



# Everything You Need to Know About Review Marketing

*A RevLocal Marketing Guide*



# Everything You Need to Know About Review Marketing

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# The New Word of Mouth Marketing

Business reviews have been around since the dawn of time. Okay, maybe cavemen weren't sending out star ratings in smoke signals, but word-of-mouth has been around for as long as people could tell their friends about their favorite businesses and products.

Before the Internet became an important part of the buying process, neighbors discussed their favorite products over backyard fences, and no one had a huge network of people they could ask for opinions about a particular washing machine.

Now, the buying process revolves around the Internet. Even consumers who buy products offline are likely to research online before making a decision.<sup>1</sup> If a consumer needs to find a local auto mechanic, they search online. They read reviews about mechanics in their area and finally settle on one.

This wasn't always the way shopping worked, though.

Meet Susan. Susan is a consumer in the 1980s, and her shoulder pads are bigger than her budget.

Let's pretend Susan's car broke down and she needs a mechanic. Before Susan consulted the yellow pages, she would first ask friends, family and neighbors who they would recommend.

If enough people recommended the same mechanic, or maybe if one person gave Susan a really glowing review

**“74 percent of consumers say word of mouth marketing is a key influencer of purchasing decisions.”**

of their favorite mechanic, chances are that Susan would choose that one. Word of mouth is, and always has been, a powerful form of marketing. Even now, as many as 74 percent of consumers say word of mouth is a key influencer in purchasing decisions.<sup>2</sup>

Now that Susan's car is running again (and after paying less than her original estimate), she will tell her friends and family about her fantastic experience. And like that, the word-of-mouth marketing spreads.

It's hard to imagine this type of physical, face-to-face network now. Consumers have an easier option. They can just reach for their smartphone and in seconds they are scrolling through Google, Yelp or TripAdvisor for reviews about the product or service they're looking for.

Now that consumers don't have to leave the house to find out what everyone else is saying about a particular product or business, they rely heavily on testimonials from strangers. Consumers search for and read more reviews than ever, and those reviews are becoming one of the most important factors that influence purchase decisions—more important than advertising or sales pitches.<sup>3</sup>

But online reviews are a double-edged sword.

“If you make customers unhappy in the physical world, they might each tell six friends. If you make customers unhappy on the Internet, they can each tell 6,000 friends.”

- Jeff Bezos, Amazon

In today's world, if Susan has a bad experience with an auto mechanic (or your business) she doesn't just tell her

neighbors. She tells everyone. She writes scathing reviews about your business on Google, Facebook, Yelp and any other online directory that will let her create a free account. You know the old adage: if you don't have anything nice to say, write a review.

“If you make customers unhappy in the physical world, they might each tell six friends. If you make customers unhappy on the Internet, they can each tell 6,000 friends.” - Jeff Bezos, Amazon

In this guide, we'll explain why and where consumers are talking about your business; the value of those reviews; how many reviews your business needs across various platforms; what to do about fake and negative reviews; and how to generate more reviews in order to harness the power of online word of mouth.

# Need more online reviews?

Actively generate new online reviews with Renown.



Renown is a review marketing and reputation management platform that helps your business generate positive reviews while making sure your brand is protected online.

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# How Much Are Reviews Actually Worth?

Now that we know your customers are talking about you, you should probably know the importance of what they're saying.

While many business owners often feel overwhelmed by reviews, small businesses need them to survive. Ninety-two percent of consumers read online reviews before making purchases, and they trust those reviews as much as they trust recommendations from friends and family. Consumers are also more likely to choose a small business if they read positive reviews about that business.<sup>4</sup>

Reviews can also boost sales and SEO, leading to a higher search ranking, since reviews are social proof (social proof is the idea that if others like your business then it's safe for me to like it—everyone else is doing it, right?).

