

MANAGING ONLINE REPUTATION

"It takes many good deeds to build a good reputation, and only one bad one to lose it" Benjamin Franklin.

Whether you manage a large city hotel or are a small activity business along the coast, you have at some point enjoyed the benefits of a glowing traveller review and felt the backlash after a negative review. As a customer yourself, you have undoubtedly checked online reviews before booking a hotel or a planning a holiday.

Globally, travel customers are looking to social media for guidance before making buying decisions. In fact, a recent survey from PhoCusWright found that 3 out of every 4 travellers mention traveller reviews and photos as very, or somewhat, influential in choosing what decision they make.

We are being judged online, whether we like it or not

Our online reputation is not in our hands but is in the customers. As tourism businesses, we may not be in control of our online reputation, but we can certainly manage it through a proactive Online Reputation Management strategy.

Online reputation management is the process of monitoring, addressing and reacting to online feedback and opinions about your tourism business and its employees, products and services. It involves actively participating in social networking by engaging with customers, generating content and using customer feedback to build loyalty and advocacy.

Some questions for you to consider:

Questions	✓
Are you listening to your customers online?	
Do you know how to improve customer satisfaction by gaining insights about what is right and wrong about your products or services?	
Are you watching competitors and their customers' perceptions about their products and services?	
Are you prepared for bad comments?	

Measuring, maintaining and improving your online reputation

Online reputation management is not about attempting to pretend your business is something it is not. It is about setting sensible expectations for customers and then

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meeting or exceeding them. Doing this encourages customers to share their experiences, thereby boosting your online reputation.

Reviews matter

When it comes to reviews, TripAdvisor is the most popular platform. Since it launched in 2000, TripAdvisor changed the way travellers research trips, by providing them with a platform to share candid opinions and advice with other tourists. TripAdvisor now hosts more than 465 million reviews and boasts of over 315 million members.

Travellers are no longer dependent on the information provided to them by us, the tourism businesses. Because of TripAdvisor, they can get advice from people just like them. And they trust each other, more than they trust us.

Top tips for managing your reputation on TripAdvisor

1. Remain **calm**, regardless of what is being communicated to you. See **all** feedback as being useful. Especially the negative. Not only can you investigate the issue and improve your offering, but it gives you the chance to resolve it publicly and boost your professional reputation online.
2. Respond to **every** review whether positive or negative. If someone has taken the time to type up a review for your business, it is respectful to recognise it, regardless of whether it is positive or negative.
3. Respond **promptly**, ideally within the week. TripAdvisor displays the most recent review first. That is shaping your potential customer's first impression.
4. Don't try to get into **revenge**. The tone is tough to express in writing and arguing against or questioning a customer's experience usually doesn't come across well. Either acknowledge the criticism, apologise, or offer to have a further discussion offline. That conveys to potential customers that you take criticism seriously but don't allow for argument.
5. Using different staff to respond shows **character** and team work. An example of best practice is the General Manager always responds to negative reviews, but for the positive reviews, a variety of staff members may respond. Who will answer depends on what the reviewer has highlighted. For example, if a compliment was given to the food, the Head Chef should respond. This also ensures that your TripAdvisor responses do not become repetitive.

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6. “Word of Mouse” has now overtaken “Word of Mouth”. Reviews on TripAdvisor default to listing friends (and friends of friends) reviews at the top, no matter how old.
7. Be **proud** of your positive feedback. Make sure you take the time to mention it through social media and other channels. Consider having a live TripAdvisor feed on your brand website... People are probably going to check it anyway, and this shows confidence in what you expect customers to be saying.

Sample responses to online reviews

Complaint about value for money			
Review	Poor response	Why it's poor	Better response
“... I had to pay €25 for parking and €12 a day for Wifi. And the Wifi was slow! rip off...”	“Sorry you are dissatisfied, our hotel is NOT a rip off! You booked a low price on Expedia and they take a high commission so Wifi was not included.”	Contradicts the guest Repeats negative feedback OTA commissions are of no relevance to them! Does not actually address the issue (expensive & slow wifi)	“We are truly sorry that your Wifi was slow, which happens on rare occasions due to our rural location. Our pricing is comparable to other local providers, and we feel we give good value. Nevertheless, we appreciate your feedback and have discussed it with our management team.”

Complaint about poor service			
Review	Poor response	Why it's poor	Better response
“We had to wait nearly an hour for our table, and then no one came to take an order for another twenty minutes! The woman who finally came was totally stressed out. When our food arrived eventually it was cold but we were too hungry to send it back”	“We’re sorry for the bad service, it was a bank holiday Monday and 2 waitresses had called in sick that day. We were rushed off our feet. That waitress who dealt with you has been previously warned about her bad manner so we’ve let her go”	Gives excuses Unprofessional tone Behind the scenes, issues are not the guest’s concern	“Sincerest apologies for what was an unsatisfactory meal for you. Clearly we were not performing to our usual standards that day. We have reviewed your feedback with the staff, and you may be happy to know that as a result of feedback like yours we have implemented the following changes...”

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Complaint about cleanliness

Review	Poor response	Why it's poor	Better response
"The room was filthy. The shelves were covered in dust, the room stank of smoke, and there were cigarette burns on the carpet. It was supposed to be a non-smoking room!"	"I am shocked and appalled by your comments. I looked into it and found out that reception had made a mistake and given you a smoking room. We are so very sorry, it's inexcusable. Unfortunately, she was new and apparently hadn't been trained in properly.	Overly dramatic tone Blames staff Does not instil confidence Does not deal with the dirt issue	"Sincere apologies. We pride ourselves on our attention to detail, but clearly we fell short in this case. I have discussed your comments with staff, and it seems we mistakenly checked you into a smoking room that hadn't been inspected. 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."

How do I know where I'm being talked about?

You can be “talked” about across a huge number of platforms, including Tripadvisor, Google My Business, Online travel operator reviews and social media.

Monitoring the sentiment of what people are saying about you online provides valuable insight into what your customers expect, it supports your customer service efforts and it informs your marketing messaging.

By using a Sentiment Analysis Tool, you can easily track what is being said about you on a range of social media platforms and forums at once. It will even tell you when conversations about your brand turn negative. The tool will also recognise an unusual spike in the volume of conversations, and measure the tone to decipher whether it is positive or negative.

Some examples of Sentiment Analysis Tools are:

- Social Mention
- Google Alerts
- HootSuite Insights

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- Twitter Advanced Search
- Meltwater
- Rapidminer
- Brandwatch
- Semantria
- Guest Folio.

Take a look at each of the above and compare those that are relevant to your business.

Don't let managing your online reputation overwhelm you

Consistently managing your online reputation may seem overwhelming at first. But if you start with the main sites like TripAdvisor and go from there, it does get easier over time.

If you are new to review sites and social media, start by reading what people are saying about your business on review sites. Then start responding to select reviews, and most importantly using the feedback to make improvements.

This is not a fad

Do be aware, though, that this isn't a "problem" that is going to go away. Social networking and review sharing will only get more evolved. So make sure either you or a trusted team member is fully engaged with monitoring, managing and responding to any sentiment that is expressed about your tourism business online.

Instead of seeing this issue as a hassle, see it as a way to engage with customer advocates, to turn customers into advocates, and to help you in your constant improvement of your products and service levels.