

# TOURISM BUSINESS ESSENTIALS



## ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

*The essential guide for tourism businesses on how to  
manage online customer reviews.*

Destination  
British Columbia™

# Online Reputation Management

This guide explains how tourism operators in British Columbia can take control, manage, and generate more business from online reviews written by both satisfied and dissatisfied customers. As a tourism operator, you will learn where reviews are being posted, when and how to respond to both positive and negative reviews, what measurement tools are available to determine how your tourism business rates online, and how to find and access your online profiles to ensure information is current.

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# 1

## Introduction to Online Reputation Management

Whether you manage a large hotel chain or a one-employee tourist attraction, you have undoubtedly reaped the benefits of favourable traveller reviews and felt the sting of the occasional negative review. As a consumer, you have probably consulted reviews before purchasing something, whether a car, book, electronic device or vacation.

Social networking has changed the way consumers make decisions, transferring control of what is being said about brands out of the hands of businesses and placing it into the hands of consumers – then handing those consumers a megaphone. Increasingly, consumers are seeking guidance on buying decisions from other consumers, not only in the form of written reviews but also in the form of photo and video content.

Social media has acted as a catalyst for this trend by providing platforms for the exchange of user-generated content, enabling consumers to interact, not only with one another, but also with brands, essentially giving them a voice.

It is often said that one unhappy customer will tell at least five others. In the age of social media that number has compounded to hundreds, even thousands of entirely online communities. “Word of mouth” has been usurped by “word of mouse,” a vastly more efficient means of spreading the word. For consumers the shift has been empowering. For businesses the sentiments are mixed: online reviews can be fantastic when customers are singing your praises, but daunting when they are voicing displeasure.

The change has been particularly acute in the travel industry. Increasingly, travel shoppers are bypassing traditional sources and turning to other travellers and peers in social networks for information and advice. A recent survey from PhoCusWright found that three in four active travellers cite traveller reviews and photos as

very, or moderately, influential in choosing what they do.<sup>1</sup>

The explosive popularity of social networking has given rise to an important new function in the tourism industry: online reputation management. Online reputation management (ORM) is the process of monitoring, reporting and reacting to online feedback and opinions about your business and its people, products and services. It involves actively participating in social networking by engaging travellers and generating content, as well as using customer feedback to strengthen your business and build loyalty and advocacy.

When it comes to traveller reviews, TripAdvisor is the most well-known website. After launching in February 2000, TripAdvisor changed the way travellers research trips by providing them with a platform to share candid advice with other travellers. Travellers were no longer dependent on information provided by tourism marketers, travel media and travel agents; because of TripAdvisor, they could get advice from people just like them.

As of July 2012, TripAdvisor receives over 74 million visitors per month. The site features over 75 million reviews and opinions as well as millions of photos and videos, and operates in 30 countries in 21 languages.<sup>2</sup> In addition to accommodation reviews, the site carries listings and reviews of destinations, airlines, restaurants, activities and attractions, as well as traveller forums, guides, enhanced business listings and special offers.

As the largest and most influential review site for travellers, TripAdvisor is a primary focus of this guide. However, it is not the only site that carries persuasive user-generated content. Also important to the tourism industry are online travel communities such as TravelPost, Bing Travel and Yahoo! Travel; business listings sites such as Yelp and Google Places;

<sup>1</sup> Hotels Magazine. (March 2011). *Mobile Mayhem*.

<sup>2</sup> TripAdvisor. [tripadvisor.com](http://tripadvisor.com). (2012). *Factsheet*.

# 1

## Introduction to Online Reputation Management

restaurant review sites including OpenTable and UrbanSpoon; and online travel agencies such as Expedia, Hotels.com and Travelocity.

In addition, there are social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter; content-sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr; and blogs, forums and location-based social networks.

### *The Goal of This Guide*

The volume of chatter can be overwhelming for tourism operators with businesses to run. This guide is intended to help you navigate the options and decide which platforms merit the most attention. It introduces the principles of online reputation management and suggests ways to gain a competitive advantage by harnessing the power of online reviews and social media feedback.

This guide is written for owners, operators and employees of all types of businesses in British Columbia's tourism industry, including bed and breakfasts, hotels, restaurants, event venues, attractions, tour companies and

activity providers.

The goal of this guide is to highlight the importance of managing your online reputation while showing you how to:

- Develop and administer an online reputation management program.
- Use time-saving tools to monitor and analyze reviews and feedback.
- Use customer feedback to affect positive change in your business.
- Respond to online reviews and social media feedback.
- Use social media channels to strengthen your business's online reputation.
- Encourage customers to share content and advocate for your business.

Many of the principles discussed in this guide are applicable to all types of tourism businesses; others will need to be modified and adapted to meet your business's unique needs.

## Trends in Ratings Systems

Given the popularity of user reviews, do star ratings matter to travellers anymore? Absolutely, according to results from the 2011 Canadian Travel Intentions Survey conducted by the Hotel Association of Canada (HAC).<sup>3</sup> This survey defines a traveller as someone who will stay at least one night in a hotel, motel or resort and was conducted among 1,627 "likely travellers."

The survey found that 73% of leisure travellers and 86% of business travellers use the Internet to gather information before they book travel. According to Tony Pollard, President of the HAC, the top five things travellers seek are special travel offers, photos, maps, accommodation ratings and amenities.

Almost 60% of business travellers and 54% of leisure travellers indicated that star and diamond ratings on Internet booking services have the most influence on their travel choices. This marks an increase of 7% over 2010.

At the same time, Pollard says the number of travellers reading blogs and traveller testimonials and writing about hotels on Twitter and Facebook is also increasing.

Results vary according to the purpose of travel. The survey indicated that social media has more influence on business travellers (17%, almost double 2010 results) than on leisure travellers (14%, up 4%). Videos have 43% influence on business travellers and 47% on leisure travellers, whereas blogs influence

<sup>3</sup> Western Hotelier Magazine. (March/April 2011). *Canadians Drive to the U.S. for Less Expensive Airline Tickets.*

## Trends in Ratings Systems

25% of business travellers and 21% of leisure travellers.

How are tourism marketing organizations responding to changes in traveller behaviour? Tourism Whistler's online accommodation listings feature a TripAdvisor review feed as well as its own "Peak Rating System." Tourism Vancouver has been listing TripAdvisor reviews on accommodation and restaurant member listings since early 2010. Members have the option of including AAA ratings and other official rankings in their descriptions.

"We know people are looking for guest reviews, so it only makes sense to provide that information on our site rather than sending them away to look for it," explains Darren Johner, Manager, Digital Marketing with

Tourism Vancouver. He says the response from travellers has been positive.

"We have discussed adding official ratings too," says Candice Gibson, Manager, Consumer Marketing, Tourism Vancouver. "But when broached with our hotel membership, there has always been debate about the merits of it, and about which rating system to adopt, so we generally do not include a rating system in our campaigns or our listings."

Given the continued appetite among travellers for both official rankings and guest reviews, individual tourism businesses may want to include both types of third-party endorsements on websites to satisfy the full spectrum of travellers.

## Destination BC and Social Media

Destination British Columbia has a history of engaging with consumers through online initiatives and is particularly active in the realm of social media. In 2007, the [HelloBC.com](http://HelloBC.com) blog was opened to consumers, allowing them to contribute words, photos and videos about their favourite travel experiences in British Columbia.

Since then, Destination BC has established a YouTube channel

([www.youtube.com/TourismBC](http://www.youtube.com/TourismBC)),

Twitter account

([www.twitter.com/TourismBC](http://www.twitter.com/TourismBC))

Facebook page

([www.facebook.com>HelloBC](http://www.facebook.com>HelloBC))

Instagram account

([Instagram.com/TourismBC](http://Instagram.com/TourismBC))

and Pinterest page

([Pinterest.com/TourismBC](http://Pinterest.com/TourismBC))

to converse with consumers who are considering, planning and re-living trips to the province.

Destination BC's core objective of using consumer-facing online initiatives is to connect consumers with tourism products.

Destination BC has embraced an approach to social media that focuses on joining those conversations in appropriate ways, and on building long-term engagement around an appreciation of British Columbia and its many tourism assets, rather than plying social networks and its influencers with traditional advertising such as banners or ad tiles.

The efforts are showing favourable results. At the time of publication, Destination BC had substantially increased its numbers of followers on Twitter and fans on Facebook. A promotional video entitled "Don't Miss a Moment" received over 3,500 views within three weeks of being posted on YouTube.



# 2 Why Manage Your Online Reputation?

The influence, reach and trust level of user-generated content has made online reputation management an essential function for tourism operators large and small.

In the age of social media, consumers demand transparency and accountability from the businesses they frequent. If they do not receive it, they have many platforms for voicing displeasure. Social networks are increasingly being used as customer service channels for travellers before, during and after trips. Requests and commentary are often posted in real time, and quick responses are expected.

Traveller reviews also provide valuable feedback for improving your business. It is up to you to determine if you are going to listen and make improvements, or if you are going to ignore feedback and risk frightening new or repeat visitors away.

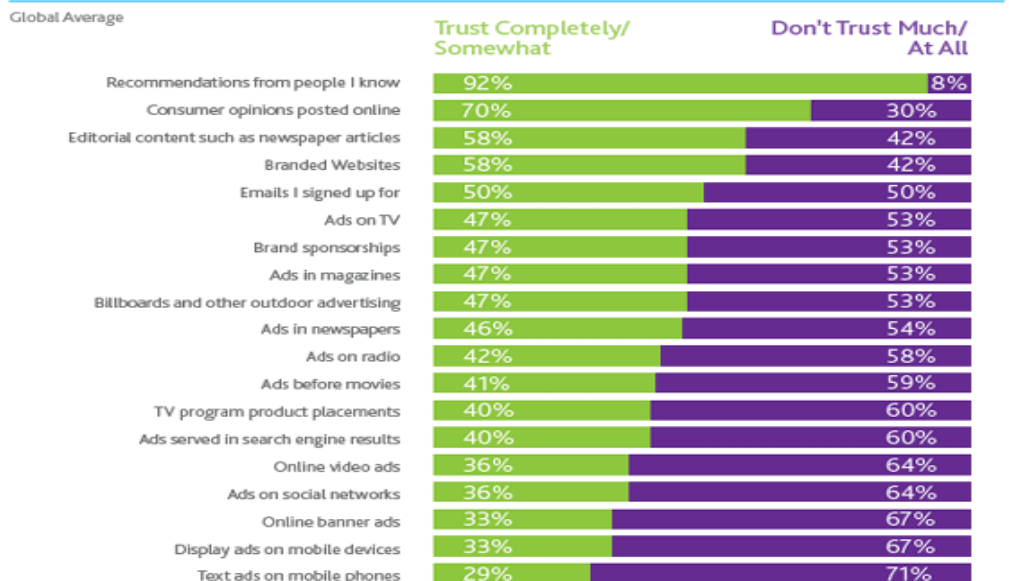
## The Importance of Trust

A 2011 Nielsen Global Online Consumer Survey<sup>4</sup> of over 25,000 Internet consumers in 50 countries found that recommendations from personal acquaintances are the most trusted forms of advertising: 92% of respondents said they trusted them “completely” or “somewhat.” The second most trusted form was online consumer opinions at 70% followed by editorial content and branded websites, which tied at 58%. This survey is the largest semi-annual survey of its kind, providing insight into the opinions and preferences of Internet consumers around the world.

Several Internet marketing activities popular among tourism businesses ranked significantly lower by comparison: 50% for opt-in emails, 40% for search engine results ads and 33% for banner ads.

The results indicate that while consumers do not trust the opinions of strangers as much as the opinions of people they know, they trust them significantly more than traditional advertising sources and slightly more than the opinions of professional journalists.

To what extent do you trust the following forms of advertising?



Source: Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising Survey, Q3 2011

<sup>4</sup> Nielsen. (April 2011). *Global Trust in Advertising and Brand Messages*.

## The Prominence of Reviews in Search

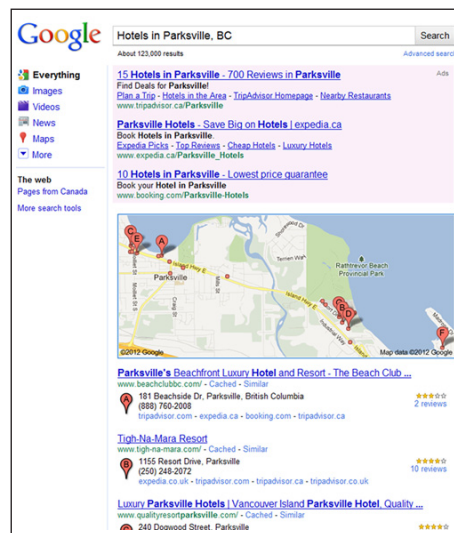
Traveller reviews and opinions are increasingly prevalent in online searches. Perform a Google search for destination accommodations, dining, shopping or activities; in addition to links to business websites and third-party resellers, reviews and links to review sites typically show up on the first page.

A link to the business Google Places page often appears to the right of the listing, along with a star rating aggregated from several review sites. For hotels, Google often lists a user review directly below the accommodation's website link, along with links to review sites such as TripAdvisor, Frommers.com and igougo.

com. These reviews and ratings can have a significant impact on click-through traffic.

Searching is becoming increasingly social as well. Recently, the Microsoft search engine Bing began integrating Facebook user activity into search results, and Google has launched its own version of the Facebook "Like" button, called +1.

Click on a website and you might see a Facebook button indicating how many people have "liked" the business as well as customer testimonials, a TripAdvisor badge, a Facebook widget, a Twitter feed or a YouTube link.



www.google.ca

## The Personalization of Search

At the same time, searching is becoming more personalized. When planning trips travellers benefit not only from the "wisdom of crowds" provided by reviews from unknown travellers but also from the "wisdom of friends" provided by reviews and commentary from peers in social networks. Facebook, Twitter and Google profiles can be connected to third-party websites, applications and social networks, giving prominence to the "likes" and preferences of the user's social graph.

TripAdvisor and Yelp offer the option of "instant personalization," which enables members to link their account with their Facebook profile. This places the likes, recommendations and activities of Facebook friends front and centre in searches, ahead of top-ranked businesses, and makes it easy to contact friends for information and advice.



