BirdEye

The Ultimate Guide to Online Reviews

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Summary

In today's world of digitally connected customers, traditional advertising messages are drowned out by customer voices, which travel further and faster through increasing avenues of communication. When deciding which product or service to purchase, customers consult the source they trust most: other customers. Online reviews play a major role in the customer journey, influencing everything from initial online search results to last minute in-store evaluations.

To succeed in such a landscape, businesses must:

1 | Develop a deep understanding of their customers' wants and needs

2 | Address all customer issues immediately

3 | Ensure happy customers' voices get heard

How? By harnessing the power of online reviews with a comprehensive online reputation management platform.

How do online reviews work?

Online reviews are a form of User Generated Content (UGC) that current or past customers can share on public sites such as Google and Facebook. These sites typically structure feedback as open-ended commentary alongside a rating from 1-5 stars.

After a customer posts a review for a business, it's tied to that business's profile and visible to the public. Any potential customers who visit that review site can see all the reviews posted for that business, both positive and negative. In most cases, reviews cannot be deleted by the business; they can only be removed by the review site itself if they violate the site's policies.

Why are online reviews important for a business?

First, online reviews are displayed in search engine results and have a huge impact on local Search Engine Optimization (SEO). Local SEO is a primary driver of customer acquisition: 90% of customers choose a business on page 1 of search results, and they favor the local results[1]. When it comes to reviews, having a high volume of positive ones works wonders for your local SEO.

A substantial portion (13%) of the 200+ factors in Google's search engine algorithm involve review signals[2] such as:

- Review Quantity (number of reviews)
- Review Velocity (how frequent reviews are posted)
- Review Diversity (the breadth of sites reviews are posted on)

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1. https://searchenginewatch.com/sew/news/2200730/organic-vs-paid-search-results-organic-wins-94-of-time
2. https://moz.com/local-search-ranking-factors

92%

of customers will use a business if it has a at least a 4-star rating

88%

of customers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations

Both Google and customers value online reviews, and the proof is in the numbers:

- Products with positive reviews sell up to 200% more than products with no reviews (WebRepublic)

- 1-3 bad online reviews are enough to deter the majority (67%) of shoppers from purchasing a product or service (Lightspeed Research)

- 92% of customers will use a business if it has a at least a 4-star rating (Cornell University)

- 88% of customers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations (BrightLocal Consumer Survey)

This means that small businesses can compete against national chains on a local SEO level--and potentially win.

In addition to their marketing power, online reviews also provide invaluable insight into brand perception and the quality of your overall customer experience. We'll cover how to use online reviews to drive customer experience improvement later on in this ebook.

Focus on the sites most important to your business

Google and Facebook carry more authority than most, so reviews on these sites are valuable for any business. Google reviews have the power to bring your business to the top of search and Maps results, while Facebook, with more than 1.4 billion monthly active users, puts your business in front of a massive audience of potential customers. Customers are often already logged in, so it's easy to ask them for a review here.

In addition to these large sites, you should include industry-specific review sites in your review management strategy. How can these niche sites make an impact? Let's say a customer searches for "lawyers near me" on Google. High up in results will be attorney-specific sites like Avvo. A search for "doctors near me" will bring up Healthgrades, Vitals, and RateMDs. Consumers visiting these sites are further along in the path to purchase and have a much more solid idea of what they're looking for; therefore, the conversion rate is much higher once they view your company profile on one of these industry-specific sites.

How to ask for online reviews

Authentically. As tempting as it might be, do not offer your customers incentives in exchange for a review. Not only does this lead to biased or insincere reviews that don't accurately reflect the customer's experience; this practice is also frowned upon or even forbidden by most review sites.

Promptly. It's best to ask your customers for a review immediately after service or transaction. This ensures your business is still top of mind and makes your outreach come across as relevant and helpful rather than disruptive.

Seamlessly. Meet your customers where they are. Often this is their smartphones. Your review request messages should be compatible across all desktop and mobile devices and should involve as few steps as possible. This way, wherever your customers are, reviewing your business is an easy, seamless experience for them.

Consistently. Your review generation strategy must be ongoing for it to be effective. Most customers only find a review relevant if it was written in the last 2-3 months, so you need a constant stream of fresh reviews to prove your credibility to potential customers[3].

3. https://www.brightlocal.com/learn/local-consumer-review-survey/

Review Management

To earn your customers' loyalty, it's imperative that you respond to both positive and negative online reviews. A recent study revealed that 70% of customers changed their opinion about a business after the business responded to their review[4]. Depending on how many reviews you're getting, responding to each one might be impossible, but you can set a realistic response ratio for your support team, such as 1 response for every 4 reviews. Your responses should be personal, respectful, and helpful.

Positive reviews

Just because a customer was happy with their experience doesn't mean your job is done. Follow up with happy customers to thank them for their feedback and show you genuinely care about their satisfaction.

★★★★★ Such friendly staff, and the shrimp skewers were incredible. All around wonderful time!

