



# How to Respond to Negative Reviews





## Owning a business means taking the bad with the good

If you're a small business owner, you should be proud of your accomplishment. Running a business is hard work, especially one focused on supporting the health and wellness of your community. And for all the great aspects of being your own boss, there are a few drawbacks – and many would agree that negative reviews are one of the biggest.

Handling negative reviews is simply part of owning a small business. That said, negative reviews aren't the marketing nightmare people make them out to be. When handled right, they can even become a marketing opportunity.

How you respond to reviews can be the determining factor in whether you win a returning customer or earn a bad reputation.

## Be empathetic

Whether on Yelp, Google, Facebook or your business's email inbox, you're bound to come across a bad review every once in a while. It's important to be empathetic in these situations. People don't take the time to write bad reviews for the fun of it; they do so because they want your business to be better. You want the same thing, which is why it's important for you to try and understand the customer's situation.

Take time to read their review with a clear head. Don't respond immediately, as you're more likely to come across as defensive. Instead, take an hour or two (and maybe get a second opinion) to think and craft a response that addresses the reviewer's concerns.



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## Review their visit

Put on your detective hat and try to figure out what occurred to cause someone to write a negative review. Ask for a first-hand account from employees or contractors who were in the building that day. If necessary, review your business's purchase transactions and software to identify as much about the service the reviewer chose as possible: date, time, staff name, class size, session duration or anything that can better help you understand the situation from an objective point of view. Knowing these details will help you craft a response that will satisfy the reviewer.

## Respond within a reasonable time frame

In today's environment of one-day shipping and instant music downloads, people want a quick response to their reviews. Again, try not to respond immediately, but don't hold off for too long. Waiting causes even more frustration for the customer, and they may start to think you aren't taking their concerns seriously.

Furthermore, a slow response to a public review is off-putting to other potential clients looking at your business. According to Pew Research Center, 82% of adults look at reviews before buying something<sup>1</sup> (such as a spot in your fitness class or an appointment at your salon) at least some of the time, and 40% do so before almost every purchase. For small businesses such as yours, reviews let potential customers see your style of customer service before setting foot in your building.

Instead of waiting a long time, respond to the review within a day or two. Yelp recommends 24 hours, noting that replying within this time frame boosts the chance of a customer upgrading their review by 33%.<sup>2</sup>



82% of adults look at reviews before buying something, some of the time.



40% look at reviews before almost every purchase.



## Be pleasant, not defensive

Again, unless the review was sent as an email, everyone has the opportunity to read it and your response. And even if it was sent as an email, you can't be sure who will see the message! This includes the reviewer as well as your current and potential customers.

Therefore, the tone you take when responding to a review is very important. A harsh, defensive note puts people off, regardless of whether or not your actions were correct. Review your response to make sure readers won't take offense to it. In fact, it helps to imagine saying your response to the reviewer in person. How would you reply if the customer was standing right in front of you?

## Explain, don't make excuses

The urge to explain your actions is understandable, and it can even be an asset if done with care. There may have been something going on behind the scenes that the customer was unaware of. Perhaps a class booked faster than anticipated or your acupuncturist had to take a sick day. Clarification can turn a bad review into a simple misunderstanding.

That said, don't make excuses. These, again, make it seem like you don't care about the customer's concerns, which is discouraging both to current members and potential new people.



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## Take the conversation offline

If the original comment was posted in a public area (Facebook, Google, Yelp, your own review page or somewhere else), then your first response should be similarly accessible. A simple comment such as, "Thank you for your message. Can I directly message you/ Can you provide your email address so we can discuss further?" should suffice. This way, any further grievances are kept between you and the customer instead of put on display for everyone else to see. This tactic also provides a bit of individual attention to the reviewer, showing them you truly want to address their concerns.

Responding to reviews is only the first step in the customer service journey. Follow up through email, phone calls or in-person meetings to solidify a relationship with your customer.

## Turning bad reviews into marketing opportunities

Every bad review is a chance to prove your customer service to anyone who might be watching. As such, you need to give each one the response they're due. Be respectful, empathetic and prompt, and do everything you can to rectify the situation to the best of your ability.

Your response to a bad review is the chance to show the strength of your business and your customer service, appeasing your current customers and attracting potential new ones.

Allow Frederick to help you keep customers coming back to your business. Polish your online reputation by automatically prompting your best customers to give a review on your website, Yelp, Google and other social review sites.

> **Get started for free – no credit card required!**



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