# 2 Why Manage Your Online Reputation?

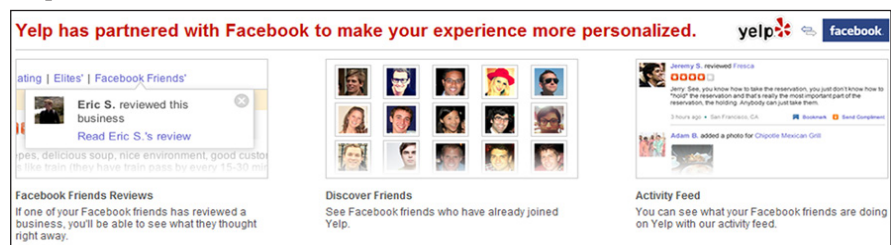
## The Personalization of Search

### TripAdvisor Personalization



www.tripadvisor.com/instantpersonalization - TripAdvisor personalization

### Yelp Personalization



www.yelp.com/static?p=fb\_yelp - Yelp personalization

## Destination Marketing Organizations and Social Media

Tourism operators depend on the support of Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) to help promote their destinations and attract visitors. Across British Columbia, DMOs have been quick to embrace social media as an effective means of advancing these objectives.

All six Regional Destination Marketing Organizations (RDMOs) representing BC are active in social media, as well as many community DMOs and tourism businesses within these communities. Their combined efforts can have a powerful effect on a region's online presence and have helped to strengthen British Columbia's reputation as one of the most desirable places in the world to visit.

In general, DMOs monitor review sites and travel forums but leave it to individual businesses to respond to reviews. Instead the DMOs focus on building awareness and engaging travellers through social networking

channels.

In addition to administering four Twitter feeds, two Facebook pages, a YouTube profile and a Flickr account, Vancouver, Coast & Mountains Tourism Region recently launched [604 PULSE](#), a destination blog. "We provide locals and visitors personal insight into the cool things you can see and do in the region," says Mary Ann Bell, Director, Special Projects. "Every day, we give you new tips, highlight upcoming events, share our favourite blogs and tell you about our travels."

Similarly, Tourism Vancouver publishes the [Inside Vancouver](#) blog to provide an insider's view of the city "written by Vancouverites about Vancouver."

[Tourism Victoria's Going Local](#) blog invites travellers to "experience Victoria from a local perspective." The blog is part of Tourism

## Destination Marketing Organizations and Social Media

Victoria's shift in focus from print marketing activities to online activities. "We find we have greater reach with our online strategy and can do more with less," explains Trina Mousseau, Director of Destination Marketing.

Bell of Vancouver, Coast & Mountains says social media is "really no different than classic "word-of-mouth" when travellers return from a vacation and share with family and friends. It's just easier to do now." She stresses the importance of monitoring conversations and engaging travellers. "Make sure that visitors (past, current and future) can find the information they want and are provided with easy (and fun) ways to share their information," she recommends. "Encourage visitors who have had a good experience to share that experience on a review site, Facebook or Twitter."

Ellen Walker-Matthews, Market Experiences Specialist for the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association, agrees. "Both DMOs and tourism businesses need to be active listeners online and get involved in conversations about your region or your tourism product," she says. "The consumer continues to seek out the advice and opinions of fellow travellers and experts on these sites and relies less and less on traditional advertising as their main source of information."

"We are seeing both consumers and stakeholders becoming more and more engaged on our Facebook and Twitter sites," says Walker-Matthews. "Many of our stakeholders regularly post special events, activities and offers." Her association launched a mobile application and a favourite places site on its Facebook page to allow consumers to post photos and vote on their favourite location or tourism business. "We have also incorporated the use of QR codes into our advertising activities," she says, referring to barcode-like images that enable smart phone users to point and link directly to a website

landing page, file or mobile application.

One of the challenges DMOs face is getting "buy-in" from local businesses. Clint Fraser, Marketing Director at the Northern British Columbia Tourism Association explains, "As a regional DMO we need to leverage our marketing funds with tourism partners, and while we understand the value of social media it's not always easy to convince local stakeholders."

Mary Ann Bell concurs, "As a DMO we recognize how vital it is to be engaged and active with social media, but we struggle with the concept that it's a 'non-revenue'-generating activity ... we are finding it very difficult to convince tourism businesses that social media is not a free marketing activity and that some level of investment (primarily human resources) is required to ensure that it happens, and happens well."

Maximizing the opportunities presented by social media requires a combined effort involving DMOs, communities and local businesses. Sites such as TripAdvisor can help by providing tools and resources to promote destinations. In addition to forums, user reviews and imagery, there is a dedicated section for tourism marketing organizations where DMOs can upload content and integrate reviews with destination websites.

Local businesses can play their part by exceeding customer expectations, participating in discussions about their region and encouraging travellers to share their experiences.

# 3 Developing Your Online Reputation Management Program

You will achieve the best results from your online reputation management program by taking an organized, methodical approach. This involves setting clear objectives, getting all staff on board and integrating the program into your marketing and operational activities.

Online reputation management is comparable to the evolution of the revenue management function in the lodging industry. Fifteen years ago revenue management was still in its infancy; today, it is an essential function for all accommodation operators. Most large properties have a dedicated revenue manager and revenue management team that meet weekly to review reports, discuss performance, set objectives, develop strategies and employ tactics to support strategic initiatives and deliver on objectives.

A similar approach should be taken with reputation management, although the amount of time and resources you dedicate will depend on your priorities and the size and nature of your business.

To start with, define your objectives and strategies by answering the following questions:

1. Who is responsible?  
(Assembling the Team)
2. What do we want to accomplish?  
(Setting Goals and Objectives)
3. How will we accomplish it?  
(Developing a Strategy)
4. Where do we start?  
(Getting Started)

## *1. Assembling the Team*

One of the challenges of managing reputation is there is often disagreement over who is responsible. Marketing may blame operations for negative reviews, and Operations may blame Marketing for setting unrealistic expectations. The reality is your business's reputation is a company-wide concern that has an impact on all aspects of the business, and involves multiple departments.

Every employee has the ability to strengthen or weaken public perceptions of your business. To be successful, your program must involve the commitment and cooperation of all employees, from frontline staff to executive management.

The size and makeup of your online reputation management team will vary according to the size and structure of your business. Include the individuals who have the greatest stake in your business's reputation. In a large hotel this may include the front office manager, the director of sales and marketing, the public relations representative and the general manager. Representatives from food and beverage, human resources, corporate office and ownership may also be appropriate. The individual responsible for administering your social media channels should be involved, even if this function is outsourced.

If you operate an attraction your group may be limited to two or three people such as the marketing manager, operations manager and general manager. In a small restaurant it might consist of just one person.

You will need to appoint someone to champion your efforts: your "reputation leader." Rather than create a new position, responsibilities can be added to an existing position. Someone is likely already performing many of the functions, in which case it is a matter of formalizing the role, assigning responsibilities and setting objectives.

The reputation leader's duties will include chairing meetings, liaising with departments and sharing relevant information with staff. They are the reputation watchdog, advocate and taskmaster, and should be senior and influential enough to effect change across departments.

You will also need someone to monitor, respond to and disseminate reviews and feedback. Depending on the nature of the review and the required response, the reputation leader or a more junior employee could draft the initial response for senior management review.

## *2. Setting Goals and Objectives*

One of your first tasks is to determine where your business is in terms of reputation and where it would like to be. An objective measure can be taken from ratings and rankings on review sites such as [TripAdvisor's Popularity Index](#).

Determine where you are, where your competitors are and where you aspire to be. Set clear and realistic goals such as "within top 20 attractions in BC on TripAdvisor's Popularity Index," "3.5-star rating on TripAdvisor," "top five restaurants on Yelp" or "top 10 hotels on Expedia's guest rating index." There are a number of tools to help you measure and track online reputation; see the next section for details.

To reach your goal of enhancing your online reputation, you will need to set some or all of the following objectives:

1. Improve rankings.
2. Improve the quality of reviews.
3. Increase the volume of reviews.
4. Decrease the number of negative reviews.
5. Build followings on social networks.
6. Increase traveller engagement on social networks.
7. Increase conversion of social media visitors to customers.

8. Strengthen loyalty and repeat business among customers.
9. Encourage customers to advocate for your business on social networks.

## *3. Developing a Strategy*

The next step is to define the strategy or strategies you will undertake to achieve these objectives. These can be divided into four main functions, each of which is discussed in detail in the following chapters:

1. Monitor and analyze reviews and feedback.
2. Discuss feedback internally and resolve issues.
3. Respond to reviews and feedback.
4. Generate social media content and build advocacy among customers.

## *4. Getting Started*

### **Allocating Resources**

Building and maintaining basic social media profiles is free, but managing reviews and social channels can be labour intensive.

### **Focussing Resources**

Finding resources is most likely a matter of reallocating expenditures and changing priorities rather than increasing overall expenditures. This may involve asking some hard questions. Do current expenditures reflect changes in how travellers make decisions? Print advertising and print collateral can be important, but in the age of social media, travel research, decision-making and purchasing are increasingly taking place online.

You might also re-evaluate expenditures on traditional public relations activities as well as sales and reservations functions. The popularity of user-generated content has made customers an integral part of a company's sales force and their testimonials are a powerful marketing tool.

# 3 Developing Your Online Reputation Management Program

## **Social Networking, Review Sites and Online Travel Agencies**

When deciding where to shift resources, it is important to differentiate between social networking and online reputation management. The travel industry has been quick to embrace social networking platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, but the real decisions are being made on review sites and online travel agencies (OTAs), where a “book now” button is never far away. People tend to go to Facebook to socialize, but they go to TripAdvisor and Expedia to shop.

## **The Importance of Traditional Marketing**

At the same time it is important to note that social networking and online reputation management will not fully replace traditional marketing activities. The vast majority of bookings and revenue generation continues to take place through traditional channels: brand websites, online travel agencies and voice reservations.

## **Review Management is Priority #1**

Sites such as Facebook and Twitter are valuable not because they generate revenue, but because they engage travellers and build loyalty and advocacy among customers. However, while engagement is an important part of your overall marketing strategy, your social media program should place review management as the highest priority. This is where you are most likely to reap the highest returns on investment.

Traveller reviews influence demand for your business, as well as the prices your customers are willing to pay. At the 2010 Cornell Hospitality Research Summit, Expedia executive Brian Ferguson reported that traveller reviews play an important role in the rates hotels can charge through a third-party site. A 1-point increase in a review score equates to a 9% increase in average daily rate.<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between reputation and pricing applies to all types of tourism businesses. However, the influence of reviews is not limited to individual travellers. Increasingly, group organizers, event planners and corporate travel managers are consulting review sites and social networks when making group decisions.

*In recent research, we found that the sentiment of online reviews reduces the impact of price on purchase decision, meaning that good reviews will influence a traveller to spend more, and bad reviews will discourage bookings, even if the hotel room is discounted.*

Kelly McGuire, Executive Director  
Hospitality and Travel Global Practice  
SAS Institute Inc.

## **Online Reputation Management – A Team Effort**

If your business receives a high volume of reviews and is very active in social media, you will probably need to hold a weekly online reputation management (ORM) meeting. Yes, another meeting, but this one can have a significant impact on the success of your business. In a smaller organization a monthly meeting is probably sufficient; alternatively, ORM can be added to the agenda of marketing, executive or operational meetings.

Whatever your situation, it is essential to have someone monitor, disseminate and respond to feedback on a consistent basis, ideally daily.

ORM meetings provide you with the opportunity to discuss the latest customer feedback and ratings, identify issues that need attention and decide how to handle them both internally and externally. If resolution is not possible or is a long way off, discuss how to manage the issue to minimize short-term repercussions. Outside these meetings, it is critical to share

<sup>1</sup> Turner, Shawn. (October 2010). Blog: *Understanding OTA Sort*.



guest feedback and program progress with employees as appropriate.

### **Creating an Online Reputation Management Plan**

To formalize your online reputation management program, draft a short document that outlines responsibilities, objectives and strategies. Include this your annual budget, operations plan, and sales and marketing plan.

Integrate ORM principles into marketing and operational activities and decision-making throughout the year, and review the plan monthly, making adjustments as necessary. Keep staff informed of progress along the way by distributing a monthly summary of customer feedback, ratings and rankings.

For a sample online reputation management plan see [Appendix 2](#).

### **A Systematic Approach to Monitoring Feedback<sup>2</sup>**

Listening closely to guests and making improvements based on their feedback has helped the Olivia Plaza Hotel in Barcelona increase positive reviews and rankings. In 2010 the four-star luxury hotel, situated on the world-famous Plaza Catalunya, received 930 reviews across 15 review sites. To help keep track, the hotel subscribed to ReviewPro, a reputation monitoring tool.

One improvement involved breakfast. Explains Ricardo Samaan, Revenue Manager, "We discovered the details of what people were saying about our breakfast online and, for the first time, were able to analyze the overall satisfaction with our breakfast offering."

They soon discovered that guests wanted a broader variety of options, and more warm dishes. "With that knowledge," says Samaan, "we started introducing new products little by little, always changing the breakfast just a bit, until we saw an increase in positive comments about it."

"This has had a huge impact and allowed us to receive higher rankings overall," says Samaan.



<sup>2</sup> Dendler, Edwina. ehotelier.com. (January 2011). *Case Study: What Olivia Plaza Hotel Found Out through Online Reviews*.



## **Where to Find the Time and Resources?**

Representatives from two very different types of lodging explain how they find time for social networking and online reputation management and why it's a priority.

### ***Abbeymoore Manor, Victoria***

Despite having only a handful of employees, the seven-room Abbeymoore Manor in Victoria administers a blog, Facebook page, Twitter feed and LinkedIn profile as well as "dabbling" in foursquare. Innkeeper Ian MacPhee says he also actively monitors reviews on Yelp, bedandbreakfast.com, iloveinns.com and TripAdvisor – "not only for the property but for Victoria in general."

How does he find the time? "It's very tough but the results speak for themselves so it's a priority," MacPhee explains. "We use systems to automate where we can and we have the tools like an iPhone, etc. I try and set aside some time each day. I have Facebook Fridays and TripAdvisor Tuesdays as well as Website Wednesdays. If I'm blogging I try and write several articles at once and publish them at different times."

MacPhee says he invests more resources in staffing and online marketing initiatives than most innkeepers in order to ensure a high level of service and a solid reputation. "Yes, it costs money," he explains, "but a great website coupled with a solid online reputation brings business." He keeps current with the latest trends by participating in conferences and social networking programs offered by BC's Bed & Breakfast Innkeepers Guild and the Professional Association of Innkeepers International.

According to MacPhee, the results have been tremendous. Abbeymoore Manor is currently ranked the #1 Bed and Breakfast in British Columbia on TripAdvisor and was recognized as the #2 B&B in Canada in TripAdvisor's 2011 Travelers' Choice Awards. Despite the challenging tourism market, MacPhee says his property has enjoyed eight years of growth.

