY ISSUE IS AT THE BOTTOM OF THE LIST.

— North Salt Lake, UT

issue of communication that appears elsewhere in our analysis, there were several restoration companies that did a notably excellent job, according to customers, only for things to take a nose-dive once the project was handed back over to construction for the rebuild phase. This ended up tarnishing the entire experience for the customer, who ended up going back and posting a negative Google Review about the entire interaction.

In some cases, this fumbling of the ball was the result of poor communication between the mitigation and construction teams. Customers told stories of contractors showing up without the right materials or being unaware of agreed upon deadlines, because businesses did not do an adequate job handing off the project from one team to the other. Delays like these are self-induced errors, and it's sad to see potential 5-star experiences turn into angry reviews on Google unnecessarily.

“

WE HAD A SEWAGE BACKUP AND FLOODING IN OUR BUILDING AND UNFORTUNATELY CALLED THIS COMPANY. THEY REPEATEDLY SAID INSURANCE WOULD COVER THE DAMAGE WITHOUT KNOWING IF IT ACTUALLY WOULD (IT DIDN'T). THEY DID NOT GIVE ANY ESTIMATION OF COST DESPITE ASKING SEVERAL TIMES. THEY WERE AT OUR BUILDING FOR LESS THAN 24 HOURS AND WE GOT A BILL FOR \$20,000.

————— Portland, OR

OVERPROMISING ON TIMELINE

Finally, we get to the least surprising recurring factor mentioned when customers complained about delays: businesses overpromising on expected completion dates. Nobody is immune to this, regardless of industry, but setting customer expectations unrealistically high (especially during the bidding phase), is a one-way ticket to appearing on our annual analysis of 1-star Google Reviews.

In many cases, the delays were related to poor project planning, where the wrong material was selected, or the scope of the work was not defined properly. This led to companies dragging their feet correcting mistakes, further prolonging how long it would take to complete a job.

Multiple reviews mentioned estimators and project managers selling jobs on how "simple" and "routine" they were, only for delays to emerge that were usually the result of contractor negligence or inexperience. Forgetting to insulate before putting up drywall, installing improper equipment, were just some of the examples customers listed that led to delays far beyond what was initially quoted as an easy job.

Once again, the underlying issue was communication, both internal and external. Project managers agreed to certain deadlines without consulting the rest of their teams, and then contractors got

“ I WAS TOLD THE PROJECT WAS GOING TO TAKE 15 DAYS, AND I FIGURED AT MOST THAT WOULD DOUBLE. OH NO, IT WAS NEARLY 6 MONTHS BEFORE THE PROJECT WAS DONE. THEY PUT UP NEW DRYWALL IN THE CEILING WITHOUT INSULATION AND THEY COMPLETELY RUINED MY FURNITURE BY NOT PUTTING ANY BLANKETS OR PROTECTION. DO NOT USE THIS COMPANY UNLESS YOU WANT TO BE A PROJECT MANAGER, CONTRACTOR, AND ACCOUNT MANAGER.

————— Nashville, TN

ONCE AGAIN, THE
UNDERLYING ISSUE
WAS COMMUNICATION,
BOTH INTERNAL AND
EXTERNAL

to work without all of the information they needed. This led to mistakes and work that needed to be redone, which failed to keep customers in the loop as the timeline was beginning to unravel. It culminated with customers exasperated that projects that should have taken days or weeks were taking months or years, longing to return to life as normal, and wanting to share their experience with others to help them avoid a similar outcome.

LESSONS FOR A 5-STAR RESTORER

Any project-based industry that runs on timelines is going to suffer delays occasionally; from graphic design to road construction – nobody is immune to schedules being skewed by factors outside of one's control.

That doesn't mean, however, that we can't look at your 1-star counterparts to find ways to minimize (or prevent) the damage from occurring, and keep your reputation intact. People are relying on Google more and more to find their next service provider, so it's important to do everything possible to ensure the customer quotes beside your company name reflect you positively.

First and most importantly, it's impossible to ignore the outsized role healthy communication has on whether delays will occur, and if so, a customer's interpretation of them. The teams that get into trouble repeatedly are ones where a project manager or estimator commits to a certain deadline with a customer, but then does not a) adequately equip his or her team members with the knowledge and resources needed to meet that timeline, or b) fails to hold adequate tension to the agreed upon deadline, allowing sloppiness or distractions to stunt progress.

Stories of teams showing up to job sites unprepared and with the wrong materials only highlight the easily preventable breakdown in team communication. It's been said that every one hour of project planning saves five hours of project execution, and any construction company worth its salt would be thrilled to have 80% of its time back per project. Taking the time to ensure that every contractor has the information they need, a clear understanding of their deliverables, and what the timeline is for each project ensures that, instead of playing catch-up, they're able to hit the ground running and over-deliver on expectations.

That said, when delays do happen, the evidence in our analysis proves that there is considerable room for improvement in how some companies are handling communicating this to customers.

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Dodging phone calls made by frustrated customers may feel like a painful experience avoided in the short-term, but in the long-term this practice only damages your reputation and ensures your customer will not get an opportunity to see things from your perspective. As mentioned, when the reasons are legitimate (natural disasters or truly extraordinary losses), customers were typically understanding, even in their 1-star reviews. Yet, it was the inability for customers to get answers or establish any real expectations for when work could be completed that left them frustrated.

In other cases, a rational explanation for going silent didn't exist: some businesses simply decided to prioritize better paying jobs even though they had already begun another project. Leaving customers unable to resume their normal lives indefinitely just because a bigger paycheck has surfaced will likely, ironically, make it much more difficult to acquire new customers in the long run, as your online reputation tanks and your status among insurance providers is damaged.

Far better is to follow the simple mantra of "finish what you start", and to respect the time and experiences of your customers. Running around chasing money isn't a winning strategy, and delivering on your commitments ensures that your customers will go to bat for you both online and in-person.

