How to Respond to Online Reviews
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How Online Reviews Influence Hotel Revenue

This comes from a conversation I had with Michele Perry, Director of Communications at TripAdvisor. Much is said about the social web providing opportunities for “conversations” - but you have to remember that any conversation goes two ways.

If guests are writing about you online, then you also need to be carrying part of the conversation. You need to pick up on what they’re saying, and continue the conversation from there.

Forrester conducted a survey of 200 travelers [on behalf of TripAdvisor] and found that 68% of respondents said the presence of management responses on any given review site would sway their booking decision towards that hotel’s favor.

Hotel operations manager and blogger Michael Hraba says this:

“In my experience, hotels that reply to all feedback - positive and negative - engage the most people become most successful. Responding to all reviews shows you’re listening and caring about what the guest thought.”

You need to respond to every single review that goes up in regards to your property. You can’t reply to just one, because you will look defensive.

You can’t reply to negative ones only, because you will look even more defensive and possibly convey a negative overall image.

Don’t think of them as some task, or problem. This is a fantastic opportunity to speak to potential guests...voyeurs reading the reviews, and searching for hotels in your specific area. Every word you say, and how you react, is to be scrutinized by future (potential) guests. It is an amazing way to speak about your property, to reinforce your brand, and to really get your hooks into guests.”

Taking time to focus on what the guest has said about their experience will help you to understand your hotel from a guest’s perspective and your management will become more accountable as a direct result. Does the same issue come up again and again, for example?

While Michael recommends responding to every single review, this isn’t always possible for various reasons which I outline on the next page.
Prioritizing Reviews: Setting up a Response System

While responding to all reviews will certainly highlight your pro-active attitude, on many occasions it might simply be too impractical and time-consuming to reply to every single one, especially if your hotel receives a high volume of reviews.

Responding to each and every review may also cause them to appear repetitive, so it’s a good idea to develop a strategy that works for your establishment and management style.

Prioritize reviews that:

1. Call for an apology or clarification.
2. Are potentially damaging to your reputation.
3. Emphasize positive aspects you wish to draw attention to.

Who should reply?

• Responses should, ideally, come from a Senior Manager
• This person must possess strong writing skills and diplomacy

• Proofread before posting – spelling mistakes and grammatical errors make the post look unprofessional. Ask someone to go through your response first.
• Personalize – Sign off with a name to let the guest know who is responding.

When:

• Investigate the matter before replying - find the guest’s booking and speak to whoever dealt with them on-site.
• Aim to respond as soon as possible, ideally within 72 hours.
• If the review has provoked a strong reaction or you're not sure what to say, sleep on it first to avoid making any hasty comments you may later regret – we’re all human!
Where Can I Respond to Reviews?

Not every review website permits management responses. This chart (right) lists the sites that let hoteliers post public responses to reviews.

See the appendix to this guide for a detailed list of more than 50 review sites with URLs and information on the ones that allow hoteliers to respond.

For websites that do not allow you to respond to reviews on the site (including links), I recommend using other channels to resolve issues and enhance your reputation.

If possible, try to resolve complaints using email or telephone if you can identify the person leaving the message.

Websites that allow management responses to reviews

- AlphaRooms
- City Search
- Expedia
- Flickr
- Global Hotel Review
- Holiday Watchdog
- HolidayCheck
- HolidaysUncovered
- Hotels.com
- LateRooms
- Qype
- TravelPost
- TripAdvisor
- Trivago
- Venere
- Vinivi
- Yelp
- YouTube
- Zoover
Basic Tips for Responding to Reviews

**Do...**

- Thank the reviewer for the feedback.
- Respond to any positive comments.
- Apologize for any legitimate negative experience.
- Explain the steps you’ll take to prevent it from happening again.
- Allow the guest to contact you offline if follow-up discussion is needed.
- If outright fraudulent, dispute with review site and post response: “We can find no record of this incident and take such matters seriously. Kindly contact me directly to discuss.”

**Don’t...**

- Take it personally. Avoid angry, abusive responses—or any type of personal attack.
- Question the reviewer’s legitimacy. (Fake reviews do happen from time to time, but they can be very difficult to prove. It’s better to avoid these types of accusations as they can easily backfire.)
- Reply with a discount or coupon (this indirectly encourages abuse.)
- Use corporate-speak that contains no meaningful information. “We are sorry to hear about your inconvenience and appreciate your comments here. We are happy that you have spoken up so that we may better our property. We will be working diligently to make your stays much more enjoyable in the future.”

