

Hoteliers' Guide to Responding to Online Reviews



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Why are Online Reviews Important?

In an increasingly digital world, Internet reviews have come to be the main source of information for potential travelers. Online review sites aren't simply what people are saying about your hotel, they're the collective word-of-mouth for your brand.

The predominant way to reach customers is changing as traveler's are accessing multiple screens to complete their research and booking. They are also accessing multiple sites as the average traveler visits up to 38 websites before booking.¹ Of these 38 websites that are viewed during this process, travel review sites and apps account for up to 42% of the online sources used.²

It is also important to understand that 89% of travelers say reviews are influential when choosing where to book.³ Your reviews can have a significant impact on your average daily rate (ADR) as well. If prices for hotels are the same, travelers are 3.9 times more likely to choose a hotel with higher review scores and 76% of customers are willing to pay more for a hotel with higher review

scores.⁴ According to study published in the Cornell Hospitality Report, a 1-star increase in your online ratings gives you the ability to raise your rates by 11% without seeing any decline in conversion. This pricing power is even stronger in the economy to midscale properties because the variation in services and amenities is more profound.⁵ With more than \$340 billion spent on online travel booking annually, it's important to leverage positive traveler reviews to increase your market share.⁶

If a guest were to approach the front desk with a question, comment or concern, would you address them directly, or wait for a comment card? One of the key factors to leading a successful business is to always be proactive, not reactive.⁷

At Travel Media Group, we help hoteliers manage online reviews to increase their occupancy rates. Founded in 1982 as a marketing company specializing in the hotel industry, our online reputation management solutions focus on providing hoteliers with the ability to quickly isolate their promoters and their detractors. Our program helps hotels identify areas of improvement offline while promoting positive online reviews which impact ADR.

In this guide, we will go over best practices for managers to respond to comments and reviews left online, breakdowns of important review sites, and tips for keeping all your pages up-to-date.

How to Respond to Online Reviews

According to a study in 2012, 81% of travelers use TripAdvisor as a source of review information before booking at a hotel.⁸ Although TripAdvisor is the most frequented site by hoteliers and guests alike, there are numerous other review sites that also play a role in booking decisions, such as Google+ and Expedia.

We advise hoteliers to respond to all online reviews, regardless of the site of origin, as every comment is a reflection of your online reputation. This includes all online review sites and Online Travel Agencies (OTAs).

Why?

77% of respondents said that seeing a hotel management response makes them believe that the hotel cares more about its guests.⁹ With that being said, it's always important to respond to reviews, whether they are positive or negative. In the case of a positive review, all that is needed is a simple "thank you," and acknowledgement for their feedback. Let the positive review speak for itself - there is no need to reiterate the guests' positive comments.

Positive Review Response Example

Don't say: *Thanks for leaving us a review. We absolutely love reviews - especially good ones. As you mentioned, our hotel is "the best."*

Do say: *On behalf of our hotel and staff, thank you for taking the time to leave a positive review. We're especially glad you enjoyed the _____. We strive to provide excellent service, and we hope to see you again soon!*

In the case of a negative review, take the time to apologize for any inconvenience, and inform them that you will be addressing the issue in a timely manner. Always use your own discretion to determine if the issue should be taken care of personally (directly contacting the guest). Keep in mind that your responses will be public and will be seen by potential travelers. 87% of travelers who read online reviews say that appropriate manager responses improve their view of the hotel.⁹

Who?

In most cases, responses should be composed or approved by a manager. Responses should be concise, well thought-out and free of any spelling or grammatical errors. In addition, it's best not to respond emotionally or defensively, and remember that it's better to win-back a guest than to upset them further.

Negative Review Response Example

Don't say: *Why would you say such things about my business?! I don't show up at your work and yell at you!*

Do say: *We apologize for the inconvenience. We appreciate your feedback and will do our best to resolve the issue as soon as we can.*

Did you know? Travel Media Group Reputation Management provides a direct link to all review sites in the Reputation Dashboard, as well as e-mail alerts to notify you of new reviews.

When?

We encourage a 24-hour turnaround for responding to online reviews – the sooner you reach the guest, the sooner you can resolve the issue at hand. Be sure to do a bit of background research on the guest's stay – check when they stayed, what room they stayed in, which staff was present, etc. Gather information necessary reach the guest directly in addition to responding to their review online.

Keep in mind that your most recent review will be the first thing potential travelers see on your review page. That's why it's so important to have a prompt and thorough manager response.

Timely Review Response Example

Don't say: *Thank you for your positive feedback, although you stayed with us 2 years ago. We don't normally look at our TripAdvisor page. Well, better late than never, right?*

Do say: *I'm glad to hear you had a pleasant stay with us this last weekend. Thank you so much for your feedback about _____. We hope you come back soon.*

How?