However, one other common occurrence was restoration companies

EVERY ONE HOUR OF
PROJECT PLANNING
SAVES FIVE HOURS OF
PROJECT EXECUTION

SET EXPECTATIONS AT THE FRONT-END THAT ARE HONEST AND MANAGEABLE

who fully intended to deliver on their promises, yet poor planning from the project manager doomed it from the start. When we asked Tim Hull, Director of Operations at Violand Management (and project management guru) what businesses can do to boost their project management ability, Tim said the answer was simple, but not necessarily easy. “The most effective ways to ensure that a project gets completed on time and on budget is to put in the work on the front side”, Tim told us. You don’t have to look hard to find evidence in the restoration industry that failing to plan means planning to fail. This means identifying risks ahead of time, listing who your stakeholders are, and clarifying with the customer exactly what work will get done and the specific processes your staff will be following in order to achieve this outcome. The benefit of defining all this ahead of time is two-fold: first, your team knows who is doing what, when, and any assumptions are listed out in the open. Secondly, your customer ends up far more comfortable with the process ahead of them, knowing clearly what the steps are going forward, and what is in between them and getting their house and life back to normal.

It’s this second point that’s immensely valuable, according to Mark Springer, President of the Restoration Industry Association. “The key to minimizing customer frustration is to set expectations at the front-end of the project that are honest and manageable,” he points out. “It’s the cliché of under-promise and over-deliver. I’m always amazed at how often restoration contractors begin a repair project without a critical path schedule. Taking time to create this on the front-end will greatly assist in setting proper expectations.”

Another common issue that came up consistently was the restoring company doing an excellent job planning and executing the restoring phase, but a sloppy hand-off from the restoration team to the rebuild team led to a bad customer experience. This is likely due to either a) poor communication between project teams, or b) project managers taking their foot off the gas and failing to hold sufficient tension to project deliverables once the restoration component of the job was complete.

In either case, hinging the project’s success on information that exists exclusively in the brain of the project manager is unsustainable and will eventually collapse. Tim points out that this creates a dynamic where your business’ success is hamstrung by certain individuals, who God forbid will never get sick or decide to pursue greener pastures. To avoid this, more and more companies are taking a company’s expertise, and the status of each project, and bringing it out into the open for everyone to see. The more freely available information is about project timelines, deliverables expected, and up-to-date communication with customers, the better

the chances are of the entire team staying on the same page, and the project going according to plan.

To accomplish this, many teams use project management software that includes all members of the team, from estimators down to subcontractors. Combined with routines and structure such as daily standups, this gives every team member visibility on expectations, deadlines, and more, ensuring that no one person restricts the success of the company, and the team at large.

Avoiding Project Delays

Do

- Give each customer and project the right amount of focus
- Give customers the most up to date, realistic timeline of the project
- Have consistent communication between the restoration and the construction division
- Be honest with the customer when delays are likely
- Take the time to plan and prepare before the project starts

Don't

- Start a job, but leave it unfinished to pursue bigger clients and projects
- Set unrealistic expectations of the timeline for the project
- Allow the construction division stray from the timeline promised
- Avoid the customers questions about why their project is delayed
- Make decisions on-the-fly with no larger plan



5



ON THE FRONTLINES OF CUSTOMER
INTERACTIONS

CHAPTER 5

CONTRACTOR DRAMA

ON THE FRONTLINES OF CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS

The stakes are high when doing work on somebody's home, and having total strangers walking in and out of one's private property is enough to put anybody on edge. Combine that with stressful life circumstances that led to needing a restorer in the first place, and anything less than "going the extra mile" on the contractor's side might result in a negative interaction.

As we'll get to in later sections, there are plenty of micro-interactions that shape a customer's perception of their entire experience, however, the complaints mentioned in this section were so unique, we tagged them separately in our analysis. More than a rude phone call or sarcastic contractor, customers told stories of employees raiding their fridge, stealing priceless items, making racist comments, and even destroying marriages. Reading more like a salacious novel than an analysis on bad Google reviews, this section was more exciting than it should have been, but filled with interesting learnings nonetheless.

Though the incidents reported vary greatly, the main concerns listed typically revolve around one of three issues:

- Moral/ethical concerns.
- Disrespect towards customers.
- Sloppiness on-the-job.

CUSTOMERS WERE
OFTEN TOLD JUST
TO TAKE THINGS UP
WITH POLICE

MORAL OR ETHICAL CONCERNS

Starting with the most intriguing category first, one the most common accusations from customers was of theft. With contractors entering and exiting a home at will, our analysis was filled with stories of examples of all types of things going missing, from alcohol, to medication, hard cash, and even a revolver. In almost every situation, businesses abdicated any responsibility and told the customer they were out of luck and could take it up with the police if they had an issue.

Complaints of theft seemed even more likely to occur when items were moved off-site for cleaning or drying. In cases like these, customers often complained that not all their items were returned to them, or businesses were being dodgy in explaining which items they deemed “unsalvageable” and discarded. Many customers lost priceless items of significance to them, while others became suspicious when particularly valuable items they owned never made it back to their house.

“

THEY CAME OUT TO SOME OF OUR UNITS AFTER A WATER FLOOD. DURING THE PROCESS OF REMOVING THE WET FLOORING, THE WORKERS STOLE ITEMS FROM SEVERAL OF OUR UNITS. THEY ALSO APPEARED INTOXICATED. SOME OF THE MISSING ITEMS INCLUDED ALCOHOL. IT WAS A MESS AND AWFUL - THE POLICE CAME OUT, JUST A COMPLETE CIRCUS.

Charlotte, NC

Another recurring complaint was workers showing up visibly drunk or high, potentially putting the customer, themselves, or their colleagues at risk. Notably (but unsurprisingly) this seemed

to occur more frequently when emergency jobs came in overnight, possibly disrupting an action-packed evening for a contractor by being pulled into work.