Asked if he has any advice for small businesses with similar aspirations, MacPhee says, "Find the time and you'll reap the rewards. Focus on online reviews first, especially TripAdvisor, and then start Facebooking. Don't get discouraged if you get behind. Just keep trying." He recommends soliciting reviews from guests but cautions against gaming the system. "TripAdvisor is far more sophisticated than folks believe, and if you are caught breaking the rules you will see your rankings suffer."

"There's no use focusing on social media and online reviews unless you are confident the reviews you get will be very positive," adds MacPhee. "Be sure your property is the best it can be and go out of your way for every guest."

### ***The Pan Pacific Hotel, Vancouver***

At the 504-room Pan Pacific Vancouver, maintaining the hotel's social media program is a full-time job. Rishad Daroowala, formerly Social Media Marketing Manager, oversaw the hotel's profiles on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and YouTube. He was also the creator of [The Room with a View Blog](#), which has received much acclaim for its engaging content.

"The Pan Pacific Vancouver is an iconic hotel in the city and there are plenty of interesting experiences and stories worth sharing," he says. "Not only do they showcase what's going on in their hotel, they also keep their guests and readers informed on what's going on in their backyard, downtown Vancouver."

Daroowala stresses that social media is a team effort. "I came up with content but shared my ideas with the public relations director and the management team for added input and feedback," he says. He personally monitored comments on the hotel's social media channels and always responded within 24 hours. Review sites are managed by the hotel's Director of Quality Assurance, as feedback can sometimes require a detailed investigation.

As for measuring results, Daroowala used Google Analytics to track visitors to the blog, traffic origins and click-throughs to the booking engine, and Google Alerts to monitor discussions and mentions. "I also used Facebook Insights and a couple different programs to track our Twitter presence, most notably Hootesuite" he says. "At each month's end, I provided a detailed report on how traffic, revenue and engagement were being created as well as a plan for the numbers we could expect in the future." To streamline the process the hotel subscribed to Revinate, a hotel-based social media monitoring and analytics tool.

Daroowala now works as a Social Media Officer at The Canadian Tourism Commission, but the Pan Pacific continues to maintain a full-time Social Media Marketing Manager.

# Destination Marketing Organizations

For Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), a variety of tools, both free and paid, are available through such sites as TripAdvisor. These tools allow you to provide and/or enhance community content available to potential travellers, take advantage of traveller-generated content, and encourage visits to both your website and your destination.

TripAdvisor tools include a variety of badges and widgets that can be placed on your destination site as well as the ability to upload articles, videos and photos, and participate in travel forums, paid advertising and sponsorship opportunities. They also offer educational workshops to ensure you are taking advantage of all TripAdvisor's online resources.

## TripAdvisor for Business

The screenshot displays the TripAdvisor for Business interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the TripAdvisor logo and links for 'Sign in with Facebook', 'Sign in', 'Register Now!', and 'FREE Mobile App'. Below this is a green header with the text 'TRIPADVISOR CONSUMER SITE'. The main content area is titled 'Promote Richmond' and includes a sidebar with options: 'Display local reviews', 'Promote your area', and 'Link to TripAdvisor'. The main section features a 'Promote Richmond' widget with a description: 'Enhance your website with TripAdvisor content that showcases the best of your destination. Choose a category below to display real travel reviews, photos and top rated points of interest.' Below this, there are three widget options: 'Rave Reviews' (Showcase the best of your area with our rave review widgets), 'Best of Montreal' (This widget lets customers see the best restaurants, attractions and hotels in your area), and 'Link to TripAdvisor' (Use these simple widgets to link users to your destination on TripAdvisor). A 'Quick Links' sidebar on the right contains: 'Add Photos', 'Post a Video', 'Share information with Travellers', 'Wrong location? Start over', 'Your area's page' (Richmond on TripAdvisor), and 'Contact TripAdvisor' (Interested in partnering with TripAdvisor? Need widgets in bulk? Contact TripAdvisor).

[www.tripadvisor.ca/Widgets-g181716-c1-Richmond\\_British\\_Columbia.html](http://www.tripadvisor.ca/Widgets-g181716-c1-Richmond_British_Columbia.html)

# 4 Monitoring and Analyzing Reviews and Feedback

## Most Popular Travel Review Websites

A critical part of online reputation management is simply paying attention to what is being written. This function alone can be a bit overwhelming. It is also important to determine which websites and channels merit your attention. Fortunately, there are many tools and resources to facilitate the process and save time. (More details on page 20).

### *Most Popular Travel Review Websites<sup>1</sup>*

Rank	Website	Category	Review Policy	Notes
1	<a href="#">TripAdvisor</a>	Online travel community	Any member can post a review; businesses can respond and contact reviewer directly; ratings 1 to 5.	Currently part of Expedia Inc but up for sale
2	<a href="#">Yahoo! Travel</a>	Online travel community	Taken from Travelocity; any member can post a review; businesses cannot respond or contact reviewers; ratings 1 to 5.	Part of Travelocity group
3	<a href="#">Expedia</a>	Online travel agency	Customer reviews only; businesses can respond to reviews but cannot contact reviewers; ratings 1 to 5.	Expedia Inc owns TripAdvisor, hotels.com, Hotwire and Venere
4	<a href="#">Travelocity</a>	Online travel agency	Any member can write a review; businesses can respond to reviews but cannot contact reviewers; ratings 1 to 5.	Part of Sabre Group, includes lastminute.com and igougo.com
5	<a href="#">Priceline</a>	Online travel agency	Customer reviews only; businesses cannot respond or contact reviewers; ratings 1 to 10; also posts Zagat ratings.	Affiliated with booking.com and cheaphotels.com
6	<a href="#">Orbitz</a>	Online travel agency	Any member can post a review; customer reviews have greater weight; businesses cannot respond or contact reviewers; ratings 1 to 5.	Affiliated with cheaptickets.com

Note: Policies and affiliations may change over time.

<sup>1</sup> [eBizMBA.com](#), May, 2011.

## Most Popular Travel Review Websites

### *Most Popular Travel Review Websites, continued*

Rank	Website	Category	Review Policy	Notes
7	<a href="#">Kayak</a>	Travel aggregator	Reviews aggregated from various sites; businesses cannot respond.	Recently merged with Sidestep
8	<a href="#">Hotels.com</a>	Online travel agency	Customer reviews only; businesses can respond to reviews but cannot contact reviewers; ratings 1 to 10.	Part of Expedia Inc
9	<a href="#">TravelZoo</a>	Travel aggregator	No reviews.	n/a
10	<a href="#">Hotwire</a>	Online travel agency	Customer reviews only; anonymous; businesses cannot respond.	Part of Expedia Inc
11	<a href="#">Booking.com</a>	Online travel agency	Customer reviews only; ratings 1 to 10; businesses cannot respond.	Part of Priceline group
12	<a href="#">CheapTickets</a>	Online travel agency	Proof of hotel stay not required but travellers can search "Verified Guest" reviews; businesses cannot respond; ratings 1 to 5.	Part of Orbitz group
13	<a href="#">Lonely Planet</a>	Online travel community	Travel journalist reviews; businesses cannot respond.	Also publishes print guidebooks; uses Expedia booking interface
14	<a href="#">VirtualTourist</a>	Online travel community and aggregator	"Real reviews from real travellers"; businesses cannot respond; ratings 1 to 5.	Owned by TripAdvisor Media Group

# 4

## Monitoring and Analyzing Reviews and Feedback

### Most Popular Travel Review Websites

#### Other Important Travel Review Sites

Website	Category	Reviews	Notes
<a href="#">Google Places</a>	Local business listings with maps and reviews	Any member can post a review; reviews also aggregated from a variety of review sites. Reviews show up in Google searches. Businesses can respond to reviews or flag content as inappropriate and submit report.	Part of Google group
<a href="#">Yelp</a>	Online travel community	Any member can write a review. Businesses can respond to reviews and contact reviewers but must register and post photo first. Ratings 1 to 5.	North America and Western Europe only at present
<a href="#">TravelPost</a>	Online travel community	Posts member reviews and reviews from <a href="#">igougo.com</a> and <a href="#">Yahoo! Travel</a> . Businesses can comment on reviews but cannot contact reviewers. Ratings 1 to 5.	Worldwide
<a href="#">Bing Travel</a>	Aggregator, rate forecaster	Reviews taken from <a href="#">TripAdvisor</a> .	Part of Microsoft
<a href="#">Igougo.com</a>	Online travel community, rate comparison	Any member can write a review. Reviews also pulled from <a href="#">Travelocity</a> . Businesses cannot respond or contact reviewers. Ratings 1 to 5.	Part of Sabre Group, owns <a href="#">Travelocity</a> and <a href="#">lastminute.com</a>
<a href="#">Eezeer.com</a>	Social network	Any member can post a review; features tweets and location-verified reviews related to travel. Any member can post mobile reviews or tweets. No ratings system; comments are qualified as positive or negative.	New, independent site
<a href="#">Uptake.com</a>	Travel aggregator	Reviews taken from <a href="#">TripAdvisor</a> .	Independent
<a href="#">Oyster.com</a>	Hotel review site, also sells hotel rooms	In-depth reviews from staff "hotel investigators," along with photos. Ratings 1 to 5.	Independent. Select destinations; only in the Americas at present.
<a href="#">OpenTable.com</a>	Restaurant reservation and review site	Only diners who reserve through <a href="#">OpenTable</a> can write reviews. Restaurants cannot respond but can report inappropriate content. Ratings 1 to 5.	Independent
<a href="#">UrbanSpoon.com</a>	Restaurant reservation and review site	Any registered member can post a review. Content also pulled from <a href="#">Twitter</a> , blogs and other review sites. Ratings from "Really likes it" to "Really doesn't like it."	Owned by IAC, which also owns <a href="#">CitySearch</a>

## Social Media Channels and Review Sites

According to a study released by PhoCusWright in April 2010, travellers posted almost three times as many reviews on online travel agency (OTA) sites than on traveller review sites.<sup>2</sup> The study found that more travellers identify hotel reviews on OTAs as influential in their purchasing decision than other types of online features or content. It also found that OTA shoppers who visit hotel review pages are twice as likely to book a room.

According to a Travelport survey, online search engines continue to dominate the travel industry, with 66% of leisure travellers and 59% of business travellers using them to research travel.<sup>3</sup> At the same time content from social media channels shows up frequently in search results, presenting opportunities for businesses to improve search engine rankings and use social media content to attract the attention of travel shoppers.

The following is an overview of some of the most popular social networking channels related to the travel industry. All channels allow businesses to set up profiles, network with other users, and promote products and services. Basic services are typically free of charge, with paid options for enhanced listings, advertising and promotions.

### Facebook

With more than 600 million users worldwide, Facebook is by far the largest social networking site. Businesses can set up a dedicated pages and add descriptions, contact information, photos, videos and related applications. Through Facebook, they can build followings and engage customers, travellers and industry contacts.

People become "friends" of business pages for a variety of reasons, but chief among them are to gain access to exclusive deals, show

others they support the brand and to keep up to date on brand news.<sup>4</sup> When a user "likes" a business page it shows up in their newsfeed and Activities & Interests section, making it visible to their network of friends. Thereafter the business's status updates also show up in the user's newsfeed.

Businesses can use Facebook pages to share news, promotions and other relevant information with fans. Customized landing pages allow you to welcome visitors with news, promotions and key value propositions. The page can be "monetized" with a booking widget or link to a booking channel. TripAdvisor now allows businesses to add a badge or review widget to their Facebook page.

Much of Facebook content is private, but fan pages and most groups are public. The Facebook "like" button is increasingly being integrated into websites and other social networks, extending its reach far beyond the Facebook platform.

### Twitter

A micro-blogging platform and open network, Twitter has an estimated 200 million users.<sup>5</sup> Businesses can easily set up a Twitter feed and can use it to share information and offers, find and follow businesses and individuals of interest and monitor news, topics and conversations. Twitter messages, called "tweets," are limited to 140 characters in length.

Twitter is increasingly used by travellers to share information and voice opinions about travel experiences, often in real time. It is also popular as a customer service channel, and users expect quick responses to inquiries and comments.

<sup>2</sup> PhoCusWright. (April 2010). *Are OTAs Taking Over Online Hotel Reviews?*

<sup>3</sup> Travelport. (2010). *The Well Connected Traveller: A Survey of Consumer Travel Trends.*

<sup>4</sup> eMarketer. (March 2010). *Social Fans More Likely to Buy.*

<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia. (March 2011). *Twitter.*



# 4 Monitoring and Analyzing Reviews and Feedback

## Social Media Channels and Review Sites

### **YouTube**

YouTube, a video-sharing social network, is the second most popular search engine (next to Google). Businesses can set up a dedicated channel to showcase video content and build networks of friends and subscribers. Users can “like,” “share,” “add as a favourite” or comment on videos, and can also post videos to their own channels. The embed function allows videos to be easily shared on websites, Facebook and other channels.

Videos are increasingly used by travellers to research travel, document trips and share experiences. When videos are posted to blogs, websites and video-sharing sites such as YouTube and Vimeo, they become accessible in a browser search. As with reviews, this can be helpful or detrimental to a business depending on the nature of the content.

Videos tend to be more compelling than text and they frequently show up in searches, making them a powerful way to capture the attention of travellers and showcase your business or destination.

Because so many people travel with cameras, ensure your staff and business are camera-ready at all times. Add tags and descriptions to content you upload and include your business name, community, destination area and descriptive keywords to enhance searchability.

### **Flickr**

An online photo-sharing community, Flickr is a popular channel for amateur and professional photographers alike. Businesses can set up a dedicated group or join groups with similar interests.

Travellers frequently post images to Flickr and share feeds with social networks and on websites and blogs. Like videos, photos can be more compelling than text and often come up in searches, making them an effective means of capturing the attention of travellers and showcasing a business or destination. Tag

photos you upload with descriptive keywords, including your business name, community and destination area.

Flickr can also be a valuable resource for promotional imagery. The Creative Commons section features copyright-free images that can be used by businesses as an alternative to producing or paying for imagery.

### **LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is different from other social networks because it is used primarily as a business networking tool. Businesses can set up a company profile and add descriptions, photos, virtual tours, status updates and staff profiles.

LinkedIn can be an excellent resource for finding and being found by corporate travel managers, event planners and group organizers. It can also be used to research companies and industries, plan sales trips, and find/network with prospects, clients, influencers and tourism industry professionals.

### **Blogs**

There are thousands of travel-related blogs, with audiences both large and small. Businesses can easily set up a blog using a free platform such as WordPress, Blogger, TypePad or Tumblr. However, keeping a blog updated with fresh and relevant content can be a challenge.

