Dealing with negative reviews

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Reviews are increasingly relevant for small businesses particularly as SMEs continue to increase their online footprint in day-to-day operations. Your small business might not get a ton of reviews compared to larger businesses, as such, a few bad remarks may be more detrimental to your business and can have significant impact on public opinion. It is worth noting that regardless of how dedicated you are to delivering excellent products/services to consumers you will, most likely, encounter a negative review. It is also worth noting that just like reviews, responses from your end are visible to the public and as such, it is important to deal with reviews in a professional manner.

'Do's' and 'Don'ts' of Negative Reviews

Did you just get a negative review? Firstly, here is what you **should not do:**

1. Take a defensive stance

- Regardless of how unwarranted you believe a bad review is, you should always view it as constructive criticism rather than an 'attack' on your business. Responding rashly can easily spiral into a viral nightmare, resulting in the narrative of an entrepreneur who cannot handle negative feedback. No matter how out of line you believe the consumer is, always respond politely and even if you are right, avoid rubbing it in the customer's face

2. Ignore

Silence can easily be interpreted as a form of agreement and as such, paying zero attention to a negative review can automatically give justification to claims laid against your business. Potential customers will also expect that such a nonchalant attitude, to any complaint, could alienate you from future business

3. Solicit positive reviews to counter negative ones

- Customers that were naturally inclined to rave about how great your business is will write the finest evaluations for you. It is not in the best practice to hover around customers for a positive review as they might end up sounding ingenuine or unenthusiastic on the review page. Potential customers are more likely to believe the bad reviews if there are a slew of fake-sounding positive reviews strewn about

''Do's'' of Negative Reviews

Now that you know what to not to do when you receive negative reviews, here is a step-by-step guide on the best way to respond:

Respond quickly

A bad review must not be treated as an afterthought; it should be your top priority. When you see a negative review on your radar, spend a few moments to read it and make a quick plan of action. If a consumer was disappointed enough to leave a poor review, you should aim to react within 24-48 hours. The faster they hear from you, the more genuine statements will appear

Acknowledge complaint & empathize

It is important to keep your emotions in check and carefully evaluate their criticism, while also acknowledging their negative experience in your response. Having acknowledged the customer's grievances, you can further demonstrate great customer service by apologizing rather than disputing with their comment/experience

Take responsibility while tactfully promoting a positive image

When responding to customer reviews, you should take a customer-centric approach. While taking responsibility for the customer's experience, you should also explain why his or her experience is rare in a non-condescending tone. If it feels right, you can also flip the script and include some of your business' qualities in your response

Provide an authentic and personal explanation

Customers are largely aware that every business is bound to make errors, and by telling them where things went wrong, you demonstrate a human aspect to your business. Explanations should not feel scripted and when responding, you should use your real name, describe your role in the business, and include your direct phone number or email address

Right the wrongs

If the problem can be resolved, do so. You can offer refunds or provide a complimentary product or service to compensate. In doing so, the unfavourable review may be removed or turned into a good customer service testimonial. If nothing can be done, write a convincing public response to the review that expresses your genuine remorse and desire to prevent a repeat of the issue

Additional things to note when dealing with negative reviews:

- It is advisable to handle complicated issues in private. Long, drawn-out interactions are not desired by visitors to the review site. You should also consider the privacy of your customers and details regarding their transactions. You can contact the consumer on another platform, if it is convenient for them. If you have a customer chat option, for example on your website, you may ask them to file a formal complaint

- Take a personal interest in those who nit-pick or complain so that all products or services that go to them is perfect to ensure that the negative reviewer is turned to an advocate or at least does not continue to complain and sway the business negatively

- Fake reviews exist and should be immediately reported. It is possible that a review is not only biased but also utterly unfounded in some circumstances. It is conceivable that a troll or business rival is launching an unjustified assault against you. If you can prove the unauthenticity of the review, you may file a complaint and you can also issue a public statement highlighting such