Unfortunately, there were more than a few situations where police had to get involved to settle disputes between contractor and customer. At that point, escaping with only a bad Google Review probably feels like a win, but overall is clearly a testament of how badly some situations can

devolve.

Then in some cases, there are the truly bizarre. We can figure out what the learning is for this story later, but it's worth sharing regardless:

“ THEY WERE HIRED TO DO THE REPAIRS ON MY HOME AFTER IT WAS HIT BY A TORNADO IN MAY 2017. INITIALLY THEY WERE VERY NICE/HELPFUL BUT IT ENDED UP BEING THE WORST EXPERIENCE OF MY LIFE. THEY TOOK ALMOST 7 MONTHS TO COMPLETE THE CONTRACTED 3-MONTH JOB. THE SUPERVISOR WOULD UP SLEEPING WITH MY WIFE OF 15 YEARS. I CAUGHT THEM IN MULTIPLE LIES AND FOUND OUT HE WAS MEETING UP WITH HER AT OUR HOUSE, HER MOM'S HOUSE, AND OUR HOTEL IN BROKEN ARROW STATING HE HAD DOCUMENTS TO SIGN OR DISCUSS THINGS ABOUT THE HOUSE CONVENIENTLY WHILE I WAS EITHER WORKING OVERNIGHT OR SLEEPING. THE COMPANY FILED A RESTRAINING ORDER ON ME AFTER I WENT TO THE BUSINESS TO CONFRONT HIM ABOUT SLEEPING WITH MY WIFE. THE BUSINESS WOULD NOT HEAR MY COMPLAINTS AND WOULD UP GETTING ME RESTRAINED FROM EVEN STEPPING FOOT ON MY OWN PROPERTY. I FOUGHT THE TRESPASSING CHARGES AND THEY ENDED UP DROPPING THEM AFTER THE WORK ON THE HOUSE WAS COMPLETE.

————— Coweta, OK

DISRESPECT TOWARD CUSTOMERS

The second, slightly less appalling but no less damaging theme in this section was contractors or technicians causing customers to feel disrespected. Separate from issues related to poor communication or delays, these complaints stemmed from negative interactions between workers and customers that go beyond just bad customer service.

Examples among the reviews analyzed included contractors demeaning homeowners based on their race, sexual orientation, or gender, sometimes explicitly, and other times subtly or passive aggressively. In the worst situations, employees would flat out state that some aspect of a customer's identity influenced their intelligence, and what they knew about their home. More often, however, customers would hear offensive comments made about them to co-workers behind their back.

Elsewhere, complaints emerged about workers treating customer possessions or property disre-

spectfully, leaving trash or garbage lying around everywhere, or not taking proper care of household items. When confronted about this, some employees were nonchalant, with one joking they left garbage around everywhere so the customer could “use them for crafts”.

“

VERY RUDE AND UNPROFESSIONAL. ASKED ME ABOUT MY NATIONALITY FIRST AND RIGHT AWAY TOLD ME THAT I KNEW NOTHING BECAUSE OF MY NATIONALITY.

— Hartford, CT

It's also worth noting that multiple reviews featured customers uncomfortable with workers showing a lack of regard for COVID-19 protocols; failing to social distance, wear masks, or take into account any sensitivities or fears that might exist among the client. As we've all likely experienced, different people have different levels of concern about exposure to

COVID-19, and are likely to interpret regional safety precautions through that lens. Regardless, if a customer feels unsafe or uncomfortable being in their own home, that is likely to significantly impact their perception of the overall service provided, and is certain to influence any reviews they write.

SLOPPINESS ON-THE-JOB

Finally, the last consistent source of negative interactions with contractors was from sloppiness. Distinct from work done poorly, this category encompasses carelessness from workers that led to broken furniture, damage to the house outside of the scope of work, and in general, leaving a place messier than how you found it (which is hard to do in the restoration industry).

The root source of this issue is clearly less about employee skill, and more about employee commitment and ownership. Reviewers shared stories of contractors leaving food wrappers and soda cans all over the house, showing a lack of sufficient care when moving furniture, damaging different items, and then refusing to take responsibility for their negligence.

“

THEY CAME WITH NO MASK AND HAD TO GO BACK AND GET A MASK. THEY DID NOT PRACTICE SOCIAL DISTANCING AT ALL. REALLY DISAPPOINTED IN THAT.

— Rochester, NY

Of note, when customers called to complain about sloppy employee behavior, their voicemails were often left unreturned or they were handed off from person to person within the organization without

“ THE PEOPLE SENT IN TO DO THE CLEAN UP WERE NOT CAREFUL AT ALL. THEY BROKE THE HANDLE ON MY STORM DOOR, THE GLASS DOOR ON THE STOVE, AND TWO NEW THEATRE CHAIRS. I CALLED THEM THE NEXT DAY AND THEY BLAMED THE BROKEN CHAIRS ON MY FRIEND. THEY LEFT MY DAUGHTER’S ROOM WITH PILES OF HER STUFF THROWN ON THE BED, AND REFUSED TO COMPENSATE FOR ANYTHING THEY BROKE.

————— Massachusetts, MA

any resolution. This would suggest a larger culture of apathy and lack of ownership that no doubt influenced whether frontline workers were willing to go the extra mile or not.

LESSONS FOR A 5-STAR RESTORER

While fascinating to read, the complaints in this section are some of the most difficult to mitigate, as the issue doesn’t always boil down to a simple principle such as “communicate more”. That said, there are still plenty of lessons to glean from complaints related to negative contractor interactions, and with intention and consistency, it’s possible to detect potential problems in this area before they arrive.

The biggest culprit in this section is companies failing to realize how important it is to properly educate their frontline employees and contractors on the role they play in the success of a project, beyond their ability to swing a hammer. This is why Dan Cassara, CEO of CORE Group is a vocal champion for the importance of soft skills. “I can’t stress enough that you’ve got to invest in your frontline staff,” he says. “They’re the front door to your business. It’s great you have a well-paid CEO and talented executive team, but these are not the people your customers are seeing. Anyone on the frontlines needs sensitivity training – I’m talking white glove customer service training – so they recognize they are a reflection of the company. Too many companies spend far more on water damage certification than investing in the soft skills of their frontline technicians.”