Travellers use blogs to research and share travel information in the form of stories, critiques, tips, photos and videos. Blog content, when rich with relevant information, can have a significant impact on a business’s visibility on search engines, driving traffic to your website and social networking channels.

### **Travel Forums**

Many online travel communities host forums for travellers to voice opinions, discuss travel-related topics and share trip information and recommendations. Some of the most popular forums are on TripAdvisor and Yelp,

## Social Media Channels and Review Sites

where business owners and members can participate in discussions or start discussions of their own. The TripAdvisor Owners' Forum addresses topics related to business operators and owners. For restaurant owners, ChowHound.com is a popular food forum.

Some members are designated "Destination Experts" by TripAdvisor or assigned "Elite" status by Yelp and tend to be highly active and influential in reviews and forums.

If you choose to participate in forums, be up-front about your affiliation with the travel industry and do not be overly promotional. Using forums to clandestinely promote your business could result in a backlash of negative feedback.

### Location-based Social Networks

Designed for use with mobile phones, location-based social networking applications allow users to browse local businesses, "check in" to establishments; share locations, tips and reviews with other users; and earn points, badges and incentives from the businesses they frequent. Some of the most popular include Facebook Places, foursquare and Gowalla. TopGuest.com aggregates perks for travellers from a range of networks.

Businesses can set up listings and offer promotions, discounts and loyalty rewards to users. These networks have special potential for retail shops, cafés, bars, restaurants and other businesses that depend on walk-in traffic because they allow you to target users in your area with special offers and promotions.

### Mobile Applications

In a recent Frommers survey, 52% of respondents said they were most likely to access travel information on their mobile devices when travelling, compared to 27% in 2010.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, Google reports that 19% of hotel search queries are conducted on mobile devices.<sup>7</sup>

The explosive growth of the use of smart phones and portable tablet computers by travellers creates special opportunities for tourism operators. Virtually every review site and social network has a mobile application, and there also hundreds of travel-related applications for finding local businesses, making bookings and reservations, planning itineraries and mapping routes.

TripAdvisor, currently the second most downloaded mobile travel application behind only Google Earth, offers an "augmented reality" feature that enables users to point a smart phone into the street and see local businesses projected over a map, along with ratings and links to reviews. Yelp offers a similar feature called Monocle.

Given the popularity of smartphones among travellers, a mobile-compatible website (i.e. a website designed for the small screens of mobile phones) has become an essential marketing tool for tourism operators.

In a PhoCusWright study<sup>8</sup>, three in four active travellers reported using a mobile device while travelling. Two-thirds said they are likely to research, shop and book travel activities via mobile devices. For more information about publishing content see [Chapter 7](#).

### Monitoring and Analytics

It would be virtually impossible to visit all review sites and social media channels daily to check for mentions of your business. Fortunately, there a number of tools available to assist you, ranging from basic alert tools to comprehensive monitoring and analytics tools.

<sup>6</sup> Hotelmarketing.com. (May 2011). *Demand for Mobile Travel Content has Doubled in the Past Year*.

<sup>7</sup> May, Kevin. Tnooz.com. (2011).

<sup>8</sup> Hotels Magazine. (2011). PhoCus Wright Study: *When They Get Three, and Why They Go*

# 4 Monitoring and Analyzing Reviews and Feedback

## Social Media Channels and Review Sites

### Alerts

Alerts are email advisories of the latest search results based on keywords specified by you. You can track content applicable to your business, industry and destination and specify how frequently you would like to receive alerts. Alert tools are free, but they will not reliably catch 100% of content.

Some of the most popular alerts include:

- Google Alerts (Web):  
[www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts)
- Yahoo Alerts (Web):  
[www.help.yahoo.com/l/us/yahoo/alerts](http://www.help.yahoo.com/l/us/yahoo/alerts)
- TweetBeep (Twitter):  
[www.tweetbeep.com](http://www.tweetbeep.com)
- SocialMention (Social Media):  
[www.socialmention.com](http://www.socialmention.com)
- TripAdvisor Alerts Reviews:  
[www.tripadvisor.com/Owners](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Owners)

Facebook and YouTube allow you to adjust settings to receive an email alert when content is posted to your wall or videos.

### Twitter Management Tools

These tools provide enhanced Twitter channel management functions, including tracking mentions of your business, searching for relevant users, managing multiple accounts, scheduling tweets, tracking keyword activity and following topics and trends.

There are dozens of Twitter management tools. Some of the most popular include:

- HootSuite:  
[www.hootsuite.com](http://www.hootsuite.com) (a BC-based company)
- TweetDeck:  
[www.tweetdeck.com](http://www.tweetdeck.com)
- SocialOomph:  
[www.socialoomph.com](http://www.socialoomph.com)
- Twellow:  
[www.twellow.com](http://www.twellow.com) (search directory)

- Klout:  
[www.klout.com](http://www.klout.com) (measures social influence)

### Additional Resources

#### Online Marketing

This guide is designed to help small and medium tourism businesses think strategically about their online presence. Technology and the Internet have created a revolution in tourism marketing: by using the Internet, consumers not only find inspiration and information on potential travel destinations, but also take immediate action by booking online. The guide covers the topics to consider when building an online marketing plan: website strategies, social media channels, search engine optimization and marketing, online display advertising and email marketing.

For more information on this and other *Tourism Business Essentials* guides and workshops, visit the [Programs](#) section of the Destination BC corporate website.



#### Which Keywords Should You Monitor?

The keywords you monitor will depend on the platforms you use, the time available and the topics you are interested in. At a minimum, monitor your business name and associated brands. You can also track management staff, competitors, key clients, your destination and topics related to your business and tourism in general. Play with combinations until you find the keywords that produce the most relevant results.

# Social Media Channels and Review Sites

## Analytics Tools

There are a variety of free tools available to help you analyze visitor traffic and behaviour on your website and social channels. Here are a few of the most popular:

- Google Analytics:  
[www.google.com/analytics](http://www.google.com/analytics)
- Facebook Insights:  
[www.facebook.com/insights](http://www.facebook.com/insights)
- Hootsuite Analytics:  
[www.hootsuite.com](http://www.hootsuite.com)
- YouTube Insight:  
[www.youtube.com/my\\_videos\\_insight](http://www.youtube.com/my_videos_insight)
- TripAdvisor Owners' Center:  
[www.tripadvisor.com/Owners](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Owners)

## Reputation Monitoring Tools

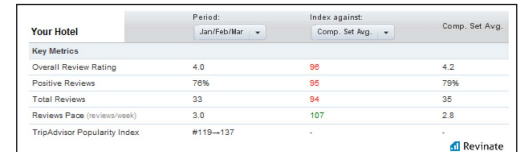
If you operate a large-to-medium-sized business and receive a high volume of reviews and feedback, consider subscribing to a reputation monitoring tool to help you collect, organize and analyze content from across the Web. These tools will enable you to identify areas of strength and weakness, compare performance with competitors, set goals and benchmark performance over time.

Most of these tools provide alerts to inform you when reviews and content related to your business and competitors are posted. An online dashboard allows you to track reviews and ratings on individual review sites, and to obtain an aggregate of reviews and ratings. Some of these tools provide a sentiment analysis feature that scans review commentary and qualifies reviews as negative, positive or neutral.

There are many tools to choose from and most offer similar features. The following tools cater primarily to the lodging industry, both independents and multiple properties:

## Revinat (www.revinat.com)

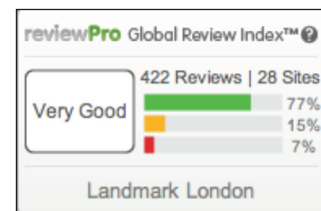
Features an easy-to-use, intuitive dashboard available in real-time from any web browser. A “social media scorecard” measures key metrics and charts performance against competitors. Response functionality is integrated with review sites, and alerts include suggested actions for follow-up. The TweetConcierge allows users to manage Twitter profiles and monitor return on campaign investments.



Your Hotel	Period		Index against	
	Jan/Feb/Mar	Comp. Set Avg.	Comp. Set Avg.	Comp. Set Avg.
Key Metrics				
Overall Review Rating	4.0	95	4.2	
Positive Reviews	76%	95	79%	
Total Reviews	33	94	35	
Reviews Pace (reviews/week)	3.0	107	2.8	
TripAdvisor Popularity Index	#119—137	-	-	

## ReviewPro (www.reviewpro.com)

Offers standard and advanced versions as well as a basic free version. Performance is assessed via quantitative analysis measured by the Global Review Index (GRI) and analysis of sentiment in guest comments. Features include the ability to compare reputation to rate positioning and a “Quality Seal” badge that displays review scores aggregated from a variety of websites. Data is collected from thousands of sources, including 60 OTAs, and reviews are analyzed in eight languages.



# 4 Monitoring and Analyzing Reviews and Feedback

## Social Media Channels and Review Sites

### **eBuzz Connect ([www.milestoneinternet.com](http://www.milestoneinternet.com))**

Features strong collaboration and accountability tools to facilitate communication among departments. Enables tracking of review responses and actions taken, and measures user engagement. Users can compare rate positioning and guest satisfaction ratings against competitors, and track lead generation on social channels. The “Impact Index” helps users identify and prioritize issues.

### **Chatter Guard ([www.chatterguard.com](http://www.chatterguard.com))**

In addition to standard monitoring and analyzing features, services include manual reading and scoring of reviews, and a professional review response service. The tool does not track competitor activity.

### **ReviewMetrix ([www.marketmetrix.com](http://www.marketmetrix.com))**

Reporting and analysis for TripAdvisor reviews only. Performance is measured based on the Customer Satisfaction Index, which assesses review performance in seven key categories. Hotels can select a benchmark set from a database of more than 450,000 hotels worldwide. The company, MarketMetrix, also provides formal survey services and third-party polls and panels.

Other reputation monitoring tools used in the tourism industry in Canada include:

- **ReviewAnalyst ([www.reviewanalyst.com](http://www.reviewanalyst.com)):** Caters to restaurants and hotels.
- **Brand Karma ([www.circos.com](http://www.circos.com)):** Particularly popular in the Asian market.
- **Trackur ([www.trackur.com](http://www.trackur.com)):**  
A low-cost option that offers a free starter plan.
- **Radian6 ([www.radian6.com](http://www.radian6.com)):**  
A Canadian company that services some of the largest organizations in the world.

### **An Example of Online Reputation Management: Delta Hotels and Resorts**

Delta Hotels and Resorts opened its first property in 1962 at the Vancouver International Airport and is now one of the leading hotel chains in the country, with 45 hotels across Canada, including seven properties in British Columbia. The company is 100 per cent Canadian owned and has been ranked as “one of the 50 Best Employers in Canada” for 11 years.

With 13,060 rooms in its portfolio, managing social media and online reputation is becoming a more important focus. Here Ricardo Nicholas, Director, Brand Performance, discusses the company’s approach.

#### **Tell us how Delta Hotels and Resorts manages its social media and Online Reputation Management functions.**

*As a brand we have always encouraged guests to speak with us through numerous channels (telephone, email, our website, electronic surveys, correspondence, etc).*

*We have a longstanding program called the "Voice of the Guest" that allows guests to contact us at anytime through any of these channels. All guest feedback is a priority and is acknowledged and responded to within a defined timeframe.*

*We have introduced a similar approach to managing social media, with individual properties monitoring and responding to online reviews on a daily basis. As a safety net we monitor reviews and comments to ensure that responses reflect the tone of the brand. All of this is structured and measured to ensure compliance to our brand standards.*

#### **Why do you subscribe to a reputation management tool?**

*While we have been responding to various online reviews over the last few years at the property level, we were looking for a more structured and measured approach to managing this space. Social media now more than ever is a platform for consumers to share their experiences*

*(positive and negative) and this plays a key role in influencing and shaping travel decisions and choices. As a brand we developed our social media program as a means of better understanding and managing our reputation in this space.*

*Through extensive research, we sourced a management tool that would allow us to accomplish a variety of objectives. We chose Revinat because in addition to allowing us to track and respond to guest feedback in a quick and easy fashion, we also have the ability to measure public satisfaction and sentiment toward our brand while at the same time monitoring the various trends of both our brand and our competitors. Our overall objective was to be able to quickly and effectively engage with our guests within the social space, creating a positive online reputation.*

#### **What are the benefits of a reputation management tool?**

*The tool we use is very user-friendly and therefore easy for individual hotels to engage with minimum training as well as to respond quickly to guests. The reporting features provide both property-specific trending and direct competitor benchmarking. It also provides an overall brand perspective through its centralized dashboard as well as additional trending and measurement features.*

#### **Do your hotels respond to online reviews?**

*Currently all of our properties are expected to respond to all online reviews within a defined response timeline. This is based on the time the reviews first appear on Revinat. Our brand guidelines outline that a personalized response is required and not a scripted response.*

#### **Do you have any recommendations for other tourism businesses that want to better manage their reputation?**

*Use every opportunity available to truly listen and honestly engage with your customers and utilize the feedback to create meaningful relationships and lasting improvements to your brand.*

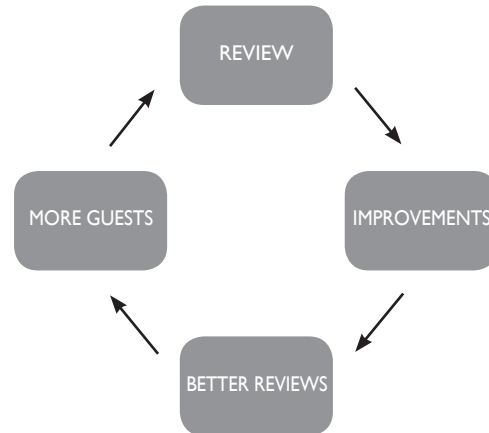


# 5 Discussing Feedback and Resolving Issues

## Cycle of Positivity

Online reputation management is not about trying to pass your business off as something it is not. It is about setting realistic expectations for customers and meeting them – or better, exceeding them. Doing this can compel travellers to share their experiences, thereby enhancing your online reputation.

### Cycle of Positivity<sup>1</sup>



upgrades or revised marketing and communications initiatives. Improvements are noted by customers, resulting in favourable reviews, which attract more business, thereby generating incremental revenue and making funds available for even more improvements.

When expectations are not met, travellers may react by posting a negative review or comment. Their motive might be to teach the business a lesson, warn other travellers or simply to vent. When businesses do not make an effort to resolve these issues, they can compound and fester, causing long-term damage to the business's reputation that can take months or years to recover from.