Response We're so happy you enjoyed your visit! The shrimp skewers are the chef's personal favorite, too! We hope to see you again soon!

① | Thank the customer for their review

② | Add a personal touch if possible

③ | Express your hope that they return

★★★★★ **on Google,**

Bertie McCormick

Such friendly staff, and the shrimp skewers were incredible. All around wonderful time!

Your Business

We're so happy you enjoyed your visit! The shrimp skewers are the chef's personal favorite, too! We hope to see you again soon!

4. https://www.convertwithcontent.com/4-reasons-respond-negative-reviews/

Negative reviews

Negative reviews can actually benefit your business if managed correctly. First, negative reviews show you what your business can improve--at a very low cost. The only potential price you pay is losing business when customers see that negative review. That price can be avoided if your business is diligent about responding to negative feedback.

If you respond quickly enough, you can turn a frustrating situation into an overall positive customer experience. You might even get the customer to take down their negative review.

Even if the customer is in the wrong, it's important not to respond defensively. This only escalates conflicts and makes your business appear unprofessional and unconcerned. Treat every customer's complaint as equally valid and respond thoughtfully and constructively. If you insist on correcting their misunderstanding, do so calmly and sympathetically. Here is an example of an effective response to negative feedback:

★☆☆☆☆ Horrible experience. This place looked great but was such a let down.

Response We're so sorry to hear you were disappointed with your experience. Your happiness is our top priority, so we'll refund you for the trouble. Send us an email at support@company.com and we'll help you right away.

① | Apologize

② | Offer a reasonable solution

③ | Follow-up privately

BirdEye Message:
You have one new review!

★☆☆☆☆ **on Google**,
Bertie McCormick

Horrible experience!
This place looked great but was such a let down.

Respond on Google

Driving the customer experience with reviews

Continuously monitoring and interpreting your online reviews yields tremendous rewards. If you respond quickly and constructively, you can set a continuous feedback loop in motion.

The customer experience feedback loop allows you to:

- Implement, test and alter business operations that affect customer experience

- Differentiate between isolated incidents and recurring trends

- Nip potential pain points in the bud

- Retain existing customers and acquire new ones

You can also leverage positive reviews as powerful marketing content. Share great testimonials to your company website, social channels, and business listings to provide social proof of your brand's exceptional quality and reliability. When customers discover your company alongside detailed information provided by real customers, they are more likely to trust you with their business.

Choosing a platform

A comprehensive review management approach is only possible with a platform that can streamline and automate the various components involved. A platform like this lets you manage all feedback in real-time from one place, keeping you organized and eliminating the risk of human error. When evaluating potential vendors for your online review strategy, it's important to consider both where your customers and your business are coming from. This helps you understand the most effective way to engage your customers and capture useful feedback.

Here are some helpful questions to get you started with your evaluation:

Understand your customer base

- What sites are my customers on?

- Do my customers use smartphones?

- How often do my customers check their email?

- How soon do they need to be asked for feedback for it to still be relevant?

Understand your business needs

- Do my employees need to send review requests from mobile and desktop?

- Do we need to integrate our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platform?

- Are we aiming to both generate and manage online reviews?

- Are we also looking to enhance our online presence?
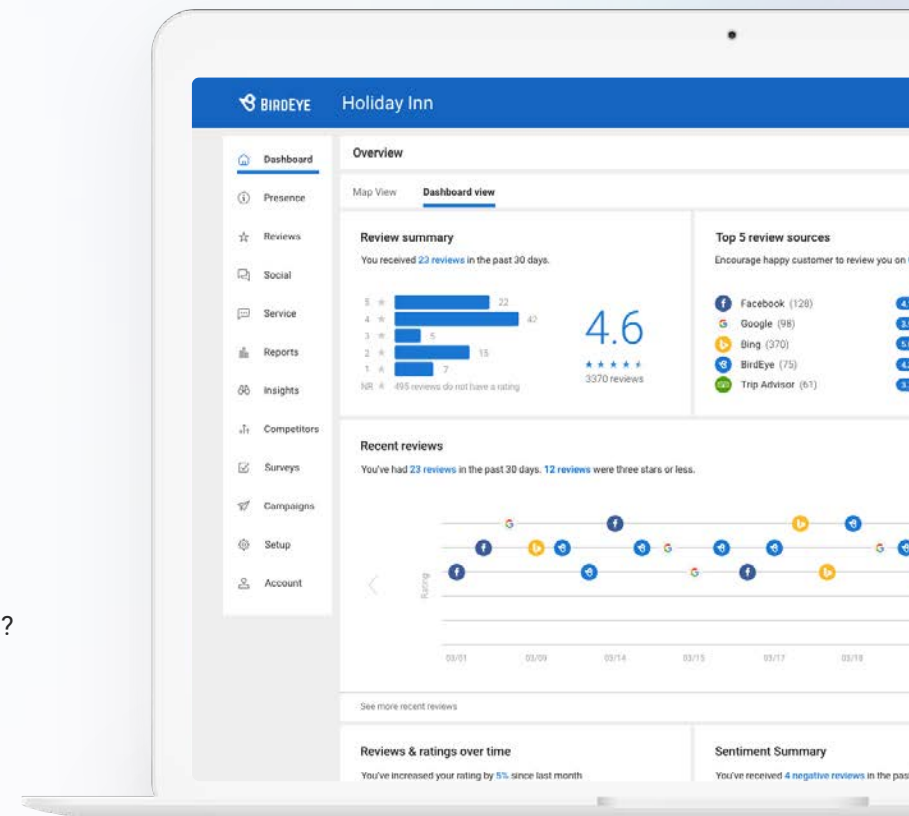
Platform capabilities

