

# Handling Online Reviews: Best Practices

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Fall 2009



TripAdvisor-branded sites make up the largest travel community in the world, with more than 25 million monthly visitors, 10 million registered members, and 25 million reviews and opinions of properties and destinations.

Although the hospitality industry is still in the beginning stages of figuring out how to master the exciting potential of social media, it is clear that the role of user-generated reviews is exploding and that consumers are wielding more power. The pace of this change has certainly caught hotels off guard: a recent survey conducted by Market Metrix and TripAdvisor found that 85% of hotels have no guidelines for monitoring, responding to, or acting on guest reviews. Perhaps this lack of direction explains why, according to TripAdvisor, only 4% of negative reviews get a response from hotels!

It's critical for hotels to regain control and take the appropriate action. Consumers say that when a company responds to a review, it puts the company in a favorable light (Compete Inc., 2007). Our own research shows that responding to customer issues can improve a guest's likelihood of recommending a hotel by 20% or more. This leads to word-of-mouth referrals that can represent 40% or more of a hotel's customer mix. If hotels don't respond, the dynamic of negative feedback can build into a huge wave of consumer defection.

To assist hotels in developing their own approach to handling online reviews, we have assembled the following guidelines based on industry best practices:

### Monitor

Hotels need to establish a process for tracking new reviews. This begins with assigning one person at your property to monitor online review sites and to be accountable for following up on all reviews. This person should:

1. Sign up for emails, alerts and RSS feeds to quickly see new reviews and know when scores change.
2. Monitor the top review sites (e.g., TripAdvisor) frequently, depending on how often your hotel receives reviews.

3. Make sure your hotel is listed on these sites and that your photos, videos and descriptions are up-to-date, accurate and complimentary.

### Respond

Management must clearly establish the hotel's response policy. Ideally, hotels should respond to all reviews within 24 hours in a personal and professional manner. This demonstrates a hotel's commitment to listening to and acting on guest feedback. If you cannot respond to all reviews within 24 hours, respond to all negative reviews first.

- Forward negative comments to the appropriate colleague if you need assistance responding, or to let them know there is an issue in their department. If necessary, the GM should also be alerted.
- If you suspect that a review is fraudulent, immediately contact the review site to dispute it. If your concern is justified, the review will be removed.

In responding to guest reviews, always start by thanking the guest for writing a review. For positive reviews, reinforce hotel strengths and invite the guest to return. When you receive positive comments, forward them to the appropriate person, who can share that feedback with deserving employees.

When responding to negative reviews, apologize for what inspired their complaint, and inform them what you will do to address the problem. If relevant, invite the guest to contact hotel management for resolution or describe how the problem was resolved (post a picture, if you can). Make sure to track which reviews have received a response.

### Analyze / Improve

User reviews expose the truth of your hotel's brand. Hotels are now challenged to maintain very high standards, meeting the expectations of customers who have done a significant amount of research before they travel. Guest reviews

not only offer hotels a chance for service recovery, they also can uncover opportunities for improvement, driving satisfaction and loyalty, and even reduce operating costs.

Each review should be thoroughly evaluated. Ideally, results from all reviews should be stored in a database with a reporting package available for analysis. Analyze guest reviews to understand trends over time, identify performance gaps versus relevant competitors, uncover scoring differences between key customer groups, and help evaluate potential investment decisions. Feedback from review sites should be combined with information from your regular guest feedback program to get a fuller picture of your guests' perception of your hotel.

Based on this analysis, action plans (preferably done at the department level) should be created to address issues, gaps and unfavorable trends. We also recommend that you:

- Share issues, gaps and trends with appropriate managers.
- Set goals that are measurable.
- Consider tying employee compensation to appropriate guest feedback measures, as long as they are fair and unbiased.

In addition, encourage guests to write reviews: fewer reviews imply a less popular hotel. Encourage guests verbally at check out, on receipts, and in communications or emails sent to guests.

More people than ever are reading hotel reviews prior to booking; hotels that embrace online reviews and take action can increase their business. Online reviews can help you connect with your customers, find out what they really want, and promote your hotel. This will lead to higher levels of service and confidence in your brand.

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## About TripAdvisor

TripAdvisor is the world's largest travel community with 25+ million unique monthly visitors, more than half of them coming from outside the United States. TripAdvisor features more user-generated content than any other travel site: more than 10 million members have contributed 23 million reviews and opinions, and nearly 1.5 million traveler photos, on more than 817,000 hotels, attractions, and restaurants in 61,000 cities.

TripAdvisor operates in the following countries:

- U.S. ([www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com))
- U.K. ([www.tripadvisor.co.uk](http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk))
- Ireland ([www.tripadvisor.ie](http://www.tripadvisor.ie))
- France ([www.tripadvisor.fr](http://www.tripadvisor.fr))
- Germany ([www.tripadvisor.de](http://www.tripadvisor.de))
- Italy ([www.tripadvisor.it](http://www.tripadvisor.it))
- Spain ([www.tripadvisor.es](http://www.tripadvisor.es))
- India ([www.tripadvisor.in](http://www.tripadvisor.in))
- Japan ([www.tripadvisor.jp](http://www.tripadvisor.jp))
- China ([www.daodao.com](http://www.daodao.com))
- Sweden ([www.tripadvisor.se](http://www.tripadvisor.se))
- The Netherlands ([nl.tripadvisor.com](http://nl.tripadvisor.com))
- Portugal and Brazil ([www.tripadvisor.br](http://www.tripadvisor.br))