The good news is most customer feedback on review sites is positive. TripAdvisor<sup>2</sup> reports an average hotel rating of 4 out of 5. However, negative feedback tends to linger on the minds of business owners, and their potential customers.

The following are suggestions for handling online reviews and social media feedback to effect positive change within your business.

#### Create a Cycle of Positivity

In the simplest sense, the ultimate success of your online reputation management can be measured by your ability to create a "Cycle of Positivity." This involves using customer feedback to guide decisions on improvements, which may include upgrades to products and services, increased labour expenditures, employee training and development, capital

The alternative? Ignore feedback and risk having the opposite results: the alienation of your existing customer base, as well as lost potential business.

#### Praise in Public, Constructively Criticize in Private

Sharing feedback with employees helps them stay in tune with the likes and dislikes of customers and can motivate them to work even harder to exceed customer expectations. If feedback is positive, it can be a great way to acknowledge a job well done, bolster confidence and foster pride in the workplace. If it is negative, it can be used to show the customer's perspective and to identify areas where improvement is needed.

Negative feedback concerning employees should be handled with sensitivity. Customers sometimes lash out in reviews, and will occasionally name staff members. This can be embarrassing and demoralizing for the employee, particularly given the public nature of social media. Address issues in private and include the employee's manager or a human resources representative where applicable. Always treat the employee with dignity and respect, and keep the discussion as constructive as possible.

<sup>1</sup> Craig, Daniel. (November 2010). Blog: *How to Cope with Bad Reviews*.

<sup>2</sup> Payea, Brian. tnooz.com. (2011). *Underscoring the Importance of Online Hotel Reputation Management*.

# 5 Discussing Feedback and Resolving Issues

## Cycle of Positivity

### **Chin Up**

You may try very hard to please your customers, but not everyone will appreciate your efforts. Social media gives a voice to all types of personalities, from the easily-impressed to the impossible-to-please, and exposes businesses to everything from high praise to cutting criticism. Opinions are subjective, and do not always represent reality.

Accept the fact that you will occasionally be the victim of unfair or inaccurate remarks, and other times you, or your staff, may simply mess up. Do not let it dampen your spirits. Listen, learn and carry on.

### **Show Leadership**

It can be tempting to write off detractors as crazy, ignorant or impossible, but that can diminish the value of all types of feedback in the eyes of staff. Treat every review as a learning experience. Discuss with staff how you could have prevented the situation and take action to avoid a recurrence. Swallow your anger and support the team.

### **Be Grateful**

Businesses used to hire mystery shoppers to evaluate services; now travellers do it for you, and pay for the privilege. Not only do reviews provide valuable feedback and set expectations, they can act as a filter for those who might not be the best fit.

Keep in mind that most travel shoppers are not seeking perfection; they are seeking experiences best suited to their wants and needs. Many seek out negative reviews because they want to know the best and worst of what to expect. A mix of pros and cons can add authenticity.

Further, review sites expose your business to a volume of travel shoppers you could not hope to reach through your own marketing efforts—and all for free. Do not allow the occasional negative review to cloud your appreciation for the many benefits.

Train staff to resolve complaints on location. Some issues take time and money to fix; others simply cannot be fixed. Travellers tend to be more forgiving if they are warned in advance or can at least see you are making an effort. They judge businesses less on problems that occur than on how well they are handled when brought to the attention of staff. A situation can go one of two ways: “We expressed our dissatisfaction, but they did not care,” or “They worked hard to find a solution.”

Train employees to prevent in-person complaints from escalating to online complaints, which can be far more damaging to your business.

For more suggestions on the internal handling of reviews see [Chapter 6](#).

### **WorldHost® Training Services**

Tourism operators can be reluctant to invest in staff training because of the high turnover that is typical of the industry. “What if I train them and they leave?” they ask. A better question to ask might be, “What if I do not train them and they stay?”

Destination BC offers a number of programs and workshops in service excellence. **WorldHost Training Services** continues the **SuperHost®** legacy by offering internationally recognized training solutions to meet the needs of the tourism industry. **WorldHost** training products address a wide range of customer service themes. In addition, customized training programs can be developed to meet specific business objectives.

For more information, visit [www.WorldHosttraining.com](http://www.WorldHosttraining.com).

### **Tips From TripAdvisor's Top-rated BC Restaurants**

When it comes to online reputation management, restaurants have several unique challenges. Customers arrive with high expectations and typically stay for one to three hours, leaving a small window in which to impress them – or to turn things around if something goes wrong.

With the popularity of mobile devices, restaurant customers are becoming particularly active in social networks, often posting comments, reviews and photos while at the dinner table. It is not only TripAdvisor, Yelp, Facebook and Twitter that demand the attention of restaurateurs. There are dozens of restaurant review sites, among them CitySearch.com, UrbanSpoon.com and OpenTable.com.

### **Given the challenges, how have some of BC's restaurants achieved top rankings?**

"Hire good staff and keep them!" recommends Richard Norwood, owner of Norwoods in Ucluelet, rated #1 of 8,222 restaurants in BC on TripAdvisor at time of publication. "Use quality products and above all always put yourself in the guest's shoes. It's hard to screw up if you do that."

Norwood says that without his core group of staff, achieving #1 ranking would have been impossible. "We are a small restaurant (just 28 seats), so the setting is intimate. Also the kitchen is completely exposed, which creates a certain honesty between guests and the kitchen brigade."

Achieving top ranking was an organic process. "Having guests submit reviews is not something we push," says Norwood. He does keep a sharp eye on review sites, however. In addition to TripAdvisor, he monitors reviews and commentary on Urbanspoon, Chowhound, Facebook and Yelp.

Recently, another top-rated BC restaurant, Allegra Restaurant in Cranbrook, began to focus on online reputation management. "In previous years we advertised in various printed tourism and dining guides for thousands of dollars without any noticeable direct return," says owner Thomas Nay. "This

year we decided to focus entirely on social media channels such as TripAdvisor – all for free, I might add."

Staff at Allegra Restaurant have started inviting customers to write reviews. "We do this by including a TripAdvisor business card with the bill," says Nay. "We also encourage our customers to 'like' our Facebook page." The restaurant also features a live feed of TripAdvisor reviews and a review widget on its website.

Nay says it all comes down to pleasing customers. "I don't think the ranking can be influenced in any other way than by providing an exceptional product and great service."

At Cedar House Restaurant in Golden, another top-ranked BC restaurant, staff also invite patrons to submit reviews, and a TripAdvisor badge is displayed on the brand website. However, proprietor Darrin DeRosa attributes his success to exceeding expectations. "The food has always been incredible and we use as much organic [ingredients] as possible," he explains. "We all work as a team ... I am involved in every aspect of the business, including being on the floor serving and in the dish pit at the end of the night."

In the highly competitive restaurant industry, Nay says that social media is a way to help spread the word. "In this time of social networking I find it a must to have as much exposure on such sites as possible. It might be a bit time consuming, but it's worth it."

"The results so far are fantastic," he adds. "We get a lot of comments from travellers who say they decided to visit our restaurant based on reviews."

Norwood is similarly pleased. "The effect on our business has been substantial," he says. "In my estimation, about 60% of our guests have checked out the area through social media of some kind. And being #1 helps a lot. Our revenue was up 35% this past winter."

Asked if he has any advice for other restaurateurs, Nay says, above all, "every customer needs to be viewed as a potential critic."

# 6 Responding to Reviews and Feedback

When customers come to you to register a complaint, do you ignore them? Not likely. You understand the risks of ignoring a complaint, and you take pride in satisfying customers. Yet the vast majority of negative online reviews receive no response. Why?

An online complaint can be far more damaging than an in-person complaint because it is public. It is viewed by travellers who are in the process of planning trips and making decisions. Without a response from the business, travellers are left to draw their own conclusions. They may think “I guess it is true” or “Management does not care.”

By responding to reviews you demonstrate that you are listening and that you do care. “We often hear from travellers that how a property responds to criticism has more influence on their booking decision than the criticism itself,” says April Robb, Editorial Content Manager at TripAdvisor. Tourism operators have a chance to redeem themselves, yet most choose to remain silent, willfully allowing their reputation and business to suffer.

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## The Importance of Responding to Reviews

“According to a recent TripAdvisor survey,” reports Brian Payea, TripAdvisor’s Head of Industry Relations, “76% of travellers said they have a more positive view of owners who respond to online guest reviews. We frequently hear from hoteliers who track referrals closely that they get more bookings referred from their thoughtful management response to an occasional negative review, than from the positive review.”

However, tourism operators have only recently begun to actively respond to online reviews. In 2010 TripAdvisor reported that 7% of negative reviews received a response, a slight increase over the previous year’s 4%. In early 2011, however, a TripAdvisor survey<sup>1</sup> of 1,000 accommodation owners and operators in the US revealed a much different attitude: 99%

reported plans to respond to guest reviews.

### Responding to Online Guest Reviews

- 72% plan to respond to both positive and negative reviews.
- 14% plan to respond only to negative reviews.
- 13% plan to respond only to positive reviews.
- 1% have no plans to respond to reviews.

<sup>1</sup> TripAdvisor. (February 2011). *TripAdvisor Reveals 2011 Accommodation Owners Survey*

# The Importance of Responding to Reviews

## **Why Do Businesses Not Respond to Reviews?**

For some businesses it is against policy to respond to reviews. Others fear they will only draw attention to issues. Still others are reluctant to engage critics, especially when reviews are anonymous. Others are not familiar with the social media channels and are not aware that they have the option to respond.

However, considering the influence of reviews and the persuasiveness of a thoughtful, reasonable response, keeping silent might not be the most prudent approach.

There is no question that responding to a review can be daunting, particularly when you know that so many travellers are listening in. However, that is part of why it is important. It gets easier with practice. Moreover, responding forces you to take a hard look at how customers perceive your business. Managing sensitive issues and difficult people are strengths of service professionals. Social media should not change that.

Some might consider review sites the exclusive domain of travellers, where the voice of business is not welcome. However, social media is about open dialogue and sharing multiple perspectives. You have the right to weigh in on conversations, especially when your business is being discussed.

Having said that, it is important to choose words carefully or you risk making things worse. The following are guidelines for responding to reviews. Everyone will have a different approach, so be sure to adapt these suggestions to suit the unique style and personality of your business.

## **Which Sites Allow Responses?**

Currently, TripAdvisor, Expedia, Hotels.com, Yelp, TravelPost and, most recently, Travelocity allow responses. TripAdvisor and Yelp also allow businesses to send a direct message to reviewers. For details, see the tables

in Chapter 4, starting on page 14.

## **Who Should Respond?**

Given their influence, reviews should be handled at the highest level and disseminated at all levels. When an owner or senior manager responds, it shows how seriously you take customer feedback. A junior employee can draft responses, but they should be reviewed and addressed by a manager – ideally the general manager.

## **Which Reviews Should You Respond To?**

Respond to any feedback that may discourage travellers from booking or cause damage to your reputation. If the reviewer is clearly irrational or vindictive, you might choose to not dignify the review with a response. Travellers can read between the lines, and your advocates might spring to your defense. But a short response to respectfully set the record straight is usually better than no response at all.

In some cases, if the site allows, or you know who the reviewer is, you might decide to contact the reviewer directly. If so, post a public response such as “Thank you for your feedback – I have sent you an email directly” to let the others know you have addressed the issue in private. If you are sincere and reasonable, the reviewer might agree to revise or remove the review.

As for positive reviews, responding is a good way to show you are listening, to thank the reviewer and to highlight the positive. However, do not feel obliged to respond to all positive reviews. That can get repetitive and even off-putting to travellers. That said, your advocates are precious and deserve acknowledgement. Where possible, send a private note of thanks or flag their profile to acknowledge them in person on their next visit.

Most reviews contain a mix of pros and cons. These tend to lend the most credibility;

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## Responding to Reviews and Feedback

### The Importance of Responding to Reviews

travellers are cautious and can be wary of extreme reviews, negative or positive. If criticism is minor, focus on the positive in your response or do not respond at all. If criticism is serious, acknowledge the positive first and then the negative.

If your business receives bad reviews frequently, it might be better to focus efforts on fixing problems instead of crafting responses. You can resume responding when you have positive changes to report.

#### **When Should You Respond?**

The sooner the better. The longer a complaint lingers unacknowledged, the more travellers it threatens to frighten away. Do not respond before you have investigated the matter and understood what happened; there are always two sides to a story. Ideally, you will have an explanation or resolution to report back.

If you are feeling angry or bitter about the review, draft a reply and sleep on it or ask a colleague to write it for you. Once the response is posted you can not make changes, so take the time to ensure you get it right.

#### **What Should You Say?**

A poorly worded response risks making things worse, but a well-worded response can change the reviewer's perception and win over other travellers – or at least compel them to give you the benefit of the doubt. Be brief; travellers skim reviews and may avoid lengthy responses. Start by thanking the reviewer, apologize if something went wrong and explain what you have done to fix the problem, or why it cannot be fixed. Keep in mind that travellers are not interested in excuses or internal issues; they simply want to be reassured they will not encounter the same problem.

Respond only if you have something of value to add to the discussion. This is not the place for promoting your business or for corporate jargon. Readers will also be put off by “canned” responses, and a few changed words will

not fool them. To save time keep a database of responses, but tailor each to address the concerns raised.

Most review sites do not allow reviewers to reply to management responses, so essentially you get the last word. Bear in mind, however, that the matter can be taken up elsewhere online or offline, so avoid saying anything that might provoke the reviewer.

#### **How Should You Say It?**

Social media calls for a less formal tone than you might use in person or by letter, but it should always be professional. Maintain a friendly, open and conversational tone. Avoid humour and sarcasm, and do not grovel or be dramatic. Simply demonstrate you are a reasonable person who cares, and that you regret any lapse in quality or service.

If you are upset you might think that you are concealing your true feelings, however, defensiveness and condescension can come out in your choice of words. Avoid saying things like “It is our policy” or comparing reviewer experiences to those of other customers. Never offer compensation, as it might encourage others to post complaints.

If an employee has been singled out, simply say that you have reviewed the issue with staff. If you feel compelled to defend the employee, say something like, “I was surprised by your comments about our reservations agent, who is one of our best.”

Address responses to the reviewer as though conducting an intimate conversation, but bear in mind that other travellers are listening in. Use “I” to express personal concern and “we” to express the collective concern of staff, and personalize the reply with your name and title rather than “The Manager.”

Finally, watch spelling and grammar! As the voice of your business, you should demonstrate appropriate professionalism and



## The Importance of Responding to Reviews

attention to detail. Use spellcheck, and ask a colleague to proofread your response. Avoid excessive punctuation and capital letters.