In some cases, as you invest into training your staff, you may realize you have certain contractors that are better at building rapport and trust with customers than others. This is okay, but the only way to take advantage of this is with proper planning before the project kicks off. As Michael Pinto, CEO of Wonder Makers International told us, “even the best projects

YOUR FRONTLINE STAFF ARE THE FRONT DOOR TO YOUR BUSINESS

HUMANS WILL
NATURALLY BECOME
SLOPPY OR LAX IN
THEIR WORK UNLESS
CONSISTENT EFFORT
IS GIVEN TO HOLD
THEM TO A PRE-
DEFINED STANDARD

can go awry if the contractor cannot communicate clearly to the client in line with their specific needs". Taking the time to identify those employees ahead of time, and ensuring they are empowered to set the tone for the rest of the crew, will allow them to play a role in shaping the standard for how your team interacts with the client.

However, assuming you've done a great job building a talented team with strong character and integrity, that's still no guarantee that customers won't hurl accusations of theft, lewdness, or worse at your business. This is where tightly-defined and consistently-adhered processes will be your offense and defense.

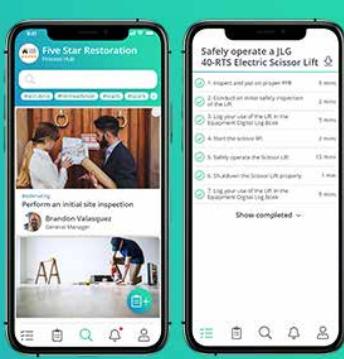
Consider any of the cases above where a restoration company had to move materials off-site, only for them not to return as they were deemed "unsalvageable". As long as the process of determining which items are worth saving is left to the discretion of an individual employee, your company will have little defense to accusations of stealing. However, if instead of allowing it to be a judgment call, your business had clearly defined the standard across the entire organization for how to determine which possessions are able to be saved/restored, and the employee had proof they were merely following the company process, suddenly the customer's complaint has much less merit.

Whether it's COVID-19 safety protocols, employee location or time tracking, clear, tangible processes have the dual benefit of holding tension to your business' high standards and covering the neck of your employees when impropriety is suggested. The law of entropy suggests that all things naturally trend toward disorder, and humans will naturally become sloppy or lax in their work unless consistent effort is given to hold them to a pre-defined standard. Clearly communicating that standard to employees

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and giving them access to it whenever they need it, ensures that the values and high-level of expectations you carry for yourself trickles down to your team members as well.

The other, much more difficult lesson learned is that in many of the examples listed, there could be a wide spread team cultural issue within the company that can't be attributed solely to a single rogue employee.

Examples of entire teams moving through a workplace without regard for the condition it's left in, or a pattern of dodging complaints throughout departments, point to a lack of ownership-thinking and stalwart leadership within the company at large. Ultimately, workplaces like this are destined to fall apart as contractors do the bare minimum to meet their job requirements, and management is not willing to do the hard work to correct this behavior.

Change will happen, frankly, when management starts giving a damn and does something about it. As long as leaders in an organization are willing to tolerate subpar efforts, disrespectful attitudes, and dodging (rather than owning) problems, organizations will continue to unwind, customers will continue to have bad experiences, and businesses are going to continue to have to deal with 1-star reviews. Turning around a toxic workplace culture is a topic that goes beyond the scope of this analysis, but it's clear when we read this section that some issues can be addressed with some simple changes, while others are far more deeply rooted in cultural issues in the company.

Say Goodbye to Contractor Drama

Do

- Create company processes that will keep your employees on track
- Thoroughly vet contractors to ensure you're hiring the good ones
- Place respect and integrity centerfold in your businesses core values
- Have a tightly defined hiring process so you know you're hiring ethical people

Don't

- Let your employees go through their day confused about daily tasks.
- Ignore the outsized influence contractors will have on how you're perceived
- Let the culture within your business become toxic and unchecked
- Hire employees that will contribute to a toxic work culture



6



CUSTOMER SERVICE BREAKDOWNS
UP AND DOWN AN ORG CHART

CHAPTER 6

RUDE AWAKENING

CUSTOMER SERVICE BREAKDOWNS UP AND DOWN AN ORG CHART

Bad customer service or rude interactions with employees were listed in 16% of all reviews. This is distinct from the previous category, though both boasted the unique ability to single-handedly tank a customer's perception of the entire company with a single interaction.

Whereas *Contractor Drama* profiled specific examples of frontline workers egregiously dropping the ball or alienating customers, this section features examples of rude or condescending staff, demanding management, or an overall lack of helpfulness when customers sought information or had questions. Specifically, complaints in this section seemed to fall into one of three categories:

- Bad interactions with employees.
- Defensiveness when something goes wrong.
- Demanding collections practices.

A quick note about this section: in some reviews, customers simply listed "bad customer service" in their review, and didn't expand on their experience beyond that. As with every category, we took the customer's review at their word, because regardless of whether or not their case was jus-

tified, or could be debated, the end result was the same: a 1-star review that negatively impacted the business affected. That said, the vast majority of reviews in this section did provide a follow up explanation, allowing us to do a deeper dive into the contributing factors that led to the bad experience for the customer and extract some lessons for businesses that want to avoid the same fate.

DEFENSIVENESS WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

It's not hard to imagine this recurring theme emerging during our analysis. Whether it be primarily fueled by customer perception, or legitimate grievances that businesses become hostile to, customers reported many examples of management or the customer service department becoming oddly defensive when asked about anything related to billing, project scope, or when something else went sideways.