If I had a poor experience at a hotel, this generic type of management response would do absolutely nothing for me. *I want specifics!* It’s unlikely I would return in the future to see if my stay is “much more enjoyable.”

- If the reviewer is clearly irrational or offensive, you may choose not to respond.
Basic Tips for Responding to Reviews:
If Something is Broken, Fix It

When a hotel has a poor ranking on TripAdvisor, it often reflects problems with the property — grounds, staffing, cleanliness, service, or something else.

When you’re listening, you’ll know what you need to fix. Some have said that for every one person who complains, 100 people will be complaining privately to their friends. This is why it really pays to listen.

If you receive consistently negative reviews, fix what's broken. **There's no getting around this!**

The only way to improve negative reviews is by improving your services from ground level first. Fundamental flaws that repeatedly leave guests unsatisfied cannot be glossed over with a slick marketing campaign. That’s denial at best and borders on unethical.

Of course, not all reviews are created equal. As any hotel marketing manager will confirm, negative reviews typically come in two forms:

1. **Constructive criticism** - These guests leave fair and balanced feedback, highlighting the good and bad points of their stay. You’ll be able to extract actionable insights from their reviews.

2. **Rants** - Some people just have an attitude problem, and are just about impossible to please. You can try to correct factual errors, but you may just have to avoid giving them much online attention.

**Why don’t you...**

- Train or change your staff?
- Bring in a consultant?
- Hire a designer—or maybe just a plumber for that leaky sink?!

**Identify Issues**

By tracking reviews via ReviewPro, you can quickly filter by positive / neutral / negative reviews, language, source, department and search by keywords on up to 3 years of review data.

With our sentiment analysis you can analyze positive and negative sentiment of mentions and quickly identify areas of operational excellence and need for improvement.

**Request a Free ReviewPro Demo now**

If you are a Restaurant click here
Basic Tips for Responding to Reviews: Publicize all Improvements Made

If you made the changes, you need to go back to the audience and let them know you listened and acted on their suggestions.

• **Tell guests directly**— In your replies on guest review websites.

• **Tell the story of how you did it**— Through videos posted to YouTube or interviews published on your hotel blog.

• **Tell the media**— With a press release or full-scale PR campaign (depending on the changes you made).

For a good example of online marketing ideas for your improvements, search Google for “100 Starbucks ideas in action.”

...Could you publish a list of changes and improvements you made based on guest feedback?

...Could you mention a guest by name to thank them for their feedback and show your appreciation?

...Could you tweet, post photos on Facebook to showcase these changes, or begin a social media campaign to refresh your hotel’s image while showcasing new features?

Consider building a microsite for better promotion of your spa or restaurant, for example.

Make sure your website uses accurate, articulate and well-researched content that manages the target market’s expectations without misleading them.
How to Respond to Negative Reviews

Some think that if you receive a positive review, there’s nothing to reply to. But that would be missing an opportunity.

**I encourage all hotels to respond to positive reviews by:**

- Thanking the reviewer for taking the time to share their experience
- Confirm what they enjoyed (reinforcing the positive)
- Use the opportunity to congratulate your staff on providing excellent service (do this by name, if possible).
- Invite the guest back. Why not suggest other activities or services (a certain dish in the restaurant, for example) you think the guest might enjoy?

Use the positive review as an example during staff training. The guest was satisfied because a specific aspect lived up to or exceeded their expectations. Highlight this.

Repeating a positive review helps introduce more people to that aspect of your hotel experience. If one person liked it, chances are good others will as well.

Affirming happy guests often starts a positive feedback loop which, in turn will encourage them to share their story with others.

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**Answering Reviews**

ReviewPro gives you the tools you need to improve internal communications and coordination with more comprehensive & flexible reporting, as well as workflows, on a corporate & property level.

Answer comments directly from within ReviewPro thanks to our advanced technology platform & coordinate actions internally with our ticketing system.

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Request a Free ReviewPro Demo now

If you are a Restaurant click here
Basic Tips for Responding to Reviews: A Checklist

Below is a well-crafted review response to a positive review.

Thank you for your feedback, which I have shared with my team. We are happy to hear that you enjoyed your stay. We do our best to accommodate early arrivals and to provide a speedy checkout, and I apologize for the lapses in service during your stay. We hope to welcome you back soon.”