### **What If The Reviewer Makes False Claims?**

Post a response to respectfully set the record straight. If the allegation is serious, dispute the review with the host website. This can be a slow and difficult process, so do not wait to post your response. Review sites typically will not withdraw a review unless it violates site rules; they are more likely to suggest that you post a reply.

Erroneous claims often arise out of misunderstandings rather than maliciousness. Politely state the facts, and never accuse the reviewer of dishonesty or exaggeration. Resist the urge to lecture. Again, if the reviewer is behaving irrationally, you have the option to not respond and let other travellers decide for themselves.

If you suspect that a disgruntled ex-employee or competitor is behind a negative review, resist the urge to post an angry, accusatory response, which may reflect poorly on you. Dispute the review with the host site and post a response to politely state the facts.

Bear in mind that one or two negative reviews, even inaccurate, should not be considered particularly damaging to your reputation. Focus efforts on encouraging satisfied customers to post favourable reviews to

*While I appreciate that we are always open to the notion of fraud, there is more fear around it than reality ... the issue with looking at the veracity of the reviews comes down to the systems we have in place to catch folks who try to manipulate our system, and the fact that hotels have so many reviews that it is next to impossible to meaningfully manipulate any part of our rating system—and that comes from scale.<sup>2</sup>*

Stephen Kaufer, CEO, TripAdvisor

push the bad ones down the list.

### **What If You Cannot Fix The Problem?**

Be transparent. Acknowledge that it is an ongoing issue that is difficult to resolve, and apologize for any inconvenience or for not meeting expectations. Complaints about pricing, noise, location, services and facilities help set expectations for other travellers and can thereby reduce complaints. Use feedback to make a case for upgrades and investments.

If you get a lot of complaints about the same issue, you might decide to respond to select reviews rather than all of them, which can get repetitive and sound defensive.

### **What If You Have Already Handled The Complaint?**

If the customer is still complaining, it is likely the matter was not handled to their satisfaction. If possible, contact the guest directly and try once more to resolve things. If successful, ask them to remove the review, but do not assume they will. In the meantime, post a reply to address the issue and say you have been in touch with the reviewer.

<sup>2</sup> Weinstein, Jeff. Hotel Magazine. (April 2011). *Stong Opinions*.

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## Responding to Reviews and Feedback

### The Importance of Responding to Reviews

#### Sample Review Response

**Ben Hechter, General Manager at Super 8 Kelowna, responded to this review**

16 August 2010

Thank you so much for taking the time to let the online community know about your experience at the Super 8 Kelowna.

It means a lot to us to know that our hard work shows to the guests that stay with us.

I will pass your comments along to the whole team, and we look forward to your next visit.

Have a Super summer!

Ben Hechter  
General Manager  
Super 8 Kelowna

[www.tripadvisor.ca/Hotel\\_Review-g154933-d188340-Reviews-or60-Super\\_8\\_Kelowna-Kelowna\\_Okanagan\\_Valley\\_British\\_Columbia.html#REVIEWS](http://www.tripadvisor.ca/Hotel_Review-g154933-d188340-Reviews-or60-Super_8_Kelowna-Kelowna_Okanagan_Valley_British_Columbia.html#REVIEWS)

#### Climbing TripAdvisor's Popularity Index One Review at a Time

How effective can responding to reviews be? Ask Ben Hechter, General Manager of the 61-room Super 8 in Kelowna, BC.<sup>3</sup>“For the past year I have been responding to every TripAdvisor review – good and bad,” he says. “In two months we went from #23 of 46 properties in town to #4 [on TripAdvisor's Popularity Index].”

“As a Wyndham property, our guests randomly get a Medallia survey via email to inquire about their recent stay,” he explains. “I respond by email to all of them the day they come in, and for any poor ones, I will call the guest personally. For the ones I email, I give them the link to post a TripAdvisor review.”

The benefits have not been limited to Popularity Index rankings. “This has also increased revenue, as guests like to stay at a higher rated property,” says Hechter. “I have had a number of guests personally tell me that they have chosen our property because they liked the way that I responded on TripAdvisor.”

Hechter says it is tough to quantify the increase in revenue, but given the recent challenging times in the lodging industry, he knows his efforts have made

a difference. “I would hate to think how it would have been if I hadn't taken these steps,” he says.

Meanwhile, further northeast, Golden's Cedar House Chalets has climbed from #26 to #4 in TripAdvisor's Specialty Lodging category in just eight months.

“We achieved this by hard work, by going out of our way to make the most memorable experiences for guests and by exceeding expectations,” says owner/ proprietor Darrin DeRosa. Staff place TripAdvisor cards in the chalets and follow up after their stay with a thank you email and a link to TripAdvisor.

The little extras help too. Says DeRosa, who also runs the top-rated Cedar House Restaurant, “Sometimes I have guests arriving for the chalets while I am serving [in the restaurant]. Between service I will run out and light the fireplace in the chalets so when the guest walks in the fire is crackling for them.”

DeRosa hopes to make it to #1 on the Popularity Index by the end of summer. How? “By continuing to exceed guests' expectations,” he says.

<sup>3</sup> TripAdvisor.

## Response Examples

### *Review and Response Examples*

To illustrate the previous guidelines, the following are examples of customer reviews and management responses. Again, the responses are suggestions only. It is important to adopt a tone and vocabulary to reflect the unique nature of your business.

#### VALUE

**Comments:** “... Parking cost half the price of my room! Internet was \$15 for 24 hrs and the connection was slow. RIP OFF!!! ...”

**Poor response:** “Sorry you were dissatisfied but our hotel is not a ‘RIP OFF’. You booked a low rate on Priceline and they take a high commission, so Internet wasn’t included. We’ve been in the business for 25 years and as you can see from the other reviews our other guests love us.”

**Why this is poor:** 1) contradicts the guest, 2) repeats negative feedback, 3) OTA commissions and other reviews are not the customer’s concern, 4) does not address the real issues (lack of value and slow Internet).

**Better response:** “I am truly sorry that your Internet access was slow, which can happen in rare occurrences when guest traffic is high. Our pricing is comparable to similar properties in the area, and we feel we provide good value given our central location and extensive facilities. Nevertheless, I appreciate your feedback and have reviewed it with our management group.”

#### SERVICE

**Comments:** “... We had to wait a half-hour before being seated, and no one came to our table for another twenty minutes. The woman who finally showed up seemed rushed and impatient. By the time our food arrived we were starving, but it was so cold and unappealing we barely touched it ...”

**Poor response:** “We’re sorry for the bad service, but two employees called in sick that

day we got totally slammed!!! I’ve had ongoing problems with that server. You’ll be happy to know she doesn’t work with us anymore.”

**Why this is poor:** 1) gives excuses, 2) behind-the-scenes issues are not the guest’s concern, 3) unprofessional, 4) poor spelling and grammar.

**Better response:** “... Clearly we were not performing to our usual standards that evening, and for that I sincerely apologize. I have reviewed your feedback with staff. You may be happy to know that as a result of feedback like yours we have implemented the following changes to ensure higher quality and consistency ...”

#### CLEANLINESS

**Comments:** “... our room in the lodge was another story, however. The closet shelf was caked with dust, the whole place smelled like smoke, and there were cigarette burns in the carpet. It was supposedly a nonsmoking room!”

**Poor response:** “I am shocked and devastated by your comments. I investigated the incident and found out the front desk agent made a grave mistake and checked you into a dirty room. We are so very sorry, it’s inexcusable! We are a non-smoking hotel but some guests smoke anyway and we can’t control their behaviour.”

**Why this is poor:** 1) too dramatic, 2) singles out staff, 3) blames other guests, 4) does not instill confidence.

**Better response:** “... We pride ourselves on our attention to detail, but clearly we were off the mark in your case. I have discussed your comments with staff, and it seems we inadvertently checked you into a room before its final inspection. The room is now out of service for thorough cleaning and repairs. Please accept my sincere apologies. I have sent you a private message to discuss the matter further.”

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## Responding to Reviews and Feedback

### Response Examples

#### POSITIVE REVIEW

**Comments:** “Staff went above and beyond after my husband fell ill during the excursion. The guide was certified in First Aid and attended to my husband until paramedics arrived, and later staff personally delivered our belongings back to the hotel. That night the owner called to see how my husband was doing. We’ll be back!”

**Poor response:** “It is with tremendous joy that I read your remarks regarding our employees, who take immense pride in pleasing our customers. It’s always heartwarming when their Herculean efforts are acknowledged. The dedication of our employees is what makes us the top tour company in ...”

**Why this is poor:** 1) too salesy, 2) too wordy and dramatic, 3) ruins a great review by being pompous and gloating.

**Better response:** “Thank you for your wonderful remarks, which I have shared with staff. We are happy we were able to be of assistance and hope your husband is recovering nicely. We look forward to welcoming you back soon.”

#### MIXED

**Comments:** “Staff were incredibly warm and friendly, and our view of the ocean was magnificent. Our dinner in the restaurant couldn’t have been more perfect. The only issue was the band in the lounge was a bit noisy, but they stopped at 11:00 PM.”

**Poor response:** “We’re sorry the band disturbed you but we inform all guests at check-in that it plays until 11:00. If we’d known it would be an issue we would have put you in a quieter room. Most guests enjoy hearing the band, even from their rooms.”

**Why this is poor:** 1) implies the guest is at fault, 2) ruins an otherwise great review by calling attention to a minor issue.

**Better response:** No response, or simply: “Thank you for your feedback and kind remarks. We are delighted that you enjoyed your stay, and look forward to welcoming you back.”

#### ATTITUDE OF STAFF

**Comment:** “... When we complained to staff they didn’t care. They just shrugged and said there was nothing they could do.”

**Poor response:** “We are sorry you thought staff didn’t care. When we tried to help, you just stormed off ...”

**Why this is poor:** 1) a non-apology apology – saying you are sorry the customer feels this way but implying she was wrong, 2) blames the customer.

**Better response:** “I have reviewed your comments with staff, and we sincerely regret that we did not handle the matter better. We have taken steps to ensure such an issue does not recur. We appreciate your feedback, which helps us get better.”

#### SERVICES

**Comments:** “There was no concierge, no bellman that I ever saw, and the kitchen closed at 9:00 PM. I expected more, and won’t be back.”

**Poor response:** “We don’t claim to be the Ritz Carlton, and we don’t charge those prices either. Our hours of operation are clearly stated on our website. The kitchen is always open at least until 10:00.”

**Why this is poor:** 1) unprofessional, 2) abrupt and patronizing, 3) contradicts the guest.

**Better response:** “We are a limited-service property and our room rates reflect this. Unfortunately, our kitchen had to close early that night due to unforeseen circumstances. I sincerely apologize for the inconvenience. Front desk staff are on duty 24-hours to assist

## Response Examples

with luggage and recommendations. We feel we provide good value to our guests, and regret that we failed to meet expectations on your stay.”

### FALSE ALLEGATIONS

**Comment:** “My wife’s purse went missing during the event and we’re certain it was stolen by one of the employees. When complained, management said they weren’t responsible. Stay away from this place! Staff are thieves!!!”

**Poor response:** “Your claims are at best pure fabrications and at worst a deliberate attempt to slander our good reputation. My employees don’t steal. I have a witness who says your wife left her purse on the shuttle bus. Regardless, we are not responsible for lost or stolen items, and it’s company policy to ...”

**Why this is poor:** 1) defensive and combative, 2) contradicts guest, 3) cites policy.

**Better response:** “Finding your wife’s purse became a top priority the moment it was reported missing. When it became apparent that your wife may have left it on the shuttle bus, employees went to great effort to track it down but had no success. We have never had an incident of theft in the history of this company. We regret the situation but feel we did our best under the circumstances.”

### TYPE OF PROPERTY

**Comment:** “It felt like staying at my grandma’s house – floral prints, doilies and trinkets everywhere. The owner was always skulking around, and we could hear everything from the guests next door – I mean everything! Next time it’s a hotel.”

**Poor response:** “I am SO sorry you didn’t like my B&B!!! Please accept my deepest apologies that everything wasn’t PERFECT. We must have had some noisy Guests that weekend!?! My furniture and décor are antiques inherited from my Grandmother. We aim to please here, and we failed MISERABLY. Please

forgive me!”

**Why this is poor:** 1) too dramatic, 2) too personal, 3) gratuitous punctuation and capital letters.

**Better response:** “As a bed and breakfast we try to provide a homey, country-house environment, and our antique furnishings reflect local history. We convey this in the photos and descriptions on our website, but it seems you had different expectations. I am very sorry you did not enjoy your stay, and I do appreciate the feedback. Feel free to contact me directly to discuss further.”

### Facebook

The same basic rules apply to Facebook commentary as online reviews, with a few key differences. People are not necessarily shopping for travel on Facebook, but feedback and opinions can be persuasive, particularly when originating within their social network.

Much of Facebook content is private, so unless it is posted to your page or by someone in your network you probably will not see it. Unlike review sites, which allow anonymous comments, Facebook comments are linked to the user’s profile, so you know who you are interacting with.

If someone posts a positive comment to your page, post a reply to thank them. It shows you are listening, opens dialogue and may encourage others to share feedback. If a complaint is posted, apologize if appropriate and say you are looking into the matter. Once you have investigated, post a follow-up comment. If claims are false, clear up the misconception, always maintaining a positive tone. If the issue is serious, send a private message and attempt to take the matter offline.

Unlike traveller reviews, you have the option of deleting comments posted to your Facebook wall. Do this sparingly, and only if it is spam, offensive or particularly damaging. Known as

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## Responding to Reviews and Feedback

### Response Examples

“sanitizing,” the practice is frowned upon and can trigger negative commentary. As with all social channels, be open and responsive to all types of feedback.

Intel’s Facebook policy is to respond to “the good, the bad, but not the ugly.” Essentially this means negative comments are fine, but comments that are disrespectful or that violate the company’s comment rules are removed.<sup>4</sup>

Be sure to adjust your Facebook settings to notify the administrator by email when someone posts to your wall.

#### FACEBOOK RESPONSE EXAMPLES

**Facebook comment:** “Our heli-skiing tour was awesome! We were up to our ears in powder, and the midday lunch break was delicious.”

**Good response:** “We are so glad! I will be sure to pass on your comments to our guides and kitchen staff. We appreciate the feedback and hope to see you back soon.”

#### NEGATIVE

**Facebook comment:** “We were disappointed with the quality of snow on the heli-tour. Lunch was soggy and there wasn’t enough food.”