DEFENSIVENESS
DOESN'T TURN DOWN
THE TEMPERATURE
- IT AMPLIFIES
IT AND ALMOST
GUARANTEES A BAD
REVIEW

In some instances, customers would have a question about their bill (either before work was completed or after) when a surprise had emerged. But as mentioned elsewhere, customer service or a willingness to explain why charges were what they were, all but vanished, and was often replaced with rudeness, or simply voicemail after voicemail left unreturned. In many cases, it's likely that a simple explanation would have helped justify the cost to the customer, but employees all of a sudden clamping up or threatening to put a lien on someone's house doesn't dial down the temperature, it amplifies it significantly and almost guarantees a customer is going to have a bad experience.

Undoubtedly, this sudden flip towards hostility is likely rooted in past situations where customers made life much harder for employees. However, defaulting to a defensive posture only creates a recurring, self-fulfilling cycle where employees make customers frustrated and only further

“ MY EXPERIENCE WITH THIS COMPANY WAS VERY BAD. THEY FAILED TO PROVIDE AN ESTIMATE AND THE COST WAS WAY BEYOND ANY REASONABLE EXPECTATION. WHEN I COMPLAINED, THE OWNER WAS ARGUMENTATIVE AND UNREASONABLE. OVERALL, A TERRIBLE AND STRESSFUL EXPERIENCE! ”

Middletown, RI

convince the employee they were right to be on edge in the first place. In some situations, reviews mentioned asking employees an innocuous question, such as if they were hiring, or if they had any availability in the next few days, only to be rudely dismissed or shut down.

DEMANDING COLLECTION PRACTICES

We've seen complaints of this genre pop up in previous sections, but once again, the topic of money has the ability to significantly change the relationship between customer and business. Over the course of our analysis, we saw multiple reviews cite instances when businesses quickly adopted shady or aggressive tactics in order to collect money they believed they were due. Of course, in some situations the price had never been agreed upon and no documentation had been signed, casting further doubt on the legitimacy of a business' claim to the money they were seeking.

Reviewers mentioned inappropriate collection techniques, including businesses calling friends or family members in an attempt to shame them into paying up, and very quickly resorting to liens, without following due process. For the sake of stating the obvious, going through avenues like this prematurely (or displaying borderline unethical behavior when seeking payment) is almost always going to result in an awful experience for customers, and will very likely lead to them pursuing every medium available to share their story with others. While you shouldn't accept not getting paid out of fear of receiving a bad review, you should consider bad reviews as you decide when, and in what order, you use tactics to receive suitable compensation for your work.

“

THEY CAME OUT TO REVIEW A WATER LEAK. AFTER 10 MINUTES IN MY HOME, MY INSURANCE COMPANY CALLED AND RECOMMENDED I ASK THEM TO LEAVE UNTIL INSURANCE COULD REVIEW THE SITUATION. I DID SO, AND THEY SENT ME A BILL FOR \$468 FOR THE 10 MINUTES THEY WERE IN MY HOUSE. A WEEK LATER, THEY SENT ME A NASTY E-MAIL STATING THEY WERE GOING TO RAISE PRICES 33% UNLESS I PAID THAT DAY. SHORTLY AFTER, THEY TRIED TO STRONG ARM ME INTO PAYING WITHOUT GOING THROUGH INSURANCE. AFTER ASKING THEM TO STOP, THEY SENT A THREATENING LETTER SAYING THEY'D PUT A LIEN ON MY HOUSE.

————— Portland, OR

“ MY EXPERIENCE WITH THIS COMPANY WAS HORRIBLE. I CALLED TO GET AN ESTIMATE AND I WAS TOLD BY THE GENERAL MANAGER THAT HE WAS TAKING HIS FAMILY TO DOLLYWOOD AND DID NOT WANT TO WASTE TIME DOING AN ESTIMATE. WHEN HE CAME OUT TO MY HOME HE WAS RUDE AND DISMISSIVE.

————— Macon, GA

BAD INTERACTIONS WITH EMPLOYEES

A SINGLE BAD
INTERACTION CAN
OUTWEIGH ALL
OTHER POSITIVE
ENCOUNTERS

Regardless of the reasons, one negative interaction with an employee at any stage of the customer journey can have massive consequences on the customer experience, and whether they walk away from a job recommending the business to their friends, or warning them to stay away. This truth was on full display in this category, as customers often honed in on one specific interaction that tainted their view of the entire process.

Unfortunately, many customers, like the one above, listed examples of employees exceeding their expectation, only to end up writing a 1-star review for the company ultimately. Why? Because a single interaction (in their mind) outweighed the impact of all their other positive encounters with team members. The classic customer service warning about customers sharing good experiences with five people, and bad experiences with 10 seems especially true in this case.

“ I HAD TO CHANGE MY REVIEW FROM A 5 TO 1 BECAUSE MY LAST EXPERIENCE WAS HORRIBLE. I HAD A FEW SERVICES AND SOME OF THEIR STAFF WERE AWESOME, BUT THE LAST TWO TECHNICIANS WERE VERY RUDE. TODAY, I FOUND A LEAK AND CALLED THEM FOR REPAIRS. THE FIRST PERSON TO ANSWER THE PHONE HUNG UP ON ME AS SOON AS SHE ENTERED MY NUMBER, AND THE SECOND PERSON SAID THEY DIDN'T HAVE ANY WEEKEND STAFF AVAILABLE.

————— Minneapolis, MN

Also worth noting was that there was no department left off this list. From receptionists to technicians, estimators to general managers, any team member at any rank has the potential to have an outsized impact on the

experience the customer has, and whose name they'll be mentioning in their positive or negative review online.

LESSONS FOR A 5-STAR RESTORER

The biggest lesson one should take away from this section is the realization that every employee, in every interaction, has the ability to shape and alter how your customers perceive your company. Your technicians can deliver a final product that far exceeds customer expectations, ahead of schedule, only for a rude phone call from a customer service representative to completely cloud the customer's view of the entire experience. It's not rational, and it's not ideal, but it's reality and disproportionately affects your ranking on Google, Yelp, Angie's List, and other review sites.