Mary Smith
General Manager

Analysis checklist:

• Thanks
• Follow-up
• Emphasize positive
• Reassure
• Apologize
• Invite back
• Personalize
• Don’t rush: Demonstrate the same thoughtfulness, attention to detail and professionalism you provide on property!

• Be brief: Focus on key issues
• Be conversational, “human” and in line with your brand
• Avoid “corporate speak,” stiff formality and marketing babble
• Show empathy
• Don’t be defensive or patronizing
• Avoid repetition
• Take a fresh approach to each response
• Personalize the response. You are a person, not a faceless entity of the hotel.
How to Respond to Negative Reviews

Even if you run one of the best hotels in the world, chances are good that a negative review will eventually show up.

To limit the damage negative reviews can have on your reputation, create a solid action plan to deal with these reviews. Many times negative reviews require action at an operational level, so it helps to have a system for sharing this information with the management team.

I recommend creating a review response policy guide that includes:

• Your target response time (e.g., within 24 hours)
• Who on your team should take ownership of the response
• The process used - and steps involved - for resolving issues
• How the incident should be documented (for records or future staff training)

Additionally, I mentioned the following items earlier in this guide, but they deserve a little more elaboration.

Once you have set up monitoring systems and are confident you are aware of everything that is being said about your hotel online, you should get into the mindset of managing feedback proactively rather than just responding reactively.

Avoid taking negative reviews personally. Angry, abusive responses - or any type of personal attack - could affect what others think of your professionalism. Everyone knows some guests are impossibly difficult, so there is no need to get emotional in your responses.

Avoid questioning the reviewer’s legitimacy. Fake reviews do happen from time to time, but they can be very difficult to prove and it’s better to avoid this kind of accusation. If you have reason to suspect a review is fraudulent, report it directly to the review website. If the review site does not respond to you, try responding to the guest using your records to verify your case.

Avoid automatically replying with a discount or coupon. I’ve seen this approach lead to abuse when not used with discretion.

Avoid corporate-speak that contains no meaningful information. Generic comments like “We’re sorry to hear about your experience” can be viewed by others as you avoiding responsibility. Instead, own up to your mistakes and demonstrate the action steps you’ve taken to prevent the situation from happening again.
How to Respond to Positive Reviews: Unfulfilled Expectations: The #1 Source of Negative Feedback

If you want to avoid receiving negative feedback, make sure you’re setting guest expectations at an appropriate level in your sales and marketing communications.

Many hotels encounter problems when they hype up their properties online and the guest experiences something different.

A good way around this is to avoid using superlatives in your marketing, and instead highlight guest reviews that are very positive. By letting your guests become the spokespeople, others will find these messages more credible.

Working in New York’s competitive, sophisticated hotel market, Adele Gutman knows the importance of exceeding expectations. Vice president of marketing at Library Hotel Collection, Gutman says merely satisfying your guests’ needs won’t get you anywhere. “If you want your guests to shower your hotel with good word-of-mouth, both on and offline, you have got to wow them with exceptional service and a unique experience that leaves them with something to talk about” she says.

“If they get home and their friends, colleagues and associates ask them how their trip was, you want them to be able to say, ‘You’ll never believe what an awesome hotel we stayed at. They had this, that and the other thing, and the people there – that was the best part of all.’”

On the flip side, creating false expectations by planting fake reviews on sites like TripAdvisor is a dangerous move, warns Mariquel Waingarten - founder of Tailor Made Hotel in Buenos Aires. "If you create false reviews, people could come to your hotel and be disappointed, and that is the worst thing that could happen. A customer with failed expectations is impossible to satisfy.”

Adele Gutman Milne
Vice President Sales, Marketing & Revenue
Library Hotel Collection
How to Respond to Positive Reviews: Damage Control: Respond to Guest Issues on-site

The focus of change should always be from within the hotel, at ground level. As soon as proactive steps are taken to improve facilities and services, you should see an increase in positive reviews.

In hotels, the old adage always rings true: Prevention is better than cure. Creating an internal culture of reputation management means that all employees are alert to guest satisfaction as a preventative measure before a problem ends up online for all to see.

There are several things you can do to minimize negative reviews before your guest has even left the hotel.

If an issue arises during the guest’s stay, ensure it is solved in an efficient and courteous manner by a Manager before the guest leaves the premises.

This achieves the following objectives:

1. Guests are less likely to leave the hotel feeling dissatisfied or upset.

2. Guests are more likely to create a review that focuses on how the management dealt with problems at the hotel. This removes the problem from the equation and the review itself is more likely to shine a light on proactive staff than the problem itself.