**Good response:** “We are so sorry! While we cannot control the snow conditions, we can certainly control lunch, and it seems we fell short of our usual standards. I have shared your comments with staff to ensure this does not recur. We appreciate the feedback.”

#### MIXED

**Facebook comment:** “We loved the heli-skiing and will definitely do it again, but the lunch was lacking in quality and quantity.”

**Good response:** “We are delighted to hear you loved the heli-skiing! But we were so sorry lunch was not up to its usual standards. I have

shared your comments with staff to ensure the issue does not recur. We appreciate your feedback.”

Forrester Research analysts report that consumers share 500 billion impressions about products and services online annually, and more than 60% of them are shared on Facebook. Moreover, 16% of users generate 80% of messages and posts about products and services.<sup>5</sup>

#### Twitter

As with Facebook, the same basic principles apply to responding to comments on Twitter as to online reviews, with a few exceptions. Given the 140-character limit of messages, travellers do not usually post full reviews. But Twitter is increasingly used as a customer service channel to inquire about services prior to a visit, to express delight or disappointment during a visit and to make general commentary after a visit. This presents opportunities to engage travellers and resolve issues in real-time before, during and after their trip.

Unlike reviews, “tweets” have a short shelf life and typically reach an audience limited to the number of followers of the person who is tweeting. However, tweets can be “re-tweeted” to someone else with a larger following, and in turn tweeted to others, and so forth. Negative tweets can be passed on quickly, go viral and cross over to blogs and other social media channels, or can be passed on by old-fashioned word-of-mouth.

As with Facebook, your tone on Twitter should be upbeat and conversational. If a tweet is positive, thank the sender and retweet it if it offers something of interest or value to your followers.

If it is negative, offer apologies and try to find out more, but do so privately if this is

<sup>4</sup> Stantak, Jesse. SmartBlog on Social Media. (April 2011). *Inside Intel’s Facebook Attack Strategy*.

<sup>5</sup> Harvard Business Review. (December 2010). *Stat Watch: 500 Billion*.



## Response Examples

an option. If the sender is not following you, post a public reply, but do not repeat negative feedback and do not draw unnecessary attention to the exchange. If the message contains false information, clarify the misconception. If the issue is serious, attempt to take the conversation offline by providing an email address or phone number. Do not engage in banter, which will only call more attention to the issue.

Set up alerts to monitor Twitter and respond promptly to comments and inquiries. Tweets often show up in searches, so include your property name and destination in your tweets whenever appropriate.

### TWITTER RESPONSE EXAMPLES

#### POSITIVE

**Tweet:** “What a fantastic stay at the ABC Lodge! Can’t wait to go back!”

**Good response:** “We are thrilled to hear you enjoyed your stay at the ABC Lodge. Thanks for sharing. We cannot wait to welcome you back to Smithers, BC!”

#### NEGATIVE

**Tweet:** “Stood in line for 20 mins to check out of ABC Lodge. Won’t be back!”

**Good response:** “We’re so sorry to hear we kept you waiting! Can we make it up to you? Please direct message me or email [chelsea@abchotel.com](mailto:chelsea@abchotel.com).”

#### MIXED

**Tweet:** “Fantastic stay at the ABC Lodge – minus the 20-min wait at check-out!”

**Good response:** “We’re so sorry for the wait at check-out! But happy to hear your stay at ABC Lodge was otherwise fantastic. We look forward to welcoming you back”

#### **Not getting re-tweeted? You are not alone.**

In 2010, Toronto-based social analytics company Sysomos scanned 1.2 billion tweets and found that more than seven in 10 got no reaction whatsoever. Of the remainder, only six percent were re-tweeted, and 92% of those re-tweets occurred within the first hour. The conclusion? Less than one in 200 messages gets re-tweeted after one hour.<sup>6</sup>

### *Crisis Management in Social Media*

Sometimes an issue goes beyond a negative review or comment and threatens to do serious harm to your business’s reputation. It may be a rumour about bedbugs, a crime committed while under your care, or questions about ethical or environmental practices. The source might be a disgruntled guest, an ex-employee, a competitor or the general public. In certain cases you might not know who is behind it.

Two reputation incidents are frequently cited in the hospitality industry: one involving an airline, the other involving a fast food chain.

After a musician's guitar came back damaged from a flight and the airline refused to accept responsibility, the traveller retaliated by making a humorous music video to recount his experience and posting it on YouTube. The video went viral, and has since received over 10 million views. The airline eventually agreed to reimburse the traveller, but not before suffering a great deal of public scrutiny and ridicule.

In the other incident, employees of a fast food chain made a video of themselves doing objectionable things to pizza and posted it to YouTube. The video received more than a million views and much negative publicity both online and offline before it was taken down. The company has since dedicated significant resources to restoring its reputation.

<sup>6</sup> Geere, Duncan. Wired.com. (October 2010). *It's Not Just You: 71 percent of Tweets Are Ignored*.

# 6

## Responding to Reviews and Feedback

### Response Examples

A crisis of any kind needs to be handled at the highest levels and may require the counsel of a public relations firm, lawyer or reputation management firm. Crisis management falls beyond the scope of this guide, but there are a few basic guidelines related to social media that can help you avert a crisis and mitigate potential damage.

#### **Be Prepared**

Every business should have a social media policy in place with clear guidelines for employee conduct as well as steps to take in the event of a crisis, the communication channels to follow and individual responsibilities.

#### **Act Quickly**

The rapid pace at which information can spread on social channels calls for a quick response to bad publicity. If it threatens to go viral, there is no time for bureaucracy. Act quickly to contain the incident, but not before you have consulted professionals and understand the potential consequences.

#### **Publish an Official Response**

People can be quick to condemn but may change their mind when they hear your side of the story. State your case with sincerity, be open and transparent, and speak to your

company's track record and credentials.

Use both online and offline media to get messages out, but choose one channel for your official response - such as your website or blog - and direct inquiries there. If possible, use the medium from which the bad publicity originated to communicate your response. For example, if a video carrying false allegations has been posted, publish a video message from the company president to set the record straight.

#### **Get it Removed**

If possible, contact the source and ask for it to be removed. Be reasonable, not heavy handed. Use litigation as a last resort; it is expensive and can take time.

#### **Rally Supporters**

Ask for support and testimonials from your advocates, customers, employees and industry partners.

#### **Do Not Fan the Flames**

Topics tend to have a short shelf life in social media, even when controversial. In some circumstances it might be best to remain silent and wait for things to settle, especially if an official response risks doing more harm than good. Monitor the situation closely, and modify your approach as necessary.

# 7 Generating Content and Building Advocacy

A key part of managing your business's online reputation involves actively generating social media content and encouraging customers to share stories, content and feedback with others. Not only does this help build your profile and reputation, it will help you connect with travellers, build followings, increase conversions and build repeat business.

The first part of this chapter discusses content generation; the second discusses how to encourage customers to advocate for your business.

## Generating Social Media Content

If you publish content on social channels that is interesting and relevant to travellers, it is more likely to be shared, bringing benefits to search engine rankings, visitor volume and direct bookings. However, sourcing and producing content can be time consuming. Focus your efforts on generating content that will most appeal to your target markets.

### Getting Started

A basic social media program consists of a Facebook page, Twitter account, YouTube profile and Flickr profile. These channels cover all content formats – text, photos and video – and will reach the largest audiences. If you have additional resources, consider other activities such as a blog, but it is better to do a great job on a few platforms than a mediocre job on several. As a guiding rule, go where your customers are.

Profiles on these channels can be set up quickly and easily. Depending on how active you are, you should be able to administer them in less than ten hours per week. Be organized and disciplined in your approach, constantly asking yourself if what you are doing is important and relevant to your business. If not, move on.

At a minimum, claim your space on major channels before someone else does. To claim a vanity URL on Facebook (a website address that contains your business name,

e.g. [www.facebook.com/ABCHotelNelson](http://www.facebook.com/ABCHotelNelson)) you will need a minimum of 25 fans. If a page already exists for your business, you may be able to take ownership of it or request for it to be removed.

Most review sites contain sections controlled by businesses, including TripAdvisor, Google Places, Yelp, TravelPost and OpenTable. It is important to ensure listings on these sites are complete, current and optimized for maximum searchability. Where permitted, post descriptions, amenities, photos, videos, special offers and links to your website, booking sources and social profiles. Basic listings are typically free, and there are options to upgrade listings and advertise for a fee.

### Use Storytelling Techniques

Stories are more compelling than lists of features and benefits. Online reviews are popular because they are authentic, but also because they feature many of the elements of good storytelling: a gripping lead, a strong point of view, lessons learned, facts and trivia. Use these techniques in the content you publish, and weave features and benefits into stories. Packages can be great for this, as can “slice of life” updates on Facebook and Twitter about what your customers are up to.

Stories do not have to be long to convey meaning. As a young newspaperman, Ernest Hemingway bet his colleagues \$10 he could

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## Generating Content and Building Advocacy

### Generating Social Media Content

tell a complete story in just six words. He won the bet with this story: “For sale. Baby shoes. Never worn.”<sup>1</sup>

#### **Find Your Voice**

Social media provides opportunities for brands to speak directly with travellers. The tone and vocabulary of your voice should reflect the nature of your business and convey enthusiasm and expertise. Many businesses outsource social media, and this might be your only viable option. However, keep in mind that the most authentic voices in social media tend to have a finger on the pulse of operations.

#### **Be a Local Expert**

The quickest way to get tuned out in social media is to constantly self-promote. Add value to conversations by alternating promotions and company updates with destination information and news, and try to put an entertaining spin on special offers.

An effective way to attract an audience is to demonstrate local expertise. The trip planning process starts online for most travellers, and if you publish relevant information it will get their attention. Travel tips and destination information can be rich content for search engines. Moreover, by providing helpful information and positioning yourself as a local expert you will instill confidence in travellers and increase conversions.

#### **Should You Have a Blog?**

With all the comings and goings of travellers, tourism operators have a wealth of social media content to draw from. A blog can be a great platform for sharing local stories and information, and for putting some personality behind your company. It is also likely to increase your visibility on search engines. A HubSpot survey found that small businesses with blogs receive 55% more traffic to their websites than those without a blog.<sup>2</sup>

The most effective blogs contain original, editorial-style content, are rich in imagery and diverse in subject material and are administered by an individual who is passionate about the company, its customers and the destination.

Too often, however, blogs start with a flurry of activity and are abandoned over time, or become a repository for media releases and promotions. Before you take the plunge, ensure you have the proper resources in place for a long-term commitment.

*We decided to create a blog as our ultimate resource for everything that's going on within the hotel. Here we can share stories, host interviews, discuss upcoming events etc ... I believe good blog content is relevant, timely, fun and encourages thought or discussion. [It should also have] well written content, useful links to other sites and bloggers and lots of photos and video to keep the reader engaged. I like to include non-hotel-related content once in a while. Nobody likes someone who talks about themselves all the time, right?*  
Rishad Daroowala, Former Administrator  
Pan Pacific Vancouver<sup>3</sup>

#### **Use Visual Content**

The old adage that a picture is worth a thousand words is particularly true in social media. Online, people tend to have short attention spans and are drawn to vivid imagery. Videos, in particular, take the guesswork out of travel. As previously discussed, travellers are increasingly checking out photos and videos when researching trips, and imagery is showing up with increasing frequency in online searches.

Producing professional imagery can be expensive, but advances in technology have made equipment and editing software more affordable and accessible. Video content

<sup>1</sup> Mattu, Gurmeet. (2011). *Creative Copy Writing*.

<sup>2</sup> Burns, R. Hubspot Blog. (August 17, 2009). *Study Shows that Small Businesses that Blog Get 55% More Website Visitors*.

<sup>3</sup> Daroowala, Rishad. (January 2011). Daniel Edward Craig Blog. *Dedicated to Social Media: A Case Study for Hotels*.

## Generating Social Media Content

posted to social media channels does not have to be as slick as corporate videos, but it should be authentic and professional. Behind-the-scenes footage can be compelling, as can local scenery, nearby attractions and interviews with customers and staff. Remember to tag imagery with your business name, destination and descriptions to enhance searchability.

### **Source Content From Guests**

One of the biggest challenges of administering a social media program is finding and producing high-quality content. User-generated content is typically more compelling and persuasive than marketer content and is often free. Search the web, YouTube and Flickr for text, photos and videos of your business and destination – you may be surprised by what you discover. **Be sure to ask the owner for permission before using it.**

### **Share Traveller Reviews**

Tourism operators are increasingly opting to post a badge, link or live feed of TripAdvisor reviews on their website. Third-party endorsements give consumers confidence and show you have nothing to hide. They can also keep travellers from leaving your site to search for reviews without returning.

Your decision to post reviews to your website will depend on how confident you are that they provide an accurate account of the experience you offer. Keep in mind that most travellers are not seeking perfection, they are seeking a combination of quality and value, and a few negative comments are not likely to deter them.

### **Build your networks**

To successfully engage in social media, you need to build loyal followings. An easy way is to hold contests and offer incentives to users to “like” your Facebook page or follow your Twitter feed. However, quality is more important than quantity: individuals are often not necessarily interested in your business and may never be willing to pay for your services.

It is better to focus on cultivating networks of people who share an interest in, and affinity for, your business and destination. This includes customers, guests, clients, prospects, media, event planners, Destination Marketing Organizations, tourism partners and key influencers. Keep informed by following competitors, similar businesses and news sources.

When building networks it is important to respect boundaries. Many people prefer to restrict Facebook friends to personal contacts and LinkedIn connections to people they have met, whereas Twitter tends to be a looser, more open network.

### **Integrate**

The most effective online reputation management program is fully integrated with marketing, sales and operational activities. Cross-promote social media channels, share relevant content across platforms and post links to social channels on the home page of your website.

Consider adding a “social page” to your website that features a TripAdvisor feed or customer reviews, a Facebook widget and links to your Twitter feed and YouTube channel. Promote social channels in direct marketing pieces, in staff email signatures, on marketing materials, on your property, and on confirmations to guests and visitors.

### **Provide Employee Guidelines**

Your employees should have guidelines on appropriate conduct when engaging in social media activities related to your business. The policy should encourage employees to support your social activities by following your channels and sharing content.

Designate one individual as the key contact and encourage employees to submit ideas to that person for consideration. Administrators of social networks should have guidelines

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## Generating Content and Building Advocacy

### Generating Social Media Content

to ensure activities and content meet with company brand standards, vision and values.

#### Measure Return on Objectives

A major point of resistance to social media is the challenge of measuring results. There are ways to monetize social channels, such as adding a booking widget to your Facebook page and placing links to booking sources, but if you are expecting a high volume of direct revenue through social media activity you will likely be disappointed.