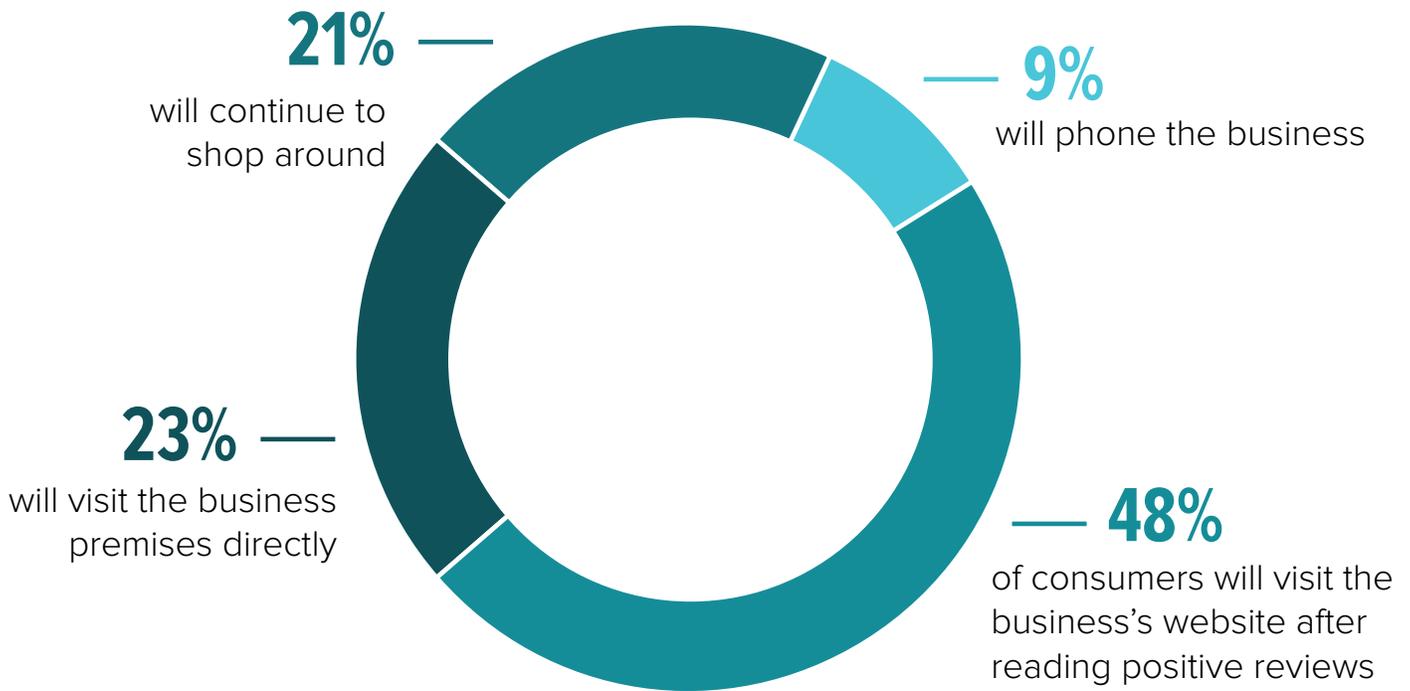
And consumers take reviews very, very seriously. Check out these stats:

- 88 percent of consumers trust reviews from strangers as much as they trust people they know.<sup>5</sup> Whether they have shady friends or they believe everything they read online, those reviews are important.
- 82 percent of consumers go to review sites because they

want to buy a service or product.

- 89 percent make a purchase within a week of visiting review sites and 28 percent will do so within a day.<sup>6</sup>

So right now, consumers are reading reviews about your business and deciding whether or not they want to become one of your customers. But the question is: where are they reading these reviews?



## The Top Review Sites

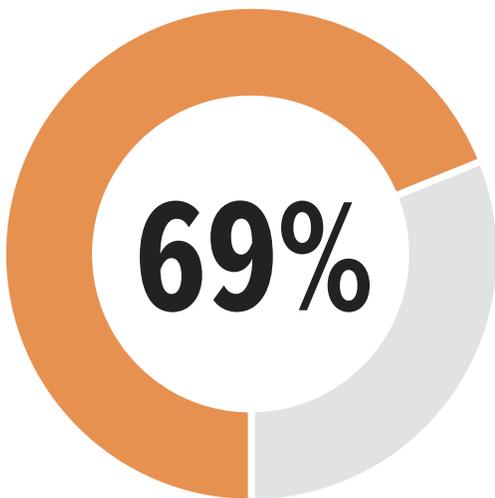
There are so many review sites out there that it's entirely possible you haven't heard of them all. Sure, you've heard of Yelp, Angie's List, Facebook, Google+ and TripAdvisor, but have you ever heard of DexKnows, MyHuckleberry, or MyLocalServices? Maybe not.