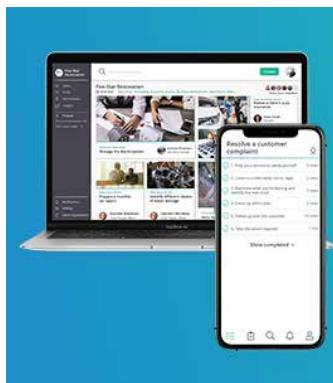
It's for this reason that customer service is something Phil Rosebrook of Business Mentors is so passionate about. "Over 80% of how a customer determines whether a restoration contractor did a good job or not is based on their relationship with the people performing the work and not the actual work," notes Phil. Using this knowledge, you can invest your energy and attention to ensuring your team over-delivers on your customer's experience." Identify your customer's baseline expectations for your service and then deliberately craft a plan to dramatically exceed these expectations. Be aware and manage your three A's – your appearance, attitude and actions. In controlling these variables, you can set a plan to dramatically exceed your customer's expectations.

Information like this can either be foreboding, or empowering. If there's a strong sense of ownership and a culture of comradery within your organization, employees will be eager to bring their best selves to every interaction with customers, to honor the hard work the rest of their team is producing, and ensuring your company gets the review it deserves. The idea of being the "weak link" that botches an otherwise great job will likely provide enough internal motivation to each employee as they go about their domain.

Yet in company cultures with low ownership, the "carrot" of helping deliver a 5-star experience turns into a "stick", where knowing the impact each team member has on the final outcome will likely be used to punish and blame-shift when projects go sideways. Instead of each employee reflecting on the influence they can have on the customer's experience, they will likely dodge ownership, and management will deny responsibility and culpability as well.

EVERY EMPLOYEE, IN
EVERY INTERACTION,
HAS THE ABILITY
TO SHAPE HOW
YOUR CUSTOMERS
PERCEIVE YOUR
COMPANY

Regardless of the ownership of any individual team member, every organization should make sure they have a clear plan of action and process in place when things go wrong, and that employees stick to it.



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Your customer service standards, seconds away for every employee, on-site or at the office

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DIFFERENT
PERSONALITY TYPES
HANDLE CONFLICT
DIFFERENTLY - GIVE
YOUR TEAM A
STANDARD PROCESS

The obvious, immediate benefit of having a process defined and accessible to every employee is ensuring that they're not left relying on inexperience, or how they're feeling in the moment, when something goes wrong. With angry

customers and accusations flying, customer service can be emotionally draining, and different personality types handle that differently. Having a clear, concise, and immediately available guide for employees gives them the expertise of your most seasoned veterans in the heat of the moment.

Additionally, having employees follow the predefined company guidelines covers your keister if things escalate and lawyers get involved (which we've seen, is not uncommon). Being able to point to a record of how your employees simply followed the company policy will make life much easier for your company and defend you against accusations from your customers.

Ultimately, conflicts with customers are inevitable in every industry. But there are steps that your company can take to ensure that employees take higher ownership of the outcome of every interaction, and when things derail that there is a plan in place to mitigate or minimize any damage that might occur.

Take Your Customer Service to The Next Level

Do

 Take initiative when things go wrong and work to find a solution

 Make it known that the company as a whole is what delivers a great experience

 Have ethical collections methods and processes in place

 Have tightly defined processes on how employees should handle customer complaints

Don't

Get defensive when things go wrong 

Have a culture of leaving it up to one department to deliver a great experience 

Use inappropriate or aggressive collection method to get payment out of a customer 

Have employees deal with customer complaints unprepared 



8



WHEN EMPLOYEES GO NUCLEAR

CHAPTER 8

GOING ROGUE

WHEN EMPLOYEES GO NUCLEAR

Initially, we filtered out “noise” reviews in our analysis, such as people complaining about bad driving from a company vehicle, or a former employee looking to seek revenge (or complain about dishonest business practices) by leaving a 1-star review. However, as we kept going through hundreds of reviews in our analysis, reviews like these eventually became impossible to ignore. Ultimately we realized that if they were having an impact on our analysis, they were also having an impact on Google’s overall rank of a business, so it was worth discussing in our report.

In this section, we’ll dive into the two most common types of “non-work performance related” reviews on Google Reviews:

- Reviewers complaining about bad driving.
- Former employees complaining about the company.

Throughout this section you’ll see that while your ability to deliver a high-quality, consistent product is obviously important, there are so many other factors that contribute to how your business is represented to the world, which means more avenues to go above and beyond, or more avenues for things to go sideways.

SCORNED FORMER EMPLOYEES

FEW PEOPLE HAVE A MORE ACCURATE IDEA OF WHAT A COMPANY IS REALLY LIKE THAN FORMER EMPLOYEES

Over the course of our analysis, we came across this issue over 2% of the time, but the stories told will have an outsized impact on the reputation of a business in the eyes of the reader, so they're worth taking extremely seriously. After all, it's easy enough to display a shiny exterior to the outside world, but few people would have a more accurate idea of what a company is really like than former employees who've spent time on the inside. Typically, their stories fell into one of three categories: complaining about not getting paid, feeling disrespected by poor communication, or going full "bridge burning" mode and airing company secrets and integrity issues out in the open for everyone to see. Let's start with those, because you know, they're the juiciest.

In these reviews, former employees blew the lid open on dishonest business practices (and occasionally framed these as the reason they quit) for everyone on Google to see. These included faking IICRC certification, insurance fraud, and overcharging customers, among others allegations. In some situations, reviews went into detail about being told to cut corners on individual projects, even though they knew it was the wrong thing to do. As with any review, it's impossible to verify the legitimacy of the claims made, but that doesn't lessen the impact or damage they can cause. Undoubtedly, during such a stressful and emotional process, if a customer has concerns about the integrity of the people walking through their house it will impact their perception on the entire process (if they choose to do business with that company at all).

