



**By: Greg C Johnson**  
**Email: [greg@familyofficebenefits.com](mailto:greg@familyofficebenefits.com)**  
**[www.eFamilyOffice.net](http://www.eFamilyOffice.net)**

In today's internet savvy age, your company's online reputation is a very serious matter. In fact, your reputation can "make" or "break" your business.

In fact, many businesses have become victims of false information, fake profiles, competitor attacks, and more; and they don't even realize it.

If you don't protect yourself and do everything you can to build positivity surrounding your brand online, your business can suffer some serious financial implications pretty fast.

At the very least, you should be assessing your online reputation consistently to see what potentially damaging information is out there for the world to see.

For starters, you can perform a simple Google search for some key information relating to your business such as:

- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Your Name
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Your Company's Name
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Your Product's Name
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Your Employees' Names
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Any Usernames Used Online

When searching for your business name, one of the first things you're likely to come across are reviews from your customers.

As a consumer, how many times have you checked out review sites before visiting a restaurant, hotel, hair salon, attorney, or other type of local business?

If you're like most consumers, the answer is "a LOT." In fact, the internet is the first place people go to get as much information as they can before spending their money with a new business.

As a business owner, are you taking steps to ensure that your potential customers have a great first impression when checking out your business online?

Are you taking steps to actively generate more reviews from your customers and secure your online image and reputation?

If not, you are potentially losing a lot of customers – and revenue.

Unfortunately, many businesses today are ignoring what their customers are saying about them online, which is a huge mistake. Even worse, most of them are not encouraging their customers to leave online reviews for them.

Approximately 90% of consumers claim that online reviews influence their buying decisions. This means that if your business has negative reviews – and hardly any positive ones – they’re skipping right over you and going with your competitors.

As you’ve probably noticed there are a lot of review sites on the web, such as:

- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Google Local
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Yelp.com
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Angie’s List
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> TripAdvisor
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Yahoo Local
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Citysearch
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> ... and many more

Thanks to these sites, the power of customer “opinion” has never been stronger. They serve as the ultimate platform to give consumers a place to share their honest, non-biased opinions about businesses... as well as a place for consumers who are looking for businesses to get an honest, non-biased opinion.

In other words, your existing customers are giving your potential customers an inside peak into your products, services, and business.

Has your business claimed your listings on these sites? If so, are you consistently monitoring what your customers are saying? Do you have a solid plan in place to increase the amount of reviews you receive so you can build your company’s online reputation?

If not, here’s why you SHOULD...

## Facts & Statistics about Online Customer Reviews

When review sites started to surface on the web, many companies failed to assess the impact they would eventually have on their ability to generate new leads and new customers.

However, customer reviews are extremely valuable and powerful because they:

- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Offer Prospects Unbiased Opinions
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Increase Credibility, Trust, & Authority
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Boost Conversion Rates
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Result in Better Local Search Engine Rankings
- <sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Ultimately Increase Sales & Profits

Here's why:

<sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> **75% of people don't believe that companies tell the truth in advertisements.** Advertising allows you to pat yourself on the back and tell everyone how great you are. But the fact is that consumers trust what other people say about your business more than they trust what you say about your business.

<sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> **90% of consumers say online reviews impact their buying decisions.** Once they've decided that they need or want a specific product or service, the very last step is to choose a business to fulfill that need or want. But before they do, they want to see how other consumers feel. If they don't like what they see in this critical point of the purchasing process, they move on to your competitors.

<sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> **79% of consumers trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations.** Basically, online customer reviews act as the new-age "word-of-mouth." Consumers no longer have to ask their personal circle for their opinions about businesses. Instead, they can simply go online to see how the masses feel about your business.

<sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> **73% of consumers say positive customer reviews make them trust a business more.** Trust is a huge factor when it comes to selecting a company to do business with. A negative review can instantly kill any level of trust, while positive reviews help to remove any doubt – leading your prospects closer to the purchase.

<sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> **Companies with positive reviews can convert 183% more new business than companies with negative or no reviews.** This further solidifies the fact that consumers place a lot of value in online reviews when choosing to spend money with companies. Speaking of “no reviews,” only 2% of those who seek out reviews are likely to use a business with no reviews or ratings.

<sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> **Businesses can see an increase in sales of up to 58% thanks to good reviews.** Your customer reviews can have a direct impact on your ability to generate profits and revenue. So obviously, the more good reviews you, the better off your business will perform.

<sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> **80% of consumers change their minds about a purchase based only on negative online reviews.** Again, once the trust is gone, so are your prospects in most cases. If you have more negative reviews than positive ones, most consumers will pass you by.

<sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> **On average, one negative review can cost you 30 customers.** It doesn't take a lot of negative reviews to cost you customers. Many studies have shown that businesses have lost sales based on just ONE negative review. No business is perfect; in fact, even consumers expect a negative review here and there. However, you have to have a lot of positive reviews to help offset the negative ones.

<sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> **7 in 10 consumers who read reviews share them with friends, family and colleagues.** This intensifies the impact of your reviews, which is great if most of your reviews are great; not so much if your overall review ratings are negative.

## **The Serious Disconnect Between Business Owners and Consumers**

Despite these statistics and the obvious buying habits and decisions made by consumers, many small business owners still do not recognize the importance of online reviews and their reputations.

In fact, a lot of businesses avoid the topic altogether as if they're hoping it will just go away... but that's very unlikely. So instead of ignoring reviews, it's time to embrace and leverage them for success.

*Some shocking studies show that:*

- Only half of small business owners think positive online reviews are important.
- Most small business owners aren't receiving nor asking for online reviews.
- Despite the low number of reviews that small businesses are receiving, only 13% of owners are approaching their customers about posting reviews.
- The biggest reason cited for not approaching customers about giving reviews is "I haven't thought about it" (43%)
- 24% of small business owners don't even know if they receive online reviews.
- Small business owners don't effectively leverage customers' online reviews. Only 14% of survey respondents post customers' reviews on their websites.

## **How Online Reviews Impact Search Engine Rankings**

Not only do online customer reviews help your potential customers form an opinion about your business, but they also impact your search engine placement.

That's because Google strives to give users the best results possible. For instance, when someone types in "Chiropractor in Nashville," they pull data from review sites to give users a wider range of choices.

Usually, those chiropractors with the most and best reviews will show up high on the list. One reason for this is that review site listings can help the search engines verify that your business is real.

While no one can nail down the exact algorithms that Google and other search engines use to display results, some studies suggest that these 4 factors are likely to impact how you will rank:

1. **Quantity:** the more customer reviews you have, the more relevance placed on your business, which results in higher search engine rankings.
2. **Ratings:** positive reviews are more favorable than negative ones. Just to be clear, you are not penalized for having negative reviews, but the more positive reviews you have, the better.
3. **Consistency:** businesses that get reviews on a regular basis tend to receive higher rankings than those with an occasional review here and there.
4. **Freshness:** recent reviews are weighed more heavily than old ones.

Customer reviews will send signals to the search engines that your business is relevant, popular, alive, and kicking; therefore, you should be ranked higher than your less active competitors.

## **NEGATIVE Online Customer Reviews: The Good & The Bad**

Before we jump into how to get more customer reviews, let's discuss the most-feared aspect of reviews for most businesses: NEGATIVE REVIEWS.

No matter how great your business is, negative reviews can surface at any time. Unfortunately, they don't go away and they have a powerful influence on whether or not a prospect will do business with you.

Studies suggest that many businesses have lost potential customers due to having just ONE negative review. More than likely, they didn't have any positive reviews to go along with it (or very few).

When consumers read negative reviews, they automatically put up a defense against companies, products, and services – whether the review is genuine or not. They immediately think, “that will be my experience with the business too.”

However, getting one or two negative reviews is not all bad – when you have some positive ones to help buffer the blow. In fact, it’s expected that every business will get a negative review at some point because it’s impossible to satisfy every consumer.

Some people actually find that businesses with a couple of negative reviews are more reputable than those with 100% 5-star reviews.

Therefore, you should focus on getting more reviews from your customers; as long as your product or service is good, you will eventually have a nice number of positive reviews posted online that other consumers will trust.

The important thing is that you understand how to handle the negative reviews professionally.

*Why do people leave negative reviews?*

In most cases, it’s simply because they were not satisfied with the product or service. Therefore, they use review sites and social media as a means to vent their frustrations about their experience.

*How should you handle negative reviews?*

Honestly, it’s really not that hard to diffuse an angry customer and turn their negative complaint into a POSITIVE. In fact, 95% of unhappy customers will return if an issue is resolved quickly and efficiently.