Consumers will find these sites, though, and they will use them to talk about you.

So where do consumers search for and read reviews? Well, the most important review platform varies by industry, but it's crucial that you know where consumers are talking about your business.

**Try This:** While you probably don't have the time to devote to in-depth research about every single review site out there, you can search Google for your industry + reviews + location. For instance, if your business is a restaurant in Columbus, Ohio, search "restaurant reviews Columbus OH".

The results of this search will show you which sites your competitors use, so make sure your business is using those sites too.



**of consumers say they sometimes or always take action after reading online reviews.**

(source: Nielsen)

Before we get into specifics, let's take a look at the value of reviews in general.

- 72 percent of consumers will only take action after reading positive reviews.

- Consumers are likely to spend 31 percent more on a business with excellent reviews, and a whopping 92 percent will use a local business if it has at least a four-star rating.<sup>7</sup>

While there are many local listing directories where consumers can leave reviews about your business, the most important places for reviews are Google, Yelp, TripAdvisor, and social media (namely Facebook). So let's look at how much reviews are worth on each platform.

## Google

While both Google and Yelp are important for small businesses, studies say Google is more important for reviews than Yelp. Google is the biggest search engine in the world (accounting for around 64 percent of all searches worldwide), and when potential customers search Google for local businesses, reviews and star ratings show up.<sup>8</sup>

Google was also found to be the most important review site for purchase decisions, and consumers are 38 percent more likely to visit and 29 percent more likely to consider buying from a business with a complete Google My Business page.<sup>9</sup>

# Do the right thing, and do it all the time.

You should probably know that, while Google used to include reviews from review sites all over the web, this has changed. Now when someone searches Google for your business,

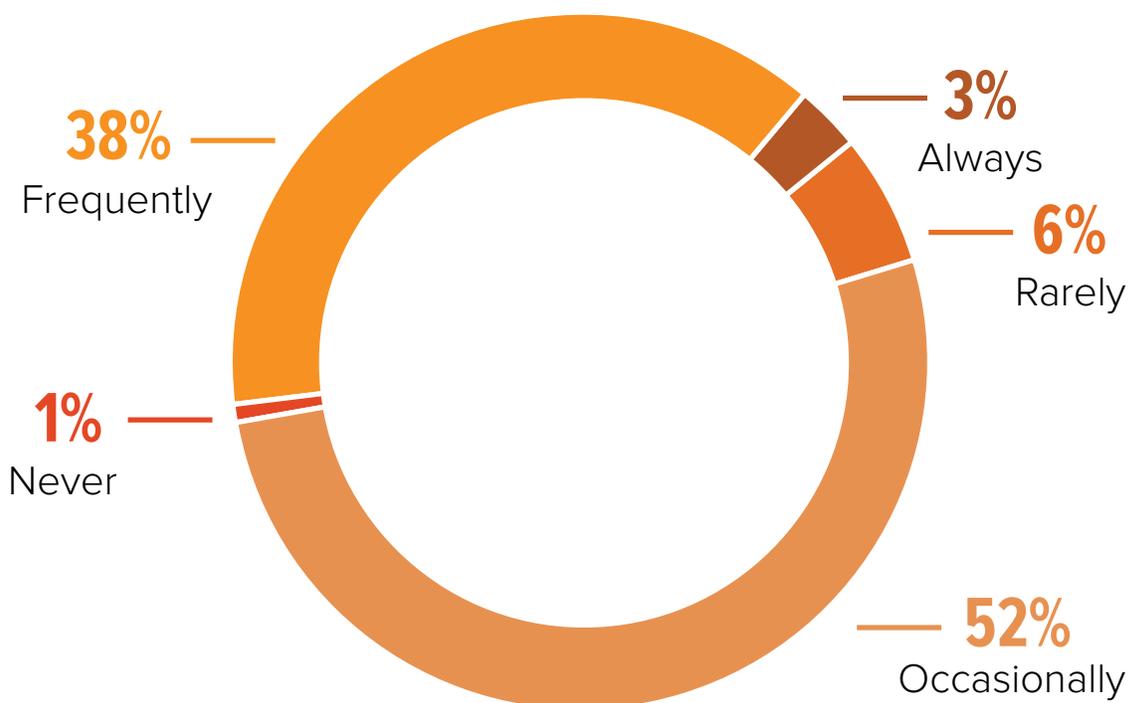
they'll see Google reviews first. Reviews from third party sites will show up lower in the search results.

