



Change your stars: How to respond to online reviews



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Review Response Guide

Local businesses know that online reviews are important. But how important? To put it into numbers, it's estimated that 95% of consumers read online reviews—and 57% of consumers will only consider businesses that have a 4-star rating or higher.

Responding to online reviews is not only an opportunity to build a positive online presence. It also reassures customers that their voices matter and that your client's brand is a company, however big, that will listen and help them. That, in turn, encourages more consumers to engage with their business.

Enterprise-level corporations that operate and oversee multiple locations are always expected to track and manage their reviews, a task which is made even more difficult if the company operates internationally.

But how can enterprise-level corporations effectively manage their reputation across countless locations? And how, exactly, should a business respond to online reviews—the positive ones and the negative? Do you really need to respond in all instances?

Let's run through these questions and more to help you navigate the complex world of online reputation management.

Reviews by the numbers

The statistics below highlight the importance of online reviews, their influence on users, and their effect on your public perception.

- [About 95% of customers read reviews before making a purchase](#)
- [91% of 18-to-34-year-old consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations](#)
- [86% of consumers read reviews for local businesses](#)
- [80% of people aged 18-34 have written online reviews, compared to 41% of consumers over 55](#)
- [72% of customers won't take any buying actions until they've read reviews](#)

- [Google accounts for 57.5% of all reviews worldwide](#)
- [57% of consumers won't use a business if it has lower than a 4-star rating](#)

Review sites

While it is important to monitor various review and social media sites to manage your client's online reputation, it is vital to understand which sites hold the most sway over your clients online audience and choose a management system that gives you control over every needed platform. Google has by far the most reach and influence over the local audience through Google My Business (GMB), though it is imperative to track and manage the other major review sources as well:

- GMB
- Facebook
- TripAdvisor (SnapMaps)
- YP.com
- Apple (potentially coming soon)

The above sites are the top sources for online reviews and should be monitored very closely. Along with these general-purpose review sites, businesses that operate in specialized industries—such as salons, hotels, contractors, and finance—may have their own niche review sites to monitor and manage.

Negative reviews

Negative reviews can cause untold damage to your client's local reputation—especially if they make up a large proportion of their overall number of reviews. Failing to respond to negative reviews only compounds the problem. After all, this is your client's chance to not only control the damage but engage their customers and turn the situation around to seize a rare and underappreciated marketing opportunity.

Why respond at all?

- Unfortunately, you can't just ignore a bad review until it goes away as it most likely is not going anywhere—and, unsurprisingly, ignoring an unpleasant review can make things worse.
- Remember: You're not only replying to just the one reviewer. You're speaking to everyone who can see the review, including potential future customers of your clients.
- Potential customers are looking for negative reviews with positive responses to gauge how the business treats its customers.
- Replying shows online users that your clients are not shady or neglectful and have taken steps to ensure this problem won't happen to the next customer.
- Replying is your client's opportunity to make things right. If a customer brought a complaint to them in person, they would try to make it right—and the same goes for online reviews. Despite the impersonal nature of online reviews, it's not over just yet. Your clients can turn this thing around!
- Respond to all reviews good or bad, even if your clients are only jumping on the response train now. Consumers can see reviews that go far back in time, so for them they are fresh. There's no such thing as a review that's too old to respond to.

- The way your clients respond to a review is everything and maintaining a professional attitude and disposition offers your clients key opportunities to take truly negative reviews and turn them into positive public relations.
- Responding to reviews has been shown to increase your overall review score over time. Although it can be difficult to find the time, it is worth the effort in the end.

How to respond to a negative review

1. Whatever happened, apologize and sympathize.

Even if the negative review is believed to be unfounded or unjustified, it's smart to acknowledge the customer's concerns and express sympathy. "I'm sorry to hear you were dissatisfied with your experience with us."

2. Inject a little positivity.

Make it clear that most customers are pleased with their experiences. "We've built a strong reputation for our attentive services, and I'm really disappointed that we seem to have fallen short in this instance."

3. Move the conversation out of the public arena.

Share contact information so the reviewer can continue their grievance one-to-one in a private channel. "My name is Drew, and I'm the Manager at this branch. I'd like to make this right for you, so please get in touch by contacting our Customer Service department at your earliest convenience. I'm sure we can work out a fix for the problem here."

4. Keep it short and sweet.

Don't share too many details, ask probing questions (you won't like the answers!), or risk upsetting the customer even more. Three short sentences should be more than enough to say what you need to say.

