



How To Handle Negative Feedback

by Dave Kogan, Manager of Marketing & Business Development, ASHI

Bad online reviews can be the death of a business as increasingly connected customers research their purchases—and complain when they've had a business dealing that didn't go their way. Industry experts discuss about how best to handle negative feedback that's painfully public below.

“Negative reviews can have massive effects because everyone loves knowing about the experiences that other shoppers have had,” explains Kyle Willis, CEO of [No to the Quo](#). “I had a client who reached out for help because he had someone who didn't have a positive experience who then made it a mission to let the world know about it. My client said that negative review cost the company over a million dollars in business over a year.”

But a bad review doesn't have to mean disaster. “A negative review is actually a good thing,” says Tash Jefferies, an author who teaches on Udemy. “It keeps things authentic — I never want to feel I'm just preaching to the choir and I'm only drawing in those who love me. It means I'm actually pushing beyond my comfort zones.” Beyond that, a few negative reviews can give your good reviews a ring of truth. Having nothing but glowing reviews may make readers wonder if your reviews are legitimate. “All the reviews I have are literally people who didn't know who I was and wanted to write something. That speaks to anyone who comes along,” says Jefferies.

Still, too many negative reviews or comments are going to create a problem for your business. Let's take a look at how you can make your online reviews work for your business — instead of against it.

Solve Review Problems Before They Start

The easiest way to prevent negative reviews is to make sure

your customers aren't unhappy enough to post them in the first place. “We believe in the old adage that an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure,” says Richard Thomas, Executive VP of [Listen360](#). “We advise our clients to be aware of issues and address them — but not to expect a perfect rating from every customer all the time. There really shouldn't ever be a time when a business is caught off guard by lots of negative reviews.”

However, it's not always possible to please every client — especially if you're a consumer-focused business that deals with a lot of customers on a daily basis. One unhappy customer may be difficult to pick out of a sea of transactions, but that could be the catalyst for big problems later if it's not nipped in the bud. If negative reviews do crop up, you want to spot them quickly so you can act. [Social media monitoring](#) can help you spot negative commentary before it gets out of hand. You can also set up Google Alerts to email you when a mention of your business pops up anywhere online — from social networks, to review sites, to personal blogs.

How to Respond to a Negative Review

Negative reviews or comments can be frustrating, especially when customers seem to be blowing things out of proportion — but it's important to keep a cool head and try to see things from the customer's point of view.

“You have to really understand that customers aren't going out of their way to burn you for no reason,” explains Alex Brola, President and Co-founder of [Checkmaid](#). “You probably screwed up. Some customers certainly see things as being far worse than they seem to a business owner, but that doesn't mean that they're wrong. It just means you need to have



empathy — understand that it’s a big deal to them, respect that, and act accordingly.”

The first step to mitigating a negative review is publicly acknowledging you’ve made a mistake — even if you don’t feel that you have — and apologizing. Resist the temptation to pick an argument or try to explain that things didn’t really happen the way the reviewer says, because it’s not going to win you any points. “You don’t want to get into the situation of ‘their experience wasn’t like that, here’s what truly happened,’” says Willis. “Because anyone who’s going to go on Yelp to read a review is going to side with the customer and not the business.”

Then, offer to mend the situation in whatever way you can. If the customer is unhappy with a service or product, offer to replace it. “When the customer takes us up on the offer, it often results in them changing their review — without us asking them to,” says Willis. “If they don’t accept the offer, then it still serves as a sign of goodwill and shows potential customers looking at reviews that the negative experience was an outlier, not the regular way we conduct business.”

Brola also recommends setting aside some time every week to reach out to customers who have had a bad experience — just touching base with an earnest apology can go a long way towards making things right. “If it’s really hurting business to have a specific negative review, you’d better make it a really big deal to get it removed,” explains Brola. “It’s unlikely you’d get a negative review removed with the initial apology or refund, but if you follow-up multiple times it can be done. Time heals these kinds of things — as long as you stay on top of your game, keep in touch, and show that you really care.”

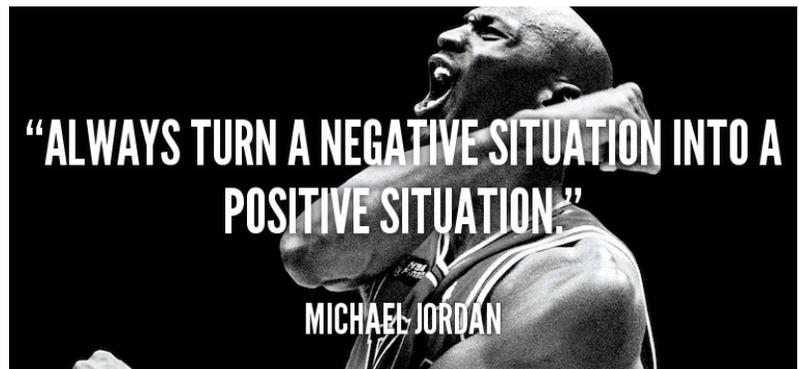
Working with reviewers, no matter how disgruntled they seem, isn’t a lost cause. “In most cases, if your customer is taking the time to give you negative feedback, it is because they believe the problem is something you can fix,” says Thomas. “The bottom line is, when you improve your business for one customer, you have improved it for all your customers. So at the end of the day, everyone is happier.”

Using Negative Reviews to Improve Your Business

There’s a silver lining to even the most negative review.

“You have to appreciate the negative reviews as much as the positive ones,” says Thomas. “Look at all your reviews and feedback, and try to identify trends or common themes. If you will let them, your customers can almost function as business consultants.”

Every negative review is a chance to improve your service — both for the reviewer and your future customers. Jefferies has used feedback — both positive and negative — to improve her course offerings. “Anyone who writes a review always gets a



note back from me,” says Jefferies. “I always ask what didn’t work, because for me that’s always an opportunity to find out where I’ve gone wrong. I’m always eager, always friendly, and always thankful.”

No matter how large or how small, the feedback you glean from your reviews should be [shared throughout your business](#). Beyond making sure everyone’s on the same page to prevent future problems, it lets your entire team know that excellent customer experience is your highest priority — and given how quickly social networks can spread a negative customer experience — it definitely should be!