And just in case you love statistics as much as I do, according to a recent Harvard Business Review study, a large percentage of local searches ended with a purchase (78 percent on mobile, 64 percent on tablet/laptop, and 61 percent on PC).<sup>10</sup>

## Yelp

People love to hate it, but don't underestimate the power of Yelp for small business. With over 90 million reviews, Yelp is the godfather (it's even been accused of mafia-like behavior) of online review platforms, and good reviews on Yelp can do a lot for a small business. Increasing your overall Yelp rating by one star could lead to a 5-9 percent boost in revenue.<sup>11</sup>

### How often does visiting Yelp lead to purchase from a local business?



Yelp reviews also show up in Bing searches on both desktop and mobile (Bing is the second biggest search engine in the world). Although it's pretty far behind Google, with only 20 percent of all searches, a significant number of consumers are using it.<sup>12</sup>

When Bing users search for a local business, Bing often features Yelp ratings directly in the search results and allows searchers to easily read more Yelp reviews. This is significant because 98 percent of Yelp users have made a purchase from a business they found on Yelp.

## **TripAdvisor**

For travel planning, consumers trust TripAdvisor more than guidebooks or even personal recommendations, and the review platform can seriously boost revenue. Not that I recommend raising prices just because you get a few good reviews, but a Cornell University study found that a hotel can raise its prices by about 11 percent for every one-point increase in its TripAdvisor star rating (without losing customers).<sup>13</sup>

## **Social Media**

Consumers like to feel that their choices are socially validated, and with over one billion daily users, Facebook is definitely the most important social media platform.

The recent appearance of Facebook Professional Services search tool has made it an even more important platform for small business owners, since consumers can now search for local businesses on Facebook. And star ratings show up in the search results, giving consumers a chance to immediately decide if your business is worth it.

Facebook reviews also generate consumer trust, with 80 percent of consumers being more likely to trust a local business if it has positive Facebook reviews.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, 72 percent of Millennials take social media friends' opinions into account when choosing a product or service.<sup>15</sup>



**is the average minutes per day that the average U.S. adult spends on Facebook.**

(source: Cowen and Company)

## Your Website

Putting reviews on product pages is the way to go. Not only has it been proven to increase review volume by 324 percent, but it can also increase both product coverage and the profile of the website.<sup>16</sup> If you're interested in learning more about this, visit <http://www.revlocal.com/review-marketing/renown/>

# The Real Problem of Fake Reviews

Despite the fact that consumers trust reviews now more than ever, there is still a large quantity of fake reviews online.

Numbers vary, but studies have shown that anywhere from 15-30 percent of online reviews are fake. This shouldn't surprise you. You can find a handful of offers for fake reviews on Craigslist in five minutes (but please don't do that).<sup>17</sup>

Remembering that consumers trust reviews as much as they trust opinions of friends and family, then fake negative reviews can be extremely damaging for businesses.

We've all heard a fake review horror story. You know, the one about the business owner who woke up one morning to dozens of negative reviews. Upon further investigation, the owner found out the reviews were fake and (illegally) commissioned by a competitor. Scary story, and you may find yourself wondering if this could happen to you.

Companies pay for fake reviews for a couple of reasons. Either they want more good reviews to entice new customers to try their business or they want to make competitors look bad, so they flood them with fake reviews. Either way, it's illegal to pay for reviews, and review platforms are cracking down on anyone who writes or pays for fakes.

Amazon recently sued 1,000 users for posting fake reviews on the site, and Yelp takes action against fakes by posting a warning on the business's Yelp page. They have also called out businesses by name in the official Yelp blog for paying for reviews, so just don't do it.<sup>18</sup>

Most review sites have an automated filter (Yelp's filter is infamous with small business owners) to keep fake reviews off the site. And if any fake reviews make it past the site's filter, most platforms have a way to flag fake reviews. The flag is usually attached to the review, but if you can't figure out how to flag a fake review on a particular site, check out the site's FAQ section or contact them to have it taken down.