Create an internal culture of reputation management:

- Make sure all employees are aware of the hotel’s reputation management objectives
- Highlight the importance of guest satisfaction and positive reviews

"Prevention is always better than cure."
Managing Guest Satisfaction Surveys: Best Practices

How to Respond to Positive Reviews: A Slightly Unusual Approach to Negative Feedback

I’ve seen some hotel managers take a more radical approach to negative reviews. They display them on their websites to qualify their audience, discouraging people who aren’t a good fit for their hotel while encouraging their target audience.

For example, if you’ve found that guests with young children aren’t the best match for your boutique hotel, post a review from a family that says the hotel was nice – except there weren’t many activities for the kids.

This way you provide a service to everyone: from the family looking for the best hotel to suit their needs, to guests who love a quiet environment.

It all comes down to guest expectations. Another method of ensuring that you are managing guest expectations well is by ensuring that all promotional material closely reflects the audience you are looking to attract. This way you are minimizing disappointment by being honest and transparent.

It’s important to use accurate and articulate content that reflects your target market’s aspirations without misleading them.
The language you use to respond to reviews can have a huge impact on the way others perceive the way your hotel is managed.

Some words are loaded with negative connotations and it’s wise to avoid them.

Carefully choosing your words will impact reviewers: using positive, action words highlights aspects they appreciate while diverting attention away from any negative experience they may have had.

In the following case studies I demonstrate the noticeable impact that language has on the way guests perceive your hotel, and how carefully wording your responses has the power to directly affect your reputation.

**Words to use**

- Can, will, assure you, ensure
- We strive to, we pride ourselves on
- Feedback, experience
- Appreciate, sincere
- Rest assured

**Words to avoid**

- Can’t, won’t, shouldn’t
- It’s against policy
- Unfortunately
- Problem, concerns
- Disappointed
- Unacceptable
- Sorry, but...
- Will try not to...
- Do our best…
What’s wrong with this review response?

The main issue here is that the hotelier’s review response doesn’t even address the main issues!

The main issues are: “We were promised an early check-in and The front desk didn’t seem to care how inconvenienced we were”.

Sorry…but,
The response gets off to a bad start with an excuse - denying responsibility from the outset.

We can’t guarantee early check-ins...
This negative vocabulary creates a defensive tone and demonstrates a lazy attitude, forgetting entirely that the guest said that they had been promised an early check-in, whether or not this is the hotel’s policy. Don’t make promises you can’t keep!

As you can see from our other reviews...
...translates as: This is the way things are, and we don’t really care what you have to say.

Thank you for your feedback!!
The Management
Two exclamation marks can be seen as rather flippant (not to mention grammatically incorrect), and signing off with a generic, impersonal title highlights the lack of human warmth that this hotel has shown towards their guest.

Would you return to a hotel with this attitude?

All in all, a careless and badly-crafted review response.
The Landmark London aims to reply to any negative reviews they may receive.

The hotel does not attempt to hide or ignore negative reviews. Rather, they choose to post a management response wherever possible. This gives the hotel the chance to explain their view of things.

“People see that we take the time to respond and are aware of any issues”, explains Joi Chuku, Marketing Manager at The Landmark London.

Management response from Executive_Office222, Manager

“Thank you for taking the time to send your review of your stay at The Landmark London. We are very pleased that you enjoyed the facilities in our Hotel and the surrounding areas.

Your point about having flatscreen TVs in the bedrooms is very valid and we are currently undergoing an upgrade of our TV system in all the guest bedrooms. This will be completed by Spring 2011 along with new mini bars and safes. We hope you will have an opportunity to return and enjoy The Landmark again in the future.”

(Management representative)
Oct 13, 2010
Dealing with Negative Reviews FAQs

Can I remove negative reviews?
Yes and no; this depends on the circumstances. For example, TripAdvisor lets you start over with a clean slate if there was a change in management, but not if you did a renovation.

Can I contact a guest to resolve a problem?
Usually you can only use a website’s management response function to publish a reply. You may try leaving a customer service phone number to encourage offline resolution.

I think a competitor is writing negative reviews.
I recommend you contact the review site directly, and explain your reason for concern. However, cases like these are fraught with difficulty: it is often difficult or even impossible to prove without concrete evidence, so proceed with caution.