The vast majority of complaints from former employees though were, unsurprisingly, about money issues (specifically, being owed payment they

“

I AM A FORMER EMPLOYEE AND THIS COMPANY WILL TRY TO SQUEEZE OUT AS MUCH MONEY AS POSSIBLE. AS AN EMPLOYEE I QUIT DUE TO THE UNPROFESSIONALISM OF THE PROJECT MANAGER WHO WOULD PERSONALLY STATE THAT THE DRYING EQUIPMENT SHOULD BE LEFT EVEN IF THE AREA OF LOSS IS DRY SO THEY COULD CHARGE FOR MORE DAYS FOR THE DRYING EQUIPMENT. HE ALSO TOLD US TO MAKE UP NUMBERS IN OUR DRYBOOK SYSTEM TO SHOW THE INSURANCE EVERYTHING WAS NORMAL AND NO QUESTIONS WOULD ARISE.

Sandy, UT

hadn't yet received). Some of these were vendors, others subcontractors, and many hourly employees, but all complained of waiting weeks or months for payment on a job completed. In most cases, by the time of the review, they still hadn't been paid.

“

THEY FALSELY CLAIM THEIR TECHNICIANS ARE IICRC CERTIFIED ON THEIR WEBSITE. THIS COMPANY IS FULL OF LIES, DECEITFULNESS, AND BROKEN PROMISES.

——— Pineville, NC

Particularly damning in these situations was that often organizations would have 1-star reviews from *multiple* former employees or vendors, building a convincing case that there were legitimate concerns and anyone wanting to engage with this company should be aware before proceeding, whether customer or staff. Additionally, anyone who has been in business

for more than six months can attest to the difficulty of attracting and retaining top talent. If a business' reputation for paying its employees on time is beginning to falter, how long until other categories in this analysis, such as "poor-quality workmanship" or "delays" begin to be affected as well?

Finally, the last category of complaints from former employees were those taking the company to task for poor communication (this time from the staff perspective). Similar to customer complaints about communication mentioned elsewhere, this category was filled with stories of sub-contractors being told to show up at certain locations, only for the job to be called off without any notice. In one situation, an employee was given an employment offer, so they quit their existing job, only to have the offer rescinded without explanation. In another, they told an employee they were closing up shop the next day without any warning, leaving them searching for work.

As was the case with customer complaints about poor communication, the biggest issue that prompted the 1-star review was the feeling of being disrespected. While any one particular slight may not have been enough to warrant an employee throwing their hands up in frustration and quitting, in aggregate it led to bitterness that gave employees a lot of ammunition once their ties were severed with the company and could be honest about how they felt.

“

THESE PEOPLE ARE CROOKS. THEY DO NOT PAY THEIR SUB-CONTRACTORS. WE DID A JOB FOR THEM AND THE CUSTOMER WAS VERY HAPPY, YET THEY STILL HAVE NOT PAID US. THEY PROMISED TO DO SO SEVERAL TIMES AND NOW THEY'RE CLAIMING THERE WAS AN ISSUE WITH OUR WORK. DISHONEST, AVOID AT ALL COSTS.

——— Topeka, KS

BAD DRIVING

This one isn't glamorous, but it isn't insignificant either. Just under 2% of the reviews in our analysis called out bad drivers for everything from sideswiping mirrors to forgetting to signal. In every review we found that referenced bad driving, it was the *only* issue mentioned, and it's safe to assume that these reviews weren't from actual customers – just ordinary citizens who'd encountered a branded vehicle on the road and were immediately left with such a bad impression that they took to Google to share their story.

YOUR EMPLOYEES
CAN DELIVER A
BRAND EXPERIENCE
BEFORE EVER
ARRIVING ON-SITE

In some situations, the grievance was indisputable, such as a car accident, but most referenced reckless driving, speeding, texting while driving, or other (relatively) minor infractions out on the road. Still, the weight of a bad review isn't any less damaging in Google's review algorithm if it was for an egregious reason or a inconsequential one. It's worth remembering when you hand over a company vehicle to a new (or seasoned) employee that they could have delivered a positive or negative brand experience before ever arriving on-site or picking up the phone.

“ THEY DRIVE INCREDIBLY WELL-MARKED VEHICLES AROUND THE CITY TO PERFORM THEIR RESTORATIONS. A VEHICLE WAS SPEEDING ON THE HIGHWAY TODAY. THE DRIVER SWERVED OFF THE HIGHWAY INTO THE SHOULDER TO PASS ANOTHER VEHICLE IN THE MOST RECKLESS MANNER POSSIBLE. THEN THEY DECIDED THE SPEED LIMIT WAS GOOD ENOUGH AND SLOWED DOWN AFTER A MOST RIDICULOUS PASS... I CAN'T IMAGINE THAT EMPLOYEES TAKE RISKS LIKE THAT FOR NO REASON. I WON'T USE THEM FOR THEIR RESTORATION BECAUSE THEY MAKE POOR CHOICES.

————— Edmond, OK

LESSONS LEARNED FOR A 5-STAR RESTORER

The biggest takeaway in this section should be that employees can influence your company's perception, and either help or harm your reputation, regardless of how well they can swing a hammer. With the power to drive away business while driving down the highway at their fingertips, high

ownership is necessary to ensure that employees represent your business positively, wherever they are.

That said, there are also more tangible tactics you can employ to ensure that you don't end up in this section unnecessarily, and that you've taken every precaution possible to prevent rogue (or careless) employees from harming your review score.

First off, assume that all secrets will eventually come to light. According to the [United States Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), younger employees are far more likely to leave a job than their senior counterparts, with 25-34 year-old employees having an average tenure of only 2.8 years. This means that it's likely only a matter of time before your current employees become former employees, and you control how much ammunition you give them if they leave on a sour note. Think carefully about your business practices, and whether you would be comfortable with them being broadcast on every search engine to potential customers to crawl through and associate with your company name.