In the meantime, you can always reach out to your legitimate customers and let them know what happened. Ask them to help you fight the fakes by posting a real review of your business. You can also respond to fakes, stating that you have no record of the supposed customer actually using your business.

# Are bad reviews costing you?

Manage your online reputation with Renown.

The image shows a screenshot of a review management interface. On the right, a review card displays the name 'CHAD R.', a 1-star rating (one solid teal star, four outlined stars), and the text 'TERRIBLE. The coffee was WAY too hot! If I wanted lava I would have visited a volcano!!!'. A teal 'RESPOND' button is located at the bottom right of the review card. On the left, a white notification box with a teal border contains the text 'New Message' and 'You have one new review!'. At the bottom of the notification box are two buttons: 'Not Now' and 'Read'.

Renown is a review marketing and reputation management platform that helps your business generate positive reviews while making sure your brand is protected online.

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# How to Handle Negative Reviews

Negative reviews are tricky. On one hand, one negative review can damage a young business. On the other hand, consumers don't always trust a business's reviews if they're all positive. Still, negative reviews do come at a cost. They can cause four out of five consumers to reverse purchase decisions.<sup>19</sup>

Your next potential customer may be ready to buy until they read a few negative reviews, at which point they will simply walk away. Additionally, one bad Yelp review can cost your business 30 customers, and bad reviews in Google search results can cause you to lose 70 percent of potential customers.<sup>20</sup>

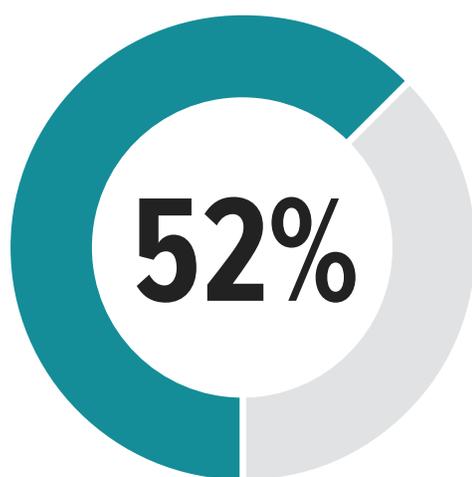
Yes, that seems extreme, but you shouldn't panic.

While you can't (and shouldn't, since consumers do want to see one or two) get rid of those bad reviews (unless they're fake) there are some steps you can take to neutralize and control the damage they can do to your business.

Negative reviews can be a touchy subject. It's never nice to hear negative things someone says about you (or your business). So you're probably upset when you read a negative review. But before you reply, take a step back and cool off.

If you respond to that review while you're still fuming, you might not be able to formulate a rational, helpful response.

Give yourself a little time to get over the initial shock, but make sure you still respond in a timely manner. You don't want to leave those negative reviewers hanging. Now, you will want to validate the reviewer's feelings. Don't ever blame the customer for the problem (even if it was their fault). Read over the review a few times so you understand the specific concern, and address it in a polite and professional manner (even if it nearly kills you).



**of consumers expect to hear back from businesses within 7 days after leaving a review, especially if it is negative.**

(source: SocialMediaToday)

Don't write an essay. Keep your response short and to the point. And remember that you can't please everyone.

Besides, this one bad review is such a great chance for your business to demonstrate why it's great. You can turn their bad experience into a positive customer service experience.

This is free PR for you. Everyone who's reading reviews and your responses will see that you won't allow customers to remain unhappy.

And remember, when businesses respond to unhappy customers (and actually resolve the problem) that customer is much (70 percent!) more likely to use the business again. All you have to do is respond, apologize and genuinely try to make it right. Don't know how to make it right? Just ask the reviewer what you can do to make it right for them!<sup>21</sup>

# What Consumers Look for in Reviews

Now that we know how much reviews are worth, let's take a look at what, exactly, it is in these reviews that consumers are using to judge businesses.

## Star Rating

Gold stars are fun, and consumers love them just as much as you love seeing a 4-5 star rating for your business. Overall star rating is the absolute most important aspect for consumers when reading reviews.

**94% of consumers will use a business if it has at least a 4 star rating.**

Obviously, everyone wants to see five stars, but most consumers will consider using a business as long as it has at least three stars. And a huge 94 percent will use a business with an overall four-star rating.