To leverage the full benefits of your online reviews, you need a comprehensive review management strategy in place that enables you to track your reviews from all third-party sites in real-time, respond instantly to reviews, and create a customer feedback loop to improve business operations. BirdEye allows businesses to do all of the above from one clean dashboard.

With the BirdEye platform, you can:

- Monitor and respond to all reviews from 200+ sites in one place

- Receive instant new review alerts

- Assign negative reviews to customer service representatives as support tickets

- Access detailed reports of reviews, ratings, and sentiment over time, by source and by location

- Auto-promote your best reviews to your company website, social channels, and search engines

- And more
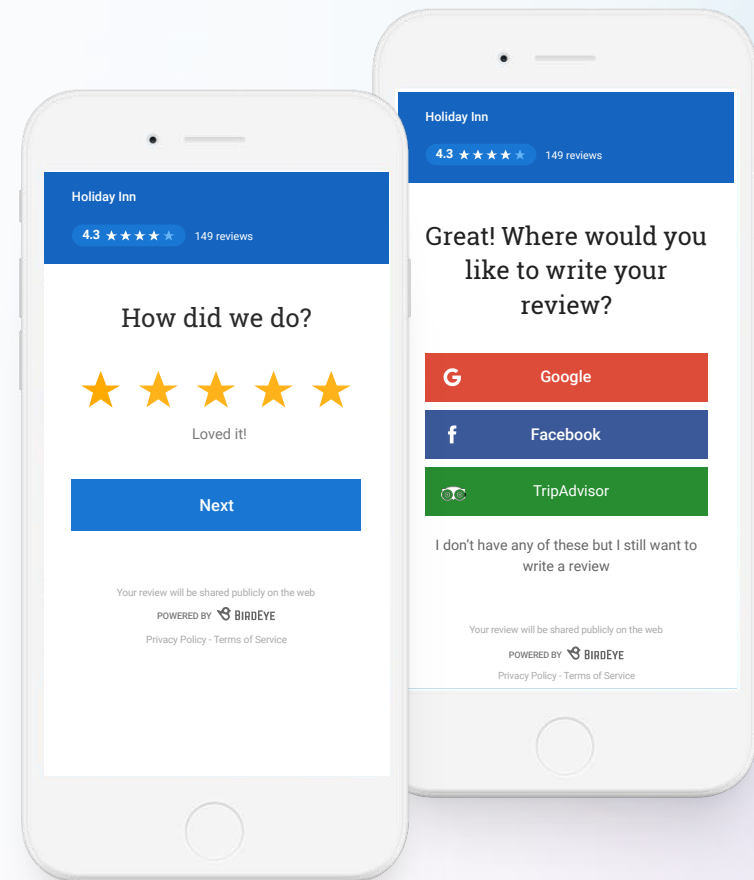
Conclusion

Online reviews are changing the way customers select businesses. If managed properly, online reviews can help businesses improve their online presence, foster brand trust and loyalty, and increase revenue. Both positive and negative reviews can make a positive impact on your brand. Just as important as regularly collecting new reviews is diligently responding to them, promoting them, and regularly gathering and analyzing insights from them to improve the customer experience on an ongoing basis.

Finally, it is important to choose an online review management platform that fits your customer base and business model. Be sure your review generation approach fits your customers' habits, and that your staff is prepared to efficiently manage incoming customer feedback. Follow the tips provided in this guide -- and provide awesome products and services -- and you're well on your way to getting more reviews and more customers!

About BirdEye

BirdEye lets businesses tap into the most powerful source of revenue: happy customers. Gather, analyze and act on customer feedback from social media, review sites and surveys about brands, locations products, and services -- in real-time, from one place. Access deep insights to understand exactly what customers like and dislike in order to solve problems instantly and improve operations. Whether you have one location or thousands, the BirdEye platform turns your customers into a marketing engine that accelerates positive word-of-mouth, boosts ratings, and increases revenue. Say hello to customer-driven marketing.

See a free live demo

And learn how BirdEye can help your business manage negative reviews, get new reviews, and get new customers with one easy solution. Say hello to completely automated customer-driven marketing.

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