

Being **LIKED** is **SERIOUS BUSINESS**

Ten Steps for Repairing and Protecting Your Online Reputation

by Kate Zabriskie



"The worst customer service experience ever! The bed was dirty, and the bathroom had hair on the toilet seat. My dog refused to enter the room. He slept in the car. I don't know why I didn't do the same thing. Do not EVER stay here!!!!!!!!!"

"If you are offered a job at this place, run! Do not walk to the nearest exit. This company is an asylum. I have never worked with a more dysfunctional group of people in my life."

"There are a lot of fake reviews on this site. Anyone who has ever been here knows there is no possible way on earth a real customer would say this place was anything but a pit. Enter at your own risk. You have been warned."



OUCH! THOSE HURT.

And there it is, right there in black and white for anyone and everyone to see—the naked truth: what someone thinks of your product, your service, or your organization.

Bad reviews can bite, wound, and sting. Worst of all, a mountain of them can appear in a matter of seconds. Social media, it's a wonderful thing, until it turns against you.

So, what's a person to do when his or her online reputation is suffering at the hands of others? Plenty.

Step One:

Take a deep breath. You can fix it. Not overnight, but you can fix it.

Step Two:

Get over any hurt feelings or embarrassment, and do it quickly. The people who complain have done you a great favor. It's now up to you to decide if negative reviews are going to be the kiss of death or a wakeup call.

Step Three:

Uncover everything that is being said about you. If you found a bad review in one place, there are probably others. You will need to spend a few hours researching yourself online. Start Googling, and take notes of what you find and where. A word of caution: resist the urge to respond to anything. Be strategic, not impulsive. You will need a game plan before typing a word.

Step Four:

Automate. Sign yourself up for Google Alerts at www.google.com/alerts. If new content mentioning your company shows up online and Google sees it, the search engine will send out an automatic alert letting you know. There are also a variety of free and paid services that will monitor online search terms and any major review sites for mentions, and will quickly notify you if new information about you is posted. If you are serious about managing your online reputation, these services are extremely valuable.

Step Five:

Once you have a good picture of your online grade, get ready to roll up your sleeves and start problem solving. If your employees are rude, train them. If your

establishment is dirty, clean it. If people hate working for you, investigate. Unless you are the victim of competitor sabotage, what you are reading is probably based in truth. If needed, revisit step two.

Step Six:

Involve your team and communicate your improvement plan. You will reach your goal faster if everyone in your organization understands what it is and is working toward it.

Step Seven:

When you are interacting with people, ask them what they think. You already know some of them have no problem sharing their opinions with the world, so they will probably be willing to candidly tell you the good, bad, and ugly. Asking your customers or clients for help can prove extremely beneficial.

"We are working hard to improve. Would you be willing to talk to me for a few minutes? Thank you. What two or three things could we have done differently in order to make your experience with us better?"

If at all possible, have these conversations verbally. You may be surprised by the quantity and quality of information you are able to quickly gather.

Step Eight:

Once you have a clear sense of what is going on with your business and are on the road to smoothing out the rough spots, get back to the reviews. It's time to answer them.

First, thank the reviewer for letting you know about a problem and include something good about yourself, too.

"Thank you for your feedback, and I'm sorry your son's birthday experience with us wasn't what you expected. We've hosted over a thousand birthday parties for children in our five years of business, and we strive to delight each of our guests."

Second, describe what you have done to prevent the issue from occurring again.

"We've taken a few steps to prevent what happened to you from happening to another parent of a birthday boy or birthday girl. Since your visit, our staff has taken several classes to improve their service skills. They've

focused specifically on techniques for positively engaging with children."

Third, ask the person to give you a second chance.

"Please celebrate with us again. I believe you will be pleasantly surprised. My name is Kate. If you ask for me when you make your reservation, I will take care of you personally."

Resist the urge to be snarky, judgmental, or to correct your customers. Yes, some customers are wrong—however, pointing that out will not help. Lots of people are going to be watching how you respond to others. Take advantage of the opportunity to be polite, helpful and solution-focused. People who rely on the reviews can often tell when other customers are being difficult. If you are gracious in your dealings with them, you will win in the long run.

Step Nine:

Ask your happy customers to post reviews. Over time, your average will improve. Obviously this approach only works if you are indeed making changes and removing the causes of bad evaluations. If you are not, prepare for more of the same reviews you've received in the past because they're coming. You simply cannot turn off the social media tap.

Step Ten:

As tempting as it may be, do not post fake reviews or go to a service to get others to do the same. Apart from the fact that it's dishonest, it's also dangerous. If you get caught, you will look even worse than you did before. Instead, get busy writing more content to post on your site, press release sites, and other appropriate places. The more that's out there, the less visible a bad comments be.

Followed closely, this 10-step plan for a reputation overhaul could earn you five stars. What do you think?

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