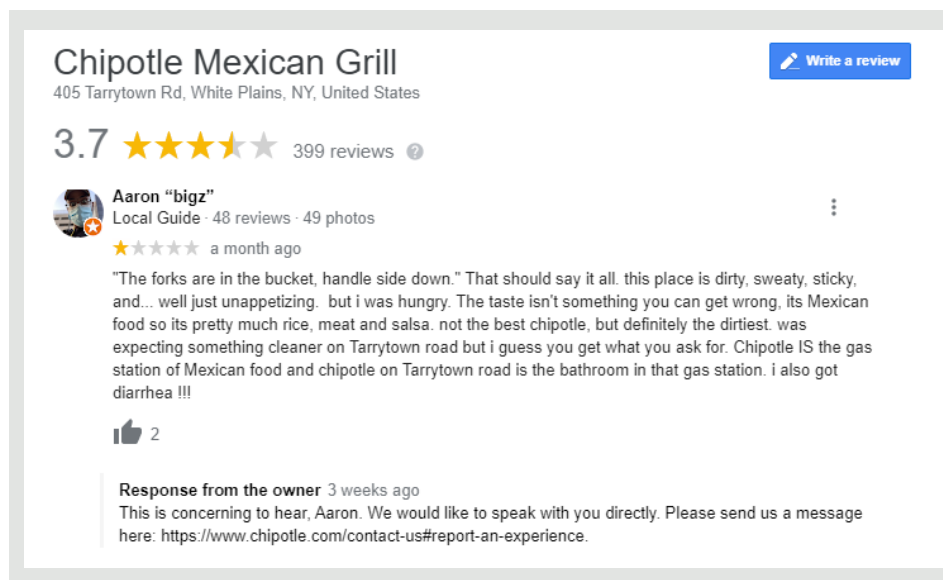
5. Omit your business name and target keywords.

When responding to negative reviews, make sure to omit the business name and any target keywords. This isn't the type of content that should appear in search results for your clients!

6. Managing negativity at scale

Managing an unhappy customer is never an easy task and doing it at scale is always a logistical challenge. Staying on brand and constantly striving to turn negative reviews into positive customers requires the use of a large-scale management system and professional experts.

Example



Positive reviews

Why respond at all?

- A five-star review is its own reward, but that's not where your job ends. Here's why you should consider a positive review to be just the first step in a longer process.
- It's polite to acknowledge praise. If you received a compliment in your everyday life, you'd say thanks, right? The same principle applies here—not least because the entire exchange takes place in public!
- Reviews travel. Remember that 95% of consumers now read online reviews. Replying to a positive review is a good chance to engage your customers (existing and potential) and broadcast your branding in a direct but subtle way.
- Aside from the ranking benefits a local business gets but if done right, a review response can elevate the SEO ranking of the review itself. That positive review may even start to show up in search results for your business depending what keywords are mentioned in the review and the response.

How to amplify a positive review

1. Say thank you—and be specific.

Make it clear that there's a real person behind the reply and call out a specific detail of the review. "Thank you so much for your kind words. You're absolutely right: Marie is an exceptional financial planner and she really cares about her clients!"

2. Include your business name and target keywords.

Maximize the potential SEO benefit by incorporating your client's business name, category, and location. "The entire team here at ACME Savings Chicago is delighted to hear your feedback, and we're proud to help local people like you with all your retirement planning needs."

3. Sprinkle a little marketing magic.

The reply is going to be read by others, so why not take the opportunity to mention a new feature or promotion? “Did you know that our new savings portfolio is now available?”

4. Include a call to action.

Turn that satisfied customer into a brand ambassador: ask them to try another product or service, or to spread the word about your business. “Ask us about our new savings app next time you visit—and bring a friend!”

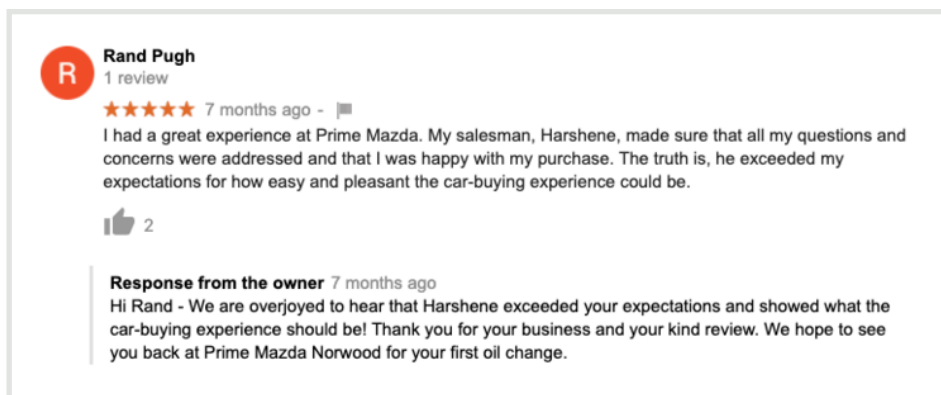
5. Keep the message on point.

While positive review responses are a golden opportunity to increase SEO potential as well as cross promotions, it is imperative that the response remain focused on the review itself so be sure to only include keywords and other extras to points that have been brought up in the review

6. Responding to positive reviews at scale

Now that you have applied all these points to your client's positive reviews you get to do it all over again for their next location and every other location under their brand, whether that is 100 locations or 100,000 locations. Applying a consistent review response and management strategy is integral to your online presence.

Example



Conclusion

Increasingly, you are what your reviews say you are.

Most consumers first encounter new brands online. That means online reputation is more important than ever before—and if you get your clients online presence right, they can make a great first impression each time.

Whether you're an agency that manages brands operating across multiple sites, or run a multinational enterprise with thousands of locations, reviews and ratings are an integral part of online businesses—and a prerequisite if you want to succeed in local SEO. Adopt a strong strategy and execution plan to monitor, respond, analyze, and action reviews, giving your online business the boost to ranking and SEO performance it needs. With a little practice, you can turn yourself into a review response expert and reap the benefits accordingly.

