

Reviews and Ratings Are Decisive Factors in Dining Decisions

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Reviews and ratings are decisive factors for 91 percent of diners with 64 percent focusing on reviews less than a month old, according to a [report](#) from RightResponse AI. Additionally, 71 percent said that they “changed their mind and decided not to go to a restaurant” based upon negative reviews.

“People read reviews, are influenced by reviews, and are very influenced by negative reviews,” George Swetlitz, co-founder of RightResponse AI, told Modern Restaurant Management magazine. “More people said that ‘the information in reviews’ influenced their decision than ‘the star rating of the restaurant’ – reviews are read and they influence behavior, but you need to think in a broader sense. Reviews impact the number of diners available to your restaurant. Roughly 30 percent of restaurants have a rating below 4.0, and based on rating cutoffs, they are losing access to 53 percent of diners.”

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The AI-powered report analyzed more than 257,000 phrases from more than 100,000 reviews, uncovering trends, sentiments and behaviors affecting the restaurant industry. In a complementary report, [2024 Restaurant Diner Survey Insights](#), RightResponse AI examined diners' online search behaviors, review habits, and expectations regarding review responses.

Negative reviews are negative in a number of ways, Swetlitz noted.

“Negative reviews are longer than positive reviews, with one-star reviews being the longest. A single negative mention has consequences. For example, if there is a single negative mention of food, there is a 52 percent chance of that review being one or two stars, and a 74 percent chance of that review being a one-, two- or three-star review. A single negative service mention would mean a 61 percent chance of a one- or two-star review.”

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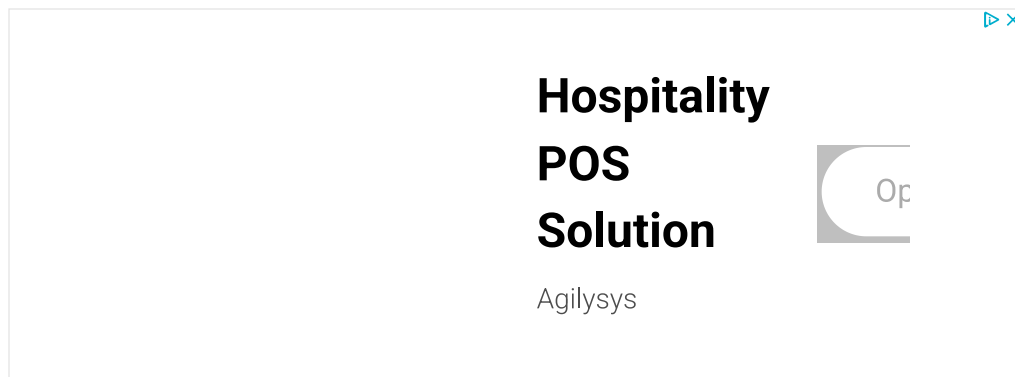
For any given star rating, chain restaurants have a lower percentage of positive mentions compared to single location restaurants, posing a notable difference in customer satisfaction. Diners are least tolerant of bad service quality and most tolerant of negative perceptions of value.

Swetlitz said he was very surprised that people were generally less satisfied with chains than single location restaurants.

“The way to think about that is that at any given star rating, you’re more likely to see negative mentions for chains,” he said. “And that’s what people read. To me, this is big news for chains and something that needs to be much more deeply explored for improvement.”

How a restaurant handles review responses can have significant impact as 78 percent of potential patrons consider responses to reviews as influential in their dining decisions, but only if they are personalized and informative.

There is a huge difference in response rates for chain compared to single location restaurants, Swetlitz pointed out.



“Chains have really invested in review response. That’s a great commitment, but I think money and time is being wasted on templated and generic reviews. That’s great marketing from review management platforms, but is not addressing what customers are saying they are looking for. It’s great that chain restaurants are responding, but using templates and generic AI isn’t gaining them much.”

“You’re not only talking to the person who left the review, but to every new customer that’s deciding whether or not to try your restaurant.”

When you dig deeper, chain restaurants are underperforming single location restaurants on the key metrics of food and service, Swetlitz added, but it is not showing up in ratings because single location engagement has a less than 20 percent response rate.

“While chains are outperforming single locations on response rate, since much of the chain response is templated or generic, single locations aren’t at a material disadvantage here. They should respond, either do it manually or invest in a solid AI tool and can hold their position. Templates don’t cut it. And generic AI doesn’t cut it either. An advanced use of AI might not be as good as the owner doing it by hand, but it’s really good, and it’s cheaper, scalable and more repeatable than having someone else to do it.”

Well-crafted responses should be top of mind for restaurant operators. The survey found that:

- 49 percent expect restaurants to respond, especially for negative reviews
- 58 percent say that a response to a negative review has made them feel less worried about that negative review
- 78 percent say that when they notice that review responses seem to be cut and paste or from a template that it negatively impacts their perception of a restaurant and that when they see personalized

“People take their time to review,” Swetlitz said. “In their mind, it’s not that hard, and it’s respectful, to respond. And further, you’re not only talking to the person who left the review, but to every new customer that’s deciding whether or not to try your restaurant. Make the response relevant and informative, especially the negative reviews. That can be done by hand, no need for AI. If someone comments about happy hour, provide the hours. If someone comments on live music, point people to the live music schedule. If someone comments on parking, include parking options. And so on.”



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