

Signature Press

HOW TO DETER NEGATIVE ONLINE REVIEWS: DON'T LET THE CUSTOMER LEAVE UNHAPPY



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For more from Ely, visit his blog, [Once Upon a Customer Experience](#).

By John Ely
Hotel & Motel Management

I've done it, maybe you have too. I have had a bad experience someplace and immediately turned to my laptop to find a peer-to-peer (e.g. Tripadvisor.com) Web site where I could vent and complain. I didn't have to go far to complain about a Canadian airline last winter and its incredibly rude service personnel. I write a blog on customer service, which made it even easier for me to express my unhappiness. And I lambasted the airline more than once.

It's so easy today to record your customer experiences, and many of us are doing it. Tripadvisor.com alone has millions of hotel and travel reviews and many are negative. Why? It's because we as humans like to spread news when we are angry or disappointed. Research shows that we are 10 times more likely to tell a bad customer service story than a good one!

In an era where every guest is a travel critic, how can a hotel combat negative reviews on Web sites, blogs and social networks? As a first step, I suggest training employees to deliver unparalleled customer service at all times in order to keep customers happy. If that doesn't happen, or not as often as it should, then I suggest addressing any potential issues regarding the customer's experience before that guest leaves the property.

So, knowing that it only takes one negative encounter to ruin a customer's experience and that customers now have a more influential voice, you certainly don't want them to leave unhappy, especially with such an extensive array of feedback mechanisms in place. But, if a guest does leave unhappy and decides to broadcast his feelings, there are ways for management or guest services

to react.

The first step is to monitor those "feedback" and review sites and find the negative comments about your company. There are many applications that can scour social networking sites to find information. For blogs, look to Google Alerts, Yahoo Alerts or Blogpulse. Twitter can be monitored via TweetScan, and Technorati is a great resource to monitor all types of sites posting user-generated content. There are many more. A quick Internet search will turn up dozens of monitoring tools.

Once you find negative reactions out there, you must respond — and quickly. I have found that if we mess up, we must first apologize. No one expects us to be perfect, but they do expect us to be honest. Next, post the specific steps you and your organization are taking to solve the problem or complaint. Finally, in severe cases, you can contact the individual directly and offer some incentive for returning to your property.

It's amazing how some quick attention to an issue helps alleviate additional or future problems. Sometimes our customers only want us to know we've disappointed them, while other times, we need to take steps to win them back.

Managing negative reactions does take time, resources and a plan. Many companies have dedicated social marketers that are always on the lookout for both negative and positive press, and do everything possible to respond immediately to those comments that are not so good.

Social media is here to stay. It's imperative to not only embrace it, but to develop strategies to make it work in your company's favor.