If your business only has one or two stars overall, you're in

trouble. Only 14 percent of consumers would even consider using a business with one or two stars.

### **Quantity of Reviews**

Quantity is the second-most important factor consumers take into consideration when reading reviews. This again ties into social proof, the idea that more is better.

If consumers see more reviews, they feel that it is safe to trust a business. While you should always be trying to generate more reviews, there are some specific minimum numbers of reviews that you can work toward.

So, exactly how many reviews does your business need? That depends on your goals.

If your goal is generating trust with consumers:

Recent studies have found that consumers generally trust a business after reading six or fewer reviews, but they'll form an opinion after reading just one. That one review isn't going to generate trust, but it will give consumers the chance to judge your business.

In fact, pretty much no one (5 percent) will trust a business after reading just one review. They want to see, but not necessarily read, more than that. And if a local business has 10 reviews, most consumers won't look any further.<sup>22</sup>

### **If your goal is to show up on Google:**

If you want Google to display your reviews in searches and Maps, you'll need at least five, but it's also helpful if you have more reviews than your competitors.

And if you have an online store and you want your Google seller rating to show up in AdWords campaigns, you need at

least 30 reviews over the last 12 months (and at least a 3.5 star rating).<sup>23</sup>

**If your goal is to show up on Yelp:**

There's no magic number of reviews to improve your Yelp ranking, but more is better (especially since Yelp's filter will only allow a fraction of those reviews to show up on your business's Yelp page). And even if you do have a lot of Yelp reviews, there are other things you'll need to do to improve your ranking:

Make sure your business's Yelp profile is complete. Also check that your address and hours are correct, and add pics. According to Yelp, if your business has 10 photos and 1-5

**One review can increase your conversion rate by 10%.**

**Once you get more than 100 reviews, the conversion rate can be boosted by up to 37%.**

reviews, it'll get 200 percent more views than a business with the same amount of reviews and no photos. Users will also spend more time on your Yelp page if you have pics. And make sure you don't add anything that violates Yelp's guidelines.<sup>24</sup>

## **If your goal is to drive e-commerce or boost SEO:**

Just a few reviews can drive traffic to your website. After you have eight or more, the site will start to see growth in organic search traffic. Every single review matters. One review can increase your conversion rate by 10 percent. And once you get more than 100 reviews, the conversion rate can be boosted by up to 37 percent.<sup>25</sup>

This number rises as you get more reviews. Consumer reviews also make up around 10 percent of how search engines decide to rank the site in search results.<sup>26</sup>

Star rating and quantity aren't the only factors consumers take into consideration when reading reviews. They also look at the quality and recency of these reviews.

### **Quality of Reviews**

Even though star rating is the most important factor for consumers, they are still interested in review quality. Users will skim past reviews with little-to-no text, and even Yelp recognizes that low-quality, two word reviews ("Great service!") aren't helpful. Yelp usually filters those types of reviews.

### **Recency of Reviews**

Reviews should be recent (no older than six months) or most consumers will consider them irrelevant, so you should be managing your reputation by asking customers to share their experiences. Also keep in mind that many consumers consider reviews more than a month old irrelevant, so it is extremely important that reviews are recent.<sup>27</sup>



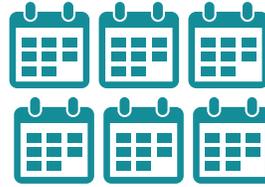
**44%**

say a review must be written within 1 month to be relevant



**69%**

say a review must be written within 2-3 months to be relevant



**84%**

say a review must be written within 3-6 months to be relevant



**16%**

say that reviews older than 6 months are relevant

# Who Actually Writes Reviews?

Everyone's reading them, but who actually writes all these reviews?

Unfortunately, while many consumers like to read reviews, not nearly as many write them. In fact, only 42 percent of consumers are leaving reviews (not even half the amount of consumers who read reviews).