Manager responses should be well thought out and articulate. A good manager response can show that despite any predicament, management is concerned with resolving the issue at hand. Always be sure to thank the customer for their positive feedback, and for taking the time to leave a review. For negative feedback, leave a short apology, if necessary, and reach out to the guest by e-mail to discuss the situation privately.

Keep public posting on a need-to-know basis, only address major concerns at your own discretion, and never bring up the specifics of an individual's stay.

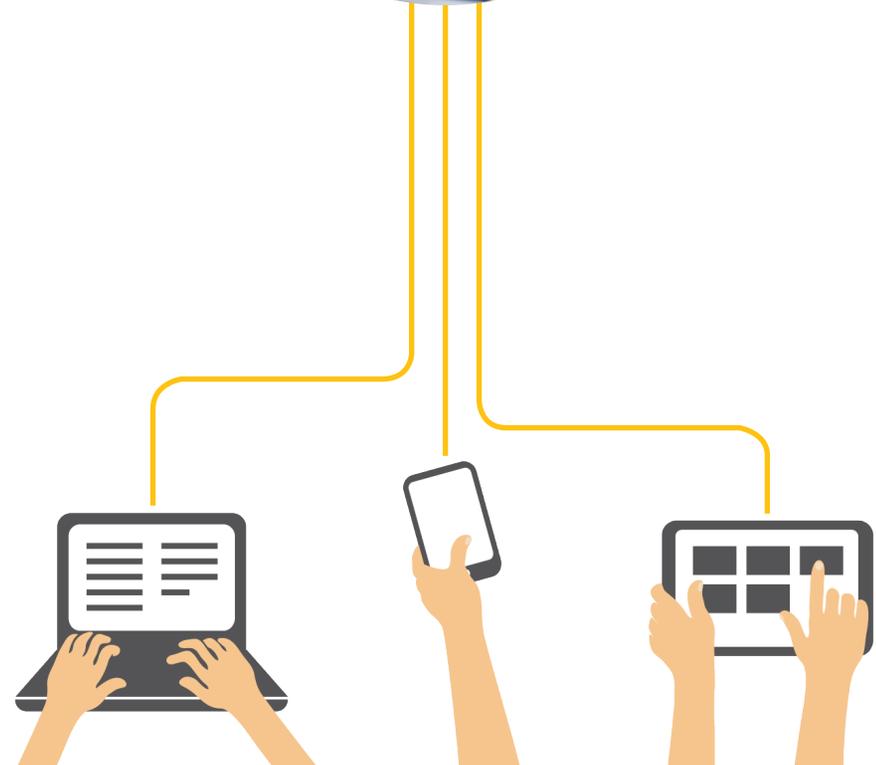


Negative Review Response Example 2

Don't say: *First of all, it's not our fault that you had unrealistic expectations. Maybe next time you'll tell us about a problem before the last day of your trip.*

Do say:

- **Public:** *Thank you for your feedback. We apologize that your stay was less than desirable, and we'll be taking steps to resolve the issue.*
- **Private:** *We apologize once again for ____ and we will be solving _____. Given the opportunity, we assure you that your next stay will be a better experience.*



Review Sites 101

TripAdvisor

[TripAdvisor for Business](#)

“TripAdvisor branded sites make up the largest travel community in the world, reaching 315 million unique monthly visitors, and more than 200 million reviews and opinions covering more than 4.4 million accommodations, restaurants, and attractions.”¹⁰ Because the reviews on TripAdvisor are written by real travelers with no solicitation, travelers can trust the advice that is available.



Reviews

TripAdvisor is open to the public, provided that a free account is created on the site. Reviewers have a wide range of facets on which to rate the property by leaving feedback and indicating the value of the room, location, amenities, cleanliness, service and sleep quality; each are rated on a scale of 1 to 5. There is a minimum requirement of 200 characters for the review dialogue.

Responses

The first step to responding is to claim your TripAdvisor page by registering with the site as an “owner,” which is TripAdvisor’s title for the hotelier. In order to create a TripAdvisor owner’s account, [click here](#) and search for your property in the provided field. Once you have located and selected your property, please click on the Register for this Business button. You can log in using a Facebook or Google+ account, or create a brand new account just for TripAdvisor.

Once registered, you can respond to any review on your property’s page. Once you respond, you cannot edit the response, and you can only have one response at a time per review. If needed, you can delete the original manager response and replace it with a revised version. TripAdvisor needs to approve all responses before they are published.

