

# Opinion: Without monitoring online reviews, a business can suffer

By John S. Rizzo and V. Michael Santoro

It happens all the time: The hard-working crew at a small business loses customers thanks to the sour grapes of one person.

It could be a disgruntled employee, an angry customer or even a competitor.

Anyone can post a bad review online and hurt your business. Unfortunately, most business owners are not even aware that these bad reviews are out there.

Seventy-two percent of buyers trust reviews as much as personal recommendations, and 70 percent trust consumer opinions posted online, according to a recent Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising Survey.

A bad review published in a newspaper, or broadcast on radio or TV, is short-lived, but a bad review posted online can live indefinitely. With consumers now researching an average of 10 reviews before making a buying decision, and 70 percent trusting a business that has a minimum of six reviews posted, business owners need to be proactive in developing their online reputation. You need several positive reviews.

Online searches have been streamlined, combining reviews with maps, pay-per-click advertising, local business directories and Facebook fan pages. As damaging as bad reviews can be, positive reviews can be equally constructive.

Here are some tips for reputation marketing:

- **Develop a 5-Star Reputation:** Begin by having your happy customers post great reviews about your business. Strive to have at least 10. Have each post to one of the following: Google Plus Local, Yelp, CitySearch, SuperPages, YP.com, your Facebook fan page, etc. This needs to be a continuous process. Proactively ask your customers to post reviews.
- **Market Your Reputation:** Once reviews are posted, use a well-designed online marketing strategy to drive targeted traffic to your website. Ensure that your website can convert this traffic into customers. Additionally, showcase these third-party reviews on your website.
- **Manage Your Reputation:** Regularly check that the reviews being posted are positive. You can use Google Alerts for your business name; however, you will need to check the local directories, too, since they're not picked up by Google Alerts. By building up the positive reviews, you can counter a poor one by sheer volume. You should also quickly post a reply to a negative review if they occur. Always be professional and indicate what action you have taken to remedy the situation.
- **Create a Reputation Marketing Culture:** Train your staff to proactively ask customers for reviews and to deal immediately with any customer who appears unhappy. A positive culture will encourage customers to post positive reviews about your business.

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