Who's most likely to write reviews? Millennials. And as people get older, they become less and less likely to read or write a review. So if your business caters mostly to Millennials, you are more susceptible to backlash if customers receive what they perceive to be bad service. But if you offer great service, the Millennial desire to write reviews will work in your favor.<sup>28</sup>

Gender makes a difference as well, and women are more likely than men to read or write a review. Women also place a greater importance on reviews for their buying decisions.<sup>29</sup>

As far negative v positive experiences, customers are more likely to share negative experiences both online and offline.<sup>30</sup> And 34 percent of people who are 25-34 years old have even admitted to writing reviews in order to get revenge against a company. So remember to turn those negatives around.<sup>31</sup>

As far as frequency goes, people only write a review every 4-14 purchases, and usually because they have strong positive or negative feelings about the product or service. So it's not all that likely that they will write a review for your business, unless you are actively working on managing your reputation and generating more reviews.<sup>32</sup>

What can you do about it?

After all this, you might be wondering what you can do about managing your online reputation. While many business owners don't think it's a big deal, it is. No matter how good you are at what you do, you need that social proof that tells consumers it's okay to use your business.

The first step is to work to generate more reviews. Did you know that only 7 percent of consumers have actually been

**34% of people who are 25-34 years old have admitted to writing reviews to get revenge.**

asked to write a review? What's more incredible is that 89 percent would leave a review if asked. It's as simple as asking.

How can you ask? There are many ways to ask for reviews, so let's look at a few.

First, you need to remember not to make it difficult for customers to leave reviews. Give them options for review platforms (You're probably already on so many anyway, right?) so

that the chances are high that they already have an account on one of the sites.

Ask customers for email addresses or phone numbers and after they make a purchase, you can send them an email or a text message asking how their experience was. Make sure the message has a link to a couple of online review platforms where customers can review your business. You can also add links to these review platforms on your business's website.

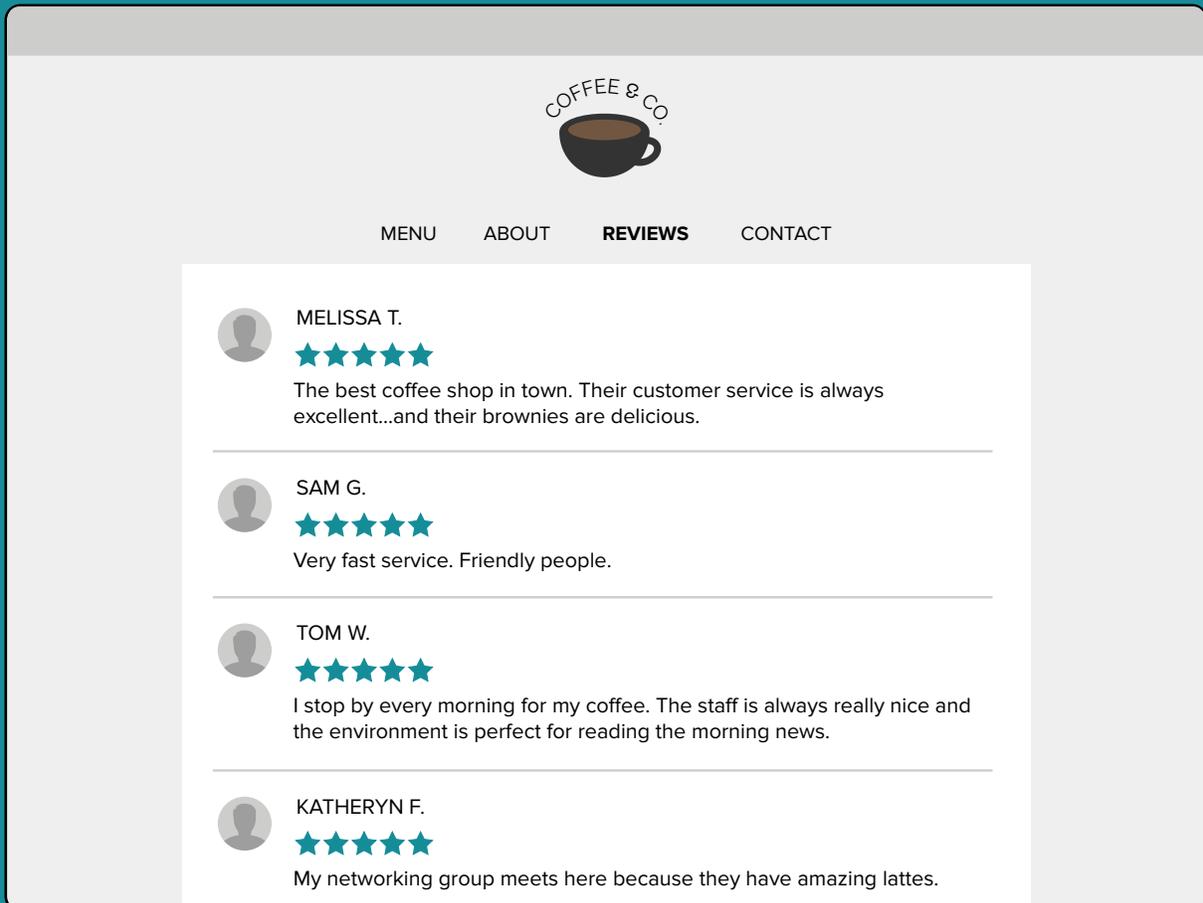
Some businesses even offer promotions for consumers who give reviews, but be careful there. Don't ever offer an incentive specifically for good reviews, and as we've mentioned before, don't just pay someone to write a review. Simply offer a small discount or other incentive for any review without mentioning specifically positive experiences. Besides, even if the customer does leave negative feedback, you know how to leverage that to your advantage.