Can I ask someone to remove their negative review?
Most sites do not allow this. You’ll need to follow the steps outlined earlier to improve your reputation.
Twitter reviews often take a very different format, but they’re no less important. Often people mentioning your hotel on Twitter will do so quickly, in passing. But even a quick tweet can have an impact on your online reputation, so it’s important to have listening mechanisms in place to capture this.

It’s a good practice to respond to every single mention of your hotel on Twitter. When someone says something about you - good or bad - send an “@” reply to the author. For negative mentions you might connect them with someone who can resolve the situation.

For positive Twitter mentions, try re-tweeting so the rest of your followers can see the positive feedback.

To provide the best service on Twitter, many hotels use tools to auto-follow every person that follows their Twitter account. This way, you can communicate through direct messages if the guest prefers not to have the discussion take place on the public
Twitter Reviews and Mentions
Case Study: Kimpton Hotels

Look how Kimpton Hotels used a single tweet – along with some compassion – to turn one complaint into a very happy guest:

Wow my first ever disappointment with @kimpton. Hate hotels that hit my credit card for $100/nite for ‘incidentals’ that I won’t use.

@Jeff_Dodd Hearing that we’ve disappointed you is like a dagger through r hearts, Jeff. We’ll look into this & let u know what we find out.

@kimpton rec’d call from billing office. Will chat tomorrow. All is well. THANK YOU. Palomar Chicago is beautiful. Will post pix soon.
Twitter Reviews and Mentions
Case Study: Apex Hotels

Apex Hotels provides customer service on Twitter to guests before they arrive, and answers any questions they may have. Sam Weston, E-Marketing Manager at Apex Hotels explains their strategy:

"We see Twitter as an invaluable online channel to engage with our guests, hear their feedback and provide responses to any questions. It reinforces our belief of the importance of online feedback in general and our overall company ethos: to constantly and consistently improve our brand based on what our guests want.

We quite often go a little bit beyond their requests. We watch Twitter for terms like 'does anyone know' + 'Edinburgh' to try and provide general assistance to those visiting Edinburgh, whether they're staying at our hotels or not. An example tweet we respond to might be "Does anyone know what time the Castle opens in Edinburgh?" While answering this doesn't provide any immediate business benefit, we see it as an excellent way to both introduce someone to our brand and help promote the cities in which our hotels are based: London, Edinburgh & Dundee."

Crossing my fingers that the weather in Edinburgh improves ahead of arrival on Sunday. Staying at @ApexHotels Waterloo Place again :-D

@XXXX Weather looking improved for Sunday so finger crossed! BBC5 day forecast: http://bbc.in/fdnVJ9 ^SW

Now that’s what I call customer service @ApexHotels!! Thank you.

How APEX Hotels uses Teamwork to Connect with Guests

Learn how they monitor and respond on Twitter, their strategy for Facebook and how they encourage guests to share content online.

Read Case Study
Because reviews play such an important part in your business, how can you reward the people that take time to promote your hotel in social media? The best way to reward reviewers is to turn them into your online spokespeople.

Give attention and recognition in your own online presence. If you want people to promote you, promote them. Turn the spotlight on your most active supporters.

**Reward your brand ambassadors with attention.**

Re-tweet their comments, interview them for your blog, post their material to your Facebook page. Highlight them in your email newsletters, and consider inviting them to guest-post an article on your website.

It amazes me how some businesses expect customers to spend time creating free promotional material for them – without even recognizing their efforts.

*How do you support the people writing about you?*
About Us

ReviewPro is the leading provider of Guest Intelligence solutions to independent hotel brands worldwide. The company’s comprehensive suite of cloud-based solutions includes Online Reputation Management (ORM) and the Guest Survey Solution (GSS), which enable hoteliers to obtain deeper insight into operational and service strengths and weaknesses, increasing guest satisfaction, ranking on review sites and OTAs, and driving revenue.

The company offers the industry-standard Global Review Index™ (GRI), an online reputation score (available exclusively to ReviewPro clients), which is used by thousands of hotels worldwide as a benchmark for reputation management efforts, based on review data collected from 142 online travel agencies (OTAs) and review sites in more than 45 languages. More than 17,000 hotel brands worldwide are currently using ReviewPro’s solutions.

Visit our Resource Hub

The Leading Source of Guest Intelligence best practices and content for the Hospitality Industry

Request a Free ReviewPro Demo now
## Appendix: List of Review Sites (I)

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Note: Yes indicates the site allows hoteliers to reply to reviews; No indicates they do not.
## Appendix: List of Review Sites (II)

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# Appendix: List of Review Sites (III)

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