When evaluating your social media program, it is important to measure more than just financial returns. Measure the returns on objectives outlined in [Chapter 3](#) and use the measurement and analytics tools discussed in [Chapter 4](#).

#### Being Resourceful With Limited Resources

When Sarah Page needed photos to promote the 600-mile Colorado River Trail in Texas, she started a Flickr group and uploaded the few shots that she had. “I then began a search on keywords related to my region,” she relates on the Tourism Tech blog. “When I saw a photo I liked, I messaged the owner and invited him/her to join my group. At the same time, I asked permission to use this and other photos they submit on a blog I write about the same region ... In just a few weeks, I have over 120 photos at my disposal.”

Page says she now has several amateur and professional photographers who submit photos to her on a regular basis. “This frees up my time for other things,” she writes, “as I don’t have to go out and search for great photography as often.”

How much does it all cost? “I have the use of professional photography – with the permission of the photographer – for absolutely nothing,” she enthuses.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Page, Sarah. Tourism Tech. (March 2009). *Flickr Can be a Great Marketing Tool*.



## Encouraging Reviews and Building Advocacy

The final component of your online reputation management plan is encouraging travellers to share their experiences on review sites and social media platforms. It is not only the quality of reviews that matters; quantity matters too. Reviews show up frequently in online searches and can improve search engine rankings. The volume of reviews also influences TripAdvisor's Popularity Index rankings.

If you are confident in what your customers will say, you may choose to take a proactive approach to generating reviews. Sometimes customers may need a little nudge to remind them to tell the world how wonderful you are. Of course, you do not want an inflated representation of your business – that could lead to problems – but you do want a fair one.

With that in mind, here are some suggestions for generating positive reviews.

### ***TripAdvisor's Popularity Index Algorithm***

*"Our popularity index works on a proprietary algorithm. We don't disclose the specifics ... but I can tell you that the quantity, quality, and timeliness of reviews play a key role in ranking properties. If you have a high number of recent reviews, and the majority of those reviews are favorable, you will likely rank higher than a competitor with fewer, older, but just as positive reviews."*

Stephen Kaufer, CEO, TripAdvisor <sup>5</sup>

### **If You Do Not Ask ...**

Train staff to ask customers to post a review when they express satisfaction. Try phrasing it this way: "I'm so glad you enjoyed your experience. Guest feedback is important to us. A favourable review on TripAdvisor would be very much appreciated." Make it easy for them by giving them a business card or flyer

with a link to your review site of choice. Avoid directly asking guests to post reviews on site, as TripAdvisor's automated fraud detection filter has been known to block these reviews.

Some employees are not comfortable asking for reviews; likewise, some guests are not comfortable being asked. Requests should be handled with tact and sensitivity. For a softer approach, send an email or note after departure to thank customers and invite them to post a review, providing the appropriate links. TripAdvisor Owners' Center offers a number of free tools to assist with this ([www.tripadvisor.com/Owners](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Owners)).

Determine which review sites have the most influence on your business and focus efforts accordingly. Consider targeting one platform at a time: one month rally staff toward bolstering TripAdvisor reviews, the next month Yelp, the next month UrbanSpoon, and so on. Keep in mind that sites such as Expedia, Hotels.com and OpenTable require guests to book through them to post a review.

### **Be Remarkable**

As Seth Godin, professional marketer and writer notes, in the age of social media "remarkable" takes on new meaning: it means "worth remarking about."<sup>6</sup> To offer truly remarkable service employees must be empowered to exceed customer expectations in creative and memorable ways.

Travellers evaluate businesses in online reviews on how well they define, communicate and deliver on brand promises. It is often the little details travellers remember most. Small, independent businesses often perform well with reviews in part because they provide personalized, unscripted service. As Scott Stratten, President of Un-Marketing, specializing in viral and social media, says, "People spread awesome."

<sup>5</sup> Kaufer, Stephen. We Are Not Making this Up Blog. (November 2009). *Trip Advisor's CEO on the Popularity Index and UCG.*

<sup>6</sup> Godin, Seth. Portfolio. (2003). *Purple Cow: Transforming Your Business by Being Remarkable.*

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## Generating Content and Building Advocacy

### Encouraging Reviews and Building Advocacy

Exceeding expectations requires intuition and inquisitiveness. If a customer asks for a map and the employee provides an unsolicited overview of local restaurants and attractions, it might be welcomed by a leisure couple visiting for the first time but off-putting to a repeat business traveller. By inquiring about preferences and paying attention to verbal and non-verbal clues, employees can tailor service to suit individual preferences.

#### **Engage Travellers**

An effective way to interact with travellers on social platforms is to ask questions. Posting a question to your Facebook page such as “What’s your favourite BC memory?” can get followers in a vacation frame of mind and prompt them to share their experiences.

Travellers often follow social channels in anticipation of gaining access to deals. Offering limited-time specials and exclusive offers can be a good way to keep them engaged and reward them for following you.

Contests can also be effective because they provide an incentive to interact. Recently, Pan Pacific Hotels ran a Dream Getaways Contest that asked followers, “If you had your choice of a complimentary weekend at any one of our four hotels in the Pacific Northwest, which one would you choose and why?” The company received over 200 entries, some very impassioned, and at the same time promoted the proximity and popularity of its four properties in the region.

#### **Be Scrupulous**

TripAdvisor and other review sites have strict rules about posting and soliciting reviews. Writing fake reviews, whether a glowing review of your business or an unflattering review of a competitor business, is strictly forbidden and can result in serious penalties. Anything that can be perceived as a bribe for writing a review is also disallowed, as is rewarding customers for writing reviews. If

TripAdvisor suspects a business is “gaming” the system, it may post a red warning badge on its listing.

In any case, artificially stacking the deck is counterproductive. It sets expectations your property cannot likely meet, resulting in negative reviews. You also risk a backlash from travellers. Better to channel your energies toward fine-tuning the customer experience to generate favorable reviews naturally.

The same applies to the imagery you use to promote your business. Travellers demand authenticity, and misleading them can result in bad reviews and negative publicity. The review site Oyster.com features a section called Photo Fakeouts in which reviewers compare hotel marketing photos with traveller photos, often with embarrassing results.

#### **Train, Recognize and Reward Staff**

In the age of social media, everyone is a critic and should be treated accordingly. Encourage individual staff and departments to go that extra mile by recognizing and rewarding them for high ratings and favourable mentions. Ensure that employees understand how their conduct can affect your business’s reputation, and integrate guest feedback and reputation management principles into staff training.

People who use social media to voice displeasure are also likely to use it to voice approbation when particularly impressed. Get staff in the habit of inquiring with customers about their experience while on location, and never allow guests to leave dissatisfied. It may be your last opportunity to resolve an issue before it is taken public. With expert handling, your harshest critics can become your biggest advocates.

**Online Reputation Management For Activities and Attractions:  
An Interview With Canadian Snowmobile and All Terrain Adventures**

Hotels tend to be the first thing that springs to mind when people think of TripAdvisor, but the site also carries reviews of a range of tourism businesses, including activities and attractions. One BC business that has learned about the power of online reviews is Whistler-based Canadian Snowmobile and All Terrain Adventures.

General Manager Craig Beattie, discusses some of the activities the company has undertaken to achieve a high ranking 729 BC-based activities and attractions on TripAdvisor.

**Tell us how your company achieved a top ranking on TripAdvisor.**

*We have great guides and fun tours, and people like to share their experiences. We encourage staff to give out review cards with our TripAdvisor link on them so that guests can leave comments for other travellers to view. [Our employees] use TripAdvisor a lot when we travel, so it seemed a natural thing to do for our business.*

**How has your positive ranking affected business?**

*We feel very proud to be at the top of the list, and hopefully this has had a positive effect on our business. It has certainly had a great effect with our staff, who love to watch us hit that top spot. If specific guides are mentioned they get a prize for being so awesome! I expect that in the future as we hold on to these rankings we will see customers choose Canadian Snowmobile and All Terrain Adventures as their tour operator based on the ranking and the amazing customer feedback.*

**Do you ask guests to write reviews and share feedback on social media channels?**

*We do ask guests if they'd like to write a review; however, we are not pushy about it.*

*Along with good comments come the bad ones, but we can learn and grow from these*

*and we appreciate people taking the time to share these with us.*

*We always respond to constructive criticism by saying thank you. It's a great way to show you are listening and that you care. We want to know what kind of experiences our guests had, and if we can make them even better. Without these comments we can't get better and that's what we are continually striving to do.*

*Previously clients would find my email and send a thank you or a critique, and both are always forwarded to all the team involved – from the front desk to the drivers, guides and managers. Any feedback is good feedback.*

**Aside from TripAdvisor, are there other review sites and social media channels you are active on?**

*We share photos and mini-stories on our Facebook page. This is a great way to show the personality of our business. We use Twitter to blast out event details, deals and other bits of information. It's not all about us – we are very engaged in our community and use our social media channels to help support other local events and charities.*

*We also use Yelp, which is another great review site. Reviewers have to remain active within the Yelp community for their comments to get posted. This means that when we get a review it's from someone who's used to writing reviews and their opinion holds a lot of weight.*

**Any tips for other tourism businesses that would like to improve their rankings?**

*We hand out small cards encouraging reviews, and have added our TripAdvisor link to our email signatures. We are training our staff, both frontline and management, to ask for feedback and reviews. But again, we try not to be too pushy. It's great to see our product through the eyes of customers and to learn from the comments we receive.*

# 8 Summary

Online reputation management may seem overwhelming at first, but it gets easier over time. Accept the fact that you will not be able to do everything, and focus on the activities likely to produce the greatest returns on objectives.

If you are new to social media, start by simply paying attention. Read what people are saying about your business on review sites. Then try responding to select reviews. You then might choose to create a Facebook page, or dabble in YouTube or Twitter. At that point, you might start asking customers to write reviews.

For the time being, you may only have time to read reviews. That may be sufficient if you are using feedback to make improvements. If you focus your efforts on taking care of your

customers, your reputation may take care of itself.

Keep in mind, however, that given its popularity, social networking is not likely to go away anytime soon. Rather, it will probably become even more pervasive as it evolves and matures. By dedicating time to familiarize yourself with the tools and platforms today, you will be better positioned to adapt to changes over time.

Most importantly, you will be able to take advantage of the opportunities social media provides to engage travellers, enhance your reputation and strengthen your business.

# 1 Glossary

**CSI**

Customer Satisfaction Index (TripAdvisor)

**Cycle of Positivity**

Using customer feedback to guide decisions on improvements to a business, which results in favourable reviews and attracts more business, generating revenue for more improvements.

**GDS**

Global Distribution System for independent hotels connecting to online travel websites.

**Instant personalization**

Integrating the activities, likes and preferences of friends in social networks into search activity by linking networks such as Facebook, Yelp and TripAdvisor.

**Location-based social network**

A mobile application that allows users to “check-in” to establishments, share their locations with friends, post comments, and earn points, badges and incentives from businesses.

**Online Reputation Management (ORM)**

The process of monitoring, reporting and reacting to online feedback and opinions about a company and its people, products and services.

**OTA**

Online Travel Agency (e.g., Expedia, TripAdvisor) where consumers can “shop” and “purchase” trip components.

**Social media**

Web-based and mobile applications for social interaction and the exchange of content. Includes social networking sites and applications such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and foursquare; user-generated content sites such as YouTube and Flickr; and review sites, blogs and forums.

**Social networking**

The use of web-based and mobile applications for social interaction and exchange of user-generated content.

**User-generated content**

Content (including text, photos and videos) produced by the general public instead of paid professionals or experts.

# Appendix **2** Sample Online Reputation Management Plan

## **Overview**

AAA Restaurant is committed to using the strengths of online reviews and social media content to build its online profile, drive traffic to its website and increase both new and repeat business.

The restaurant and its employees are committed to honesty, authenticity and accountability in all social media communications. They always listen to customer feedback and respond in a friendly, open and professional manner.

## **Objectives**

The objectives of the program are to:

1. Improve reviews on TripAdvisor, Yelp, UrbanSpoon and OpenTable.
2. Reach the Top 20 ranking of local destination restaurants on TripAdvisor and Yelp by the end of the year and within the Top 10 by the end of the following year.
3. Build followings and increase engagement on Facebook and Twitter.
4. Increase conversions of social media visitors to customers.
5. Strengthen loyalty and repeat business among customers.
6. Encourage customers to write reviews and share feedback.

## **Strategies**

The restaurant will achieve these objectives through the following strategies:

1. Solicit reviews from satisfied customers and distribute cards with links to review sites.
2. Share favourable customer feedback on Twitter and Facebook.
3. Use Google Alerts, SocialMention and TweetBeep to monitor feedback.
4. Share feedback with staff and resolve issues wherever possible.
5. Respond to reviews and feedback.

## **Responsibilities and Roles**

The restaurant's general manager and public relations representative are responsible for administering social media channels, responding to reviews and generating content. The morning hostess is responsible for monitoring reviews and feedback and disseminating to staff when needed.

All official messaging must be approved and distributed by the key personnel above. Employees are encouraged to follow the restaurant's social profiles, share restaurant content with their personal networks and submit content and ideas.



# Appendix **3** BC Tourism Industry Takes Top Awards<sup>1</sup>

With over 45 million visitors every month, TripAdvisor's annual Travelers' Choice Awards® can result in significant exposure for tourism businesses. In 2012, BC businesses dominated several award categories.

## **Top 10 Hotels in Canada**

- #1 L'Hermitage Hotel, Vancouver
- #3 Echo Valley Ranch, Clinton
- #4 Sonora Resort, Sonora Island
- #5 Fairmont Pacific Rim, Vancouver
- #6 Opus Hotel, Vancouver
- #7 Wedgewood Hotel & Spa, Vancouver
- #8 Pinnacle Hotel At The Pier, North Vancouver
- #9 Abigail's Hotel, Victoria

## **Top B&Bs and Inns in Canada**

- #1 Abbeymoore Manor, Victoria
- #6 Eagle Landing Bed & Breakfast, Qualicum Beach
- #7 Bostrom's B&B On Little Beach Bay, Ucluelet
- #8 Bee & Thistle Guest House, Vancouver
- #9 The Del Ray B&B, Osoyoos
- #10 Colby House B&B, Sydney

<sup>1</sup> TripAdvisor. Traveler's Choice Award Results. <http://www.tripadvisor.com/TravelersChoice-Hotels-cTop25-g153339> and <http://www.tripadvisor.com/TravelersChoice-Hotels-cInnsBB-g153339>

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