As a final note, remember that the many review platforms each have their own rules and guidelines. For instance, Yelp doesn't like for businesses to specifically ask for reviews (though it isn't strictly against the rules). They also don't allow businesses to offer promotions for reviews unless those businesses advertise with Yelp.

Other platforms have their own rules, so be sure to check out the terms and conditions before you do anything that might violate the rules. You know what's worse than a lack of reviews? Having your page taken down because you broke the rules.

# What are your customers saying?

Monitor your business's online reputation with Renown.



Renown is a review marketing and reputation management platform that helps your business generate positive reviews while making sure your brand is protected online.

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# Review Marketing Take-Aways

1

Your business needs reviews. Eighty-eight percent of consumers trust online reviews as much as they trust personal recommendations.

2

There are too many review sites to keep up with them all (unless you have a marketing partner who manages your reputation for you) but you can search for industry + location + reviews to find the most important review sites for your business.

3

Paying for fake reviews is illegal, but still a whopping 15-30 percent of online reviews are fake.

4

Thirty-four percent of consumers aged 25-34 years old have written a negative review to get revenge on a business.

5

Negative reviews are scary, but a couple of bad reviews can actually increase trust in your business. Just make sure you respond to the negatives, because customers are 70 percent more likely to use a business again if it responds to negative reviews. Not sure what you can do to make it right? Just ask the reviewer what you can do for them!

6

It's not all about gold stars. Consumers take many aspects of reviews into consideration, including star rating, quantity, quality and recency of reviews.

7

Millennials are the generation most likely to write a review, and as people get older they are less likely to leave a review.

8

Not sure how to get more reviews? Just ask! Only 7 percent of consumers have been asked to write a review, while 89 percent would write a review if they were asked to do so.

9

Remember to check out every review site's terms and conditions to make sure you don't break any of their rules!



## Who is RevLocal?

First and foremost, RevLocal is your digital marketing partner. We offer our clients something that our competitors can't - relationships.

We grow as you grow. We change as the Internet changes. We're an extension of your marketing department - a really useful extension. We embrace the challenges that Internet marketing poses for small businesses. We will do whatever it takes to help your business get found online.

Call us your partner, your consultant, your strategist, your marketing department or even your web guru. We're not picky.

[revlocal.com](http://revlocal.com)



# Ready to Get Started?

As a business owner, it's up to you to decide what story you're going to tell. Consumers will judge a book by its digital cover. Don't be stubborn when it comes to marketing. Be willing to make changes to your strategy. Don't settle for average, because an average marketing strategy will yield average results. Business is truly a survival of the fittest. If you continue to adapt, you will be rewarded.

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

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30. [http://cdn.zendesk.com/resources/whitepapers/Zendesk\\_WP\\_Customer\\_Service\\_and\\_Business\\_Results.pdf](http://cdn.zendesk.com/resources/whitepapers/Zendesk_WP_Customer_Service_and_Business_Results.pdf)
31. <http://www.insightsquared.com/2015/04/100-customer-service-statistics-you-need-to-know/>
32. <http://www.powerreviews.com/blog/survey-confirms-the-value-of-reviews/>