TripAdvisor Ranking

TripAdvisor ranks all hotels in a particular area, based on a formula determined by review ratings, number of reviews, and how recently the reviews were published. In order to have the best impact on improving your rank it is not only important to get good ratings, but you also need to ensure travelers are consistently leaving reviews.

Did you know that TripAdvisor ranking also influences booking statistics?

- Hotels ranked #10 on TripAdvisor book 10% more room nights than hotels ranked #20.
- Hotels ranked #5 on TripAdvisor book 9% more room nights than hotels ranked #10.
- Hotels ranked #2 on TripAdvisor book 7% more room nights than hotels ranked #5.
- Hotels ranked #1 on TripAdvisor book 11% more room nights than hotels ranked #2.¹¹

How to Improve Your TripAdvisor Listing

TripAdvisor offers something they refer to as Business Listings, which enables you to add the property's phone number, address, website, and amenities.

Adding pictures is another crucial aspect of improving your TripAdvisor listing. Properties with at least one photo have a 138% increase in engagement on average compared to properties with no photos.¹² In addition, 73% of travelers use photos from other travelers to help them make decisions.¹³ In this case, seeing really is believing.



Google Plus

Google My Business

Google Plus (formerly Google Places), launched in 2011, is a combination of social media and interactive searching. It allows people to connect through different circles, that include friends, family, acquaintances, and “followers” - the followers section is designed for people to see posts and activity from businesses, or people they don’t know first-hand. Business pages function in a similar way to Facebook and TripAdvisor.

The key benefit from having a Google Plus page is the fact that this affects the Search Engine Optimization, otherwise known as SEO. This means that the more content and activity your page has, the better your position will be when keywords pertaining to your property are entered into Google.



Reviews

Users are required to have a Google Plus account in order to leave a review. The majority of the community consists of Gmail Users. The review format is simple - guests can rate their stay from 1 to 5 stars, and leave any comments or feedback pertaining to their experience. The default setting on a Google Plus review page is set to display the “Most Helpful” reviews first, based on Google algorithms.

Responses

Hoteliers need to claim their Google Plus page in order to respond. Once the page is claimed, they can respond through the Reviews section by clicking “Manage Reviews.” Once on the Manage Reviews page, click “View and reply,” type in your response, and then click “Submit.”

Yelp

[Yelp for Business Owners](#)

Yelp is a website that allows users to leave a review for a hotel, restaurant, and a variety of other local businesses. It also encourages a digital community to converse about their experience and the service provided.

82% of Yelp users turned to the site when preparing to spend money at a local business.¹⁴ With an average of approximately 139 million monthly unique visitors in Q3 2014, why not create a strong presence on Yelp for your property?¹⁵

Plus, Yelp users are more mobile than other review site members, influencing how potential guests make buying decisions on-the-go. Through the mobile app, 73 million unique monthly visitors complete 64% of searches, leading to tens of thousands of direct messages and phone calls to local businesses, including hotels.¹⁶

Reviews

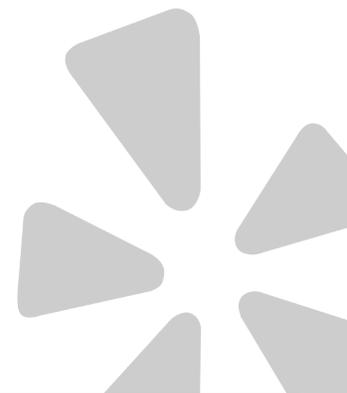
Yelp allows users to leave a review consisting of a 1-5 star rating, the date the review was posted, comment up to 5,000 characters, and even pictures. Once a review is posted to the business page, other members of the Yelp community can indicate if the review was useful, funny, or cool by using the interactive icons provided.

Yelp filters reviews that they do not “recommend,” based on Yelp’s standard for legitimacy. There is a set of criteria, which a review needs to meet, in order to be “recommended” on the business page and affect the overall rating. This includes, but is not limited to, the reviewer’s Yelp profile, the extremity of the review (too positive or too negative), and sufficient detail (number of words). Yelp prefers to have reviews published at the location itself (hence, its heavy mobile focus). Reviews can be filtered if they are not published at the location of the business.

Yelp Business Features

The first thing you should do is to claim your business page on Yelp. Once you have claimed your page you will be able to respond to reviews, both privately and publicly. Yelp also allows you to track user views on your business page so you can see how engaging your page is to potential customers. Lastly, you’ll be able to add photos, links, a phone number and your hours of operation.¹⁷

When too many legitimate positive reviews are filtered, it can be frustrating for business owners. Fortunately, Travel Media Group’s client support specialists can provide a few tips to help the reviews make it to your business page.



