

6 rules for influencing how customers will review your brand

[Business](#), [Company](#)



TripAdvisor has long been a destination for finding cheap flights, but this summer, it unveiled its biggest redesign in seven years when it introduced . The reviews will contribute to an airline's overall " flight score," which affects its position in search results. Airlines with higher scores will move to the top of the queue.

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With human attention ps , according to one U. K. study, winning the top spot is critical.

But the value of customer reviews extends far beyond the travel space. According to Walker's report, 86 percent of consumers surveyed said that they were willing to pay more for a better experience, and 88 percent said they considered reviews a credible source of information -- a belief TripAdvisor has reinforced by using reviews to rank search results.

The message here? Businesses in all industries shouldn't underestimate the influence of review sites.

Understanding review sites

Since I started my company, I've had plenty of opportunities to claim success -- and failure. We build pools in Arizona, arguably the most competitive pool market in the country. So, being viewed as the best is our only sustainable advantage. But, being the " best" and being " perfect" aren't the same.

The problem is that the digital world makes helping consumers understand that distinction increasingly difficult.

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Of the who-knows-how-many chances we might have to make an error with our business, we do so infrequently. But due to the structure and nature of review sites (and basic human psychology), consumers shopping for a pool builder may have a hard time sorting that out.

To illustrate, I surveyed a couple of review sources. On Facebook, the day I conducted my search, had 68 reviews: 45 were five-star reviews and 19 were one star.

On Yelp, we had 40 reviews: 20 were five-star reviews; 14 were one star.

This represented only a small fraction of our customers, and the reviews were largely polarizing. People aren't typically compelled to write an online review unless they loved or hated their experience. This is the challenge of review sites. Although the evidence is anecdotal, statistically insignificant and scattered throughout the internet, it's an information source on which consumers rely.

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Rules of (customer) engagement

Knowing our internal data and the challenge review sites present, we created our own proactive rules for maintaining strong feedback loops, with current customers, while offering prospective ones resources to build a clear picture of who we are. Here are those rules:

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1. Understand that nobody is perfect.

Despite their efforts, all businesses occasionally make mistakes. So, don't hide from yours. Instead, embrace and learn from them.

We survey customers at the end of projects to gauge satisfaction. We ask them to rate our performance in 11 areas of service, on a scale from zero to 10. Our average in these internal surveys is 8.6. It's not a perfect 10, but it does highlight the areas we excel in (e. g., quality of work, with a "9.5" average) and those in which we need to improve (e. g., scheduling, with an "8" average).

2. Make it easy for consumers to contact you.

Whether or not customers can communicate with a live person can make or break a business. According to PwC's , a large majority () of customers get frustrated when contact information proves inaccessible, while with a brand based on how easily support can be accessed.

A solid customer experience starts with open communication, so (if necessary) reorganize your website to encourage people to reach out directly with any questions or concerns. Additionally, respond to any communication, whether it be a call, Facebook message, tweet or customer review.

3. Display a detailed, diverse record of work.

American Express' *Global Customer Service Barometer* reported that surveyed said they were willing to try a new company for a better customer experience. As customer experience overtakes price and product

as a key brand differentiator, it's vital to ensure that, no matter where they look, people can see what sets you apart.

It never has been and never will be your customers' fault if they don't know enough about you to reach out. It's your responsibility to make information available in a variety of venues. My company achieves this through online galleries, project highlights, a 16, 000-square-foot pool park and more.

4. Encourage advocacy in any form.

Word of mouth is a key customer acquisition avenue. A Nielsen survey found that while , 92 percent trusted a recommendation from people in their social circles even more.

My company encourages referrals by collecting referrers' names from new customers so we can reach out and personally thank them. We retweet and share people's stories and pictures about their purchases, via social media, and happily provide references to prospective customers, too.

5. Overcommunicate.

Often, customers leave negative reviews when they feel ignored. In fact, how customers feel they're being treated determines whether they'll buy from a company , according to a McKinsey study. People now use public channels as their first form of communication after a poor customer service experience. Many view it as their only avenue of recourse. For this reason, it's important to stay in constant communication until a customer issue is resolved.

6. Never get comfortable.

No matter how many five-star reviews you get, there's always room for improvement. Years of positive experiences can be undone with one unresolved negative one, and, according to HelpScout, it typically takes to make up for it.

Continuously strive to be the best by doing everything possible to make customers feel proud to have worked with you. Being the best also means nurturing and maintaining high expectations of talent so employees can wear your logo with pride, take their roles seriously and hold one another accountable.

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Again, perfection isn't possible, but being the best is. Consumer-generated reviews are a part of doing business in 2016, and they're not going anywhere any time soon. So, focus on delivering consistent quality and resolving any issues that may come up. That kind of strategy makes for the best marketing tactics on the planet.