



How to Deal with a Negative Online Review

By Amanda Stevens

In a digital age, what your customers say about you online matters more and more. But with the good sometimes comes the bad, often in greater proportions. In fact, the research shows that customers are up to five times more likely to share a negative experience than they are a positive one.

So how do you respond when someone has slated you online in a public forum such as Facebook or a review site?

Here are six steps to follow to ensure the damage is minimised and if you're lucky, turn a disgruntled customer into a vocal brand advocate.

1. Respond Promptly

Promptly responding to negative reviews shows the customer that you care and value their opinion. It may also be the catalyst that results in a person who had a bad experience with your business giving you a second chance.

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2. Take the Issue Offline

Depending on the problem, rather than respond to an adverse review by leaving a public comment, it may be better to reply privately via email or phone. For example, Yelp gives business page owners the opportunity to do so via email. If you resolve the matter to the customer's satisfaction, leave a brief comment in the public timeline thanking them and expressing how delighted you are that a solution was found.

3. Be Gracious, Be Grateful

A negative review, particularly one that expresses a strong opinion, such as in the example below, may stimulate emotions that could lead to a sterner response than necessary. Your mindset and reaction is critical — view the complaint as a gift rather than a personal attack.

Take time to collect your thoughts and respond by saying something like, "Thank you for taking the time to share your feedback. I would value the opportunity to speak with you about your experience. Please contact me as soon as it's convenient."

If after talking with the person you find there is merit to their comments, take proactive steps to remedy the situation.

4. Fix it by Going the Extra Mile

An unhappy customer is often one of your most vocal future advocates. Depending on how you compensate for the issue, you can create a situation where a customer is happier in the end than if they'd been given an initial experience that gave them no cause for complaint. Within reason, demonstrate to your angry customer that you acknowledge and validate their feelings and are willing to go to extraordinary lengths to resolve it. In most cases, your focus on a speedy and exceptional resolution will dilute their emotion.

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5. Don't Strive for Five Stars 100% of the Time

Negative reviews can benefit your business. If every review is positive and abounds with four and five star ratings, potential customers can become suspicious, feeling that the reviews are 'manufactured' rather than being left by real customers. As paradoxical as it sounds, the fact that less than perfect or negative reviews appear can contribute to building trust rather than diminishing it, particularly if the review is accompanied by a prompt, thoughtful response from the business.

6. Share Reviews with Your Employees

Make sure everyone in your company is aware of reviews you've received, both positive and negative. Acknowledge, celebrate and reward the positive reviews and encourage transparent and constructive discussion around the negative ones. Not only will that help to ensure you prevent similar problems in the future, it builds customer engagement.