Expedia

[Expedia Partner Central](#)

In 1996, a Microsoft division launched Expedia.com as a more encompassing method to research hotels and book stays. Over the last 19 years, Expedia has become the largest OTA, with 60 million unique monthly visitors.¹⁸ Recently, Expedia acquired TripAdvisor, though the two retain their unique formats.

Reviews

Expedia promotes verified reviews. This means that when a guest reserves a room through Expedia, the site sends them an email invitation to leave a review roughly 24 to 48 hours after their check-out. The review format is similar to TripAdvisor, with hotel cleanliness, service, condition, comfort and overall satisfaction being rated on a 5-point scale. Feedback dialogue is not required.

Responses

Hoteliers can respond through Expedia Partner Central, a partnership website which allows hoteliers to respond to reviews on multiple review sites. Hotels have up to 6 months to respond to a review from the check-out date of the guest, so a timely response is essential.



Hotels.com

[Expedia Partner Central](#)

Hotels.com is a division of Expedia, known for its deals and “Price Match Guarantee™.” The Hotel Reservations Network was created in 1991, and in 2001 it became part of Expedia, changing its name to Hotels.com in 2002.

Reviews

As an OTA like Expedia, Hotels.com requires travelers to book a room through their website in order to post a review. The email link is sent upon check-out, and guests have a 5-point scale for rating the overall hotel, the condition, service, room cleanliness and room comfort. Travelers can also say whether or not they would recommend the property and the type of trip they took (leisure, business, etc.).

Responses

Hoteliers can also respond to Hotels.com reviews using the Expedia Partner Central website. They can also respond via e-mail by sending a reply to reviews@hotels.com, as long as enough relevant information is included. Please contact Hotels.com for further details regarding this.

Orbitz

www.orbitz.com

Orbitz was originally founded in 2001 through a partnership between a few members of the airline industry including Continental Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Northwest Airlines, and United Airlines - and later American Airlines in order to provide a way to lower their distribution costs.

Reviews

Orbitz lists reviews on a 1 to 5 point scale regarding amenities, cleanliness, hotel staff, comfort, location, and value. After factoring all of these ratings together, Orbitz determines an overall rating and also allows users to indicate whether or not they'd recommend the property to other travelers. An average of all the ratings is then calculated at the top of the page.

Travelers can only write a review of a hotel if they booked your stay through Orbitz.

Responses

Orbitz does not allow responses to customer reviews. However, Expedia recently acquired Orbitz in February 2015, leaving the future of Orbitz's review platform uncertain. Orbitz may adopt Expedia's format for manager responses. At Travel Media Group, our reputation experts stay aware of changes to major review websites, so you can rest assured that your client support specialist will inform you if/when the ability to reply to reviews becomes available.



Booking.com

[Connect to Booking.com](#)

More than 18 million rooms are booked each month through Booking.com.¹⁹ Booking.com currently holds the largest market share of OTA unique customer views. It was created in 1996 and acquired by the Priceline Group in 2005.



Reviews

Guests can only leave a review if they booked a stay through Booking.com, and will receive an invitation after their stay is over. On Booking.com reviewers can indicate an overall rating out of 10, as well as the level of cleanliness, comfort, location, facilities, staff, value for the money, and quality of WiFi on a scale of 1 to 10. In addition, travelers can elect to indicate the type of trip they took, the size of the group, the type of room they stayed in, and the duration of their stay.

Responses

On Booking.com hoteliers can only respond directly to the customer, there is not a public reply feature.

At Travel Media Group, our client support specialists have experience with managing reviews. If you receive a negative review from a guest, we can help you develop an appropriate response.

Next Steps For Success

In this document we have outlined some tricks and tips for successful manager interactions on different forums where guests leave feedback about your property and your brand, plus provided a brief overview of some of the most popular review websites. Through actively managing your online reputation, you stand to gain not only rich feedback on the property's successes and shortcomings, but also use strategic replies to shape the perception of your hotel online.

Creating and maintaining a strong online presence may sound like a tedious task, but with help from Travel Media Group's wide range of digital products, it will not be so daunting. We offer products that can help drive walk-in guests and online bookings, influence your online reputation, and create and maintain various social media profiles. Our online reputation management program allows you to track, influence, and maintain your online

reputation through one easy-to-use dashboard. Our program also leverages a branded e-mail campaign to drive more reviews.

Our newest product, a responsive hotel website that drives commission-free bookings by utilizing the brand's booking engine, while integrating our reputation, social and video products seamlessly for an integrated marketing approach.



Let Travel Media Group help you improve your online reputation!
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