Sometimes, an employee outburst (either publicly or privately) may come as a surprise to you, but it rarely is surprising for them. Usually, months or years of mounting frustrations precede any displays of anger directed towards an employer. This means that, if you're paying attention to how your employees and contractors are feeling, you should begin to sense these things before they blow up.

It's in these moments, according to B. Jon Isaacson, author of *Be Intentional: Culture*, that managers can put their egos aside and see an opportunity to correct things before they go public. "It's important, as people in a position of leadership, that we resist the natural urge to silence negative feedback," Jon says. "Understand that in the pursuit of excellence negative feedback may be the most valuable. We often learn more from our failures than our successes. If you have one employee that is angry enough at your organization that they are attempting to tarnish your reputation via social media, there is a strong possibility that there are more people in your organization who feel similarly. Rather than tamp that message down, find ways to drive that information out before it explodes in your face. Conduct regular check-ins with your team and build their confidence in being able to

ASSUME ALL YOUR
SECRETS WILL
EVENTUALLY COME TO
LIGHT



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CHANGE WILL HAVE TO BE LED BY MANAGEMENT AND ENFORCED BY WELL- DEFINED POLICIES

share their observations by showing them you want to know where your company is lacking and their thoughts on how to fix these issues. Turn negative feedback into transformation fuel.” By empowering employees currently wrestling with doubt, you’re giving them the opportunity to play a role in fixing things, and giving them greater ownership over the company culture at the same time.

Next, over-document and over-communicate things you don’t think you need to communicate. You may think it’s obvious that an employee shouldn’t drive erratically and should obey the speed limit, but people take their bad habits into every job and the only way to correct them is through intentionality. If employees shouldn’t drive more than 10 miles per hour above the speed limit, document that and ensure every employee is trained on it and can access that information. If you have a specific way employees should be dismissed (either fired or “let-go”), make sure that process is written down step-by-step and every manager can reference it wherever they are. When the process isn’t followed, employees get hurt and the business opens itself up to unnecessary risk.

Finally, as mentioned elsewhere, look for ways you can begin to push for more consistent communication among employees. This doesn’t come easily to most, but when employees or customers are left hanging because no one bothered to pick up the phone or fire a quick text letting them know plans have changed, unnecessary frustration is caused and both parties are more likely to stomp off in anger looking for an outlet. This change will most likely have to be led by management, and will be enforced by well-defined policies every employee is aware of. Holding employees accountable to mantras like “At our company, we give our customers a call when we’re on our way, or if we’re running behind” might feel unnatural at first, but if it’s written down and referenced by team members and modelled by management, it’s possible to course correct bad practices and ensure both customers and employees feel respected, even when things don’t go according to plan.

Avoid Rogue Employees Harming Your Brand

Do

 Ensure your business practices are ethical - are you giving disgruntled employees ammo?

 Over-communicate and over-document everything, even if it seems obvious

 If you need to dismiss an employee, make sure you have a company wide process to follow to do so

 Seek to understand how employees are feeling, before frustration boils to the surface

Don't

 Take shortcuts or tell your employee to do something that will come back to haunt you

 Assume your employees have the same moral compass as you do. Everything needs explaining

 Dimiss employees in a flurry of emotion or while unprepared

 Let bad communication be the reason rifts are created between you and your employees





9

SO, WHAT DO YOU DO WITH ALL
THIS?

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

SO, WHAT DO YOU DO WITH ALL THIS?

Analyzing over 1,000 bad reviews of restoration companies across North America was eye-opening, and sometimes shocking. But considering the outsized influence your rating on Google has on the traffic you'll generate, it's also extremely consequential. Many consumers trust online reviews as much as they do a friend's word, so the importance of striving to be a 5-star restoration company can't be understated. Thankfully, while no shortage of interesting stories filled the pages of this report, it also left us with clear truths that should be a source of optimism for every restoration company reading this, regardless of whether they have more 1-star reviews or 5-star reviews.

First, customer reviews are very, very rarely spontaneous. There is almost always a triggering incident or experience (whether positive or negative) that precipitates a customer sharing it with other people. Unfortunately, and we can thank human nature for this, in the case of a positive experience, that prompt will likely have to be an employee asking the customer to share their story with other people. In the case of a negative experience, this step is unnecessary, as customers will be more than happy to spread the word without prompting.

However, this also means that (usually) customers aren't waking up in the morning looking for businesses to rant about online. Instead, a spe-

ANY BUSINESS CAN TAKE SIMPLE STEPS THAT WILL HAVE AN OUTSIZED IMPACT ON THEIR REVIEWS

cific negative experience spurred them to share their story, which means that companies can reverse engineer what went wrong to find out what prompted such frustration from the customer in the first place. Out of the 1,000 reviews we analyzed, 84% of them had at least one clearly discernible trigger that led to the review being posted. Once those common issues have been identified, it's easier to begin to take steps to mitigate and catch them ahead of time (if not eliminating them altogether).

If your business is anything like those included in our analysis, there are some simple steps you can take that will have an outsized impact on the amount of negative reviews you receive. Imagine increasing your overall Google score by a few decimal points (and potentially opening up tens of thousands of dollars in opportunities), just by developing the habit of firing out a text to customers if you're running late.

Like we did in our analysis, your company can begin slowly and methodically targeting the different areas where projects break down, unique to your organization. Whether you need to improve communication or begin documenting your company processes (probably both), there are tangible steps you can take to whittle away at the issues that are most dogging your company.

This is great news – no company is unsalvageable or problem unsolvable. With intentionality, businesses can address the problems that are turning customers into keyboard warriors and instead transform them into champions and referral machines. With knowledge of where most restoration projects fail, and the self-awareness to recognize the degree to which they match problems within your company, home restoration companies can turn their fates around and give customers the 5-star experiences they are looking for.