The bad news is that most small businesses aren’t effectively managing their online reviews; so instead of doing what they can to save their unhappy customers, they’re losing them for life.

When responding to negative reviews:

- <sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Don’t lose your cool – respond professionally without anger
- <sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Apologize and let them know that you understand
- <sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Resolve the issue at hand promptly – don’t wait weeks or months
- <sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Be polite and show empathy so everyone can see that you care
- <sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Take the issue offline after you’ve responded publicly



Keep in mind that some people can never be satisfied – no matter what you do. As long as you handle the issue to the best of your ability, your job is done.

## **Why Having NO Online Customer Reviews is NOT Good**

Some businesses seem to think they have it made because they don't have any reviews at all posted online. But the fact is that consumers skip over businesses with no reviews almost as much as those with bad reviews.

Why?

They're skeptical. In most cases, it's simply because there's no insight into that business one way or another. They think that the company is irrelevant because there's nothing to say about them; so they move on.

When they see *some* type of review, they're at least comforted in the fact that people are talking about your business. They need this "social proof" to give them an indication of whether they will be satisfied or disappointed.

If your business does not have any reviews at all, you have some work to do. It's time to start filling up your review pages with honest reviews from your customers.

## **Ways to Get More Positive Customer Reviews**

Many small business owners can be uneasy about asking customers for reviews; most of them worry that they will annoy and turn-off their happy customers.

However, this is not true in most cases. Consumers LIKE the fact that businesses want their feedback. Most "happy" customers don't leave reviews because they just forget about it in the wrath of their everyday busy lives.

Since online reviews can literally impact the number of new customers coming through your doors, it's time to overcome the awkwardness of encouraging customer reviews.

Unfortunately, angry, frustrated customers are a lot more likely to leave a review online than satisfied customers; which really isn't fair to you – but it's a reality.

This is why businesses should be actively encouraging their satisfied customers to leave reviews; reputation marketing should be a normal part of your overall marketing strategy just like all other methods you're using.

Ideally, every satisfied customer could bring you *more* customers just by posting their opinions online. If you're not encouraging this, you're missing a MAJOR opportunity to build trust and boost sales.

But the big question is "HOW?"

Even savvy business owners who understand the importance of online customer reviews get stuck here. They KNOW how critical reviews are, but have no idea how to go about asking their customers to leave them.

Here are some tips to help get you started on the right track:

1. **Good Old-Fashioned Customer Service:** Never underestimate the power of great customer service and doing everything you can to make sure your customers are happy. A great product combined with great service is the first critical step in your quest for more positive online feedback.

Also make sure your staff is on the same page when it comes to your service expectations. They are on the frontline representing your company; and in many cases, it's the actions of employees that lead to some of the negative reviews posted by consumers.

In addition, create a well-defined plan to deal with unhappy customers to put out any potential fires before they start. If someone expresses that they're disappointed, frustrated, or angered by your product or service, make an attempt to solve it on the spot before they leave a nasty online review.

2. **Claim Your Online Local Listings & Review Site Listings:** Sites like Yelp, Google+ Local, CitySearch, and others are web-based services that help people find great local businesses. When searching for businesses in their area online, these listings will often come up in the results.

Most businesses are already listed in these directories even if they have not claimed or verified those listings.

If this is the case, it's not likely that you will come up very high in the results; and the information on your listing could be all wrong. By claiming your listings, you are letting the search engines know that this is your business by filling it out completely and accurately.

Claim your listing on as many sites as possible because everyone has their favorite review sites; so it makes sense for your business to have a presence and engage on all of them.

To help, you can use [getlisted.org](http://getlisted.org) or have a professional reputation management specialist help you out since they are the experts.

Once your listings are claimed and verified, consumers will feel more inclined to leave reviews for you. Going forward, it is critical that you read and respond to what people are saying about you on these sites.

3. **Put Links/Images to Review Sites on Your Website:** While external review sites are great, why not use your website to alert your visitors about your listings? Create a review section or page on your site where you can display some of your direct customer reviews and/or reviews from third-party. Don't forget to utilize some space on your home page to ensure most of your visitors actually see this information.

Many review sites have badges that you can link to your review pages; use these to capture the attention of your visitors.

This is an indirect way to encourage them to click through from your website to read your reviews; as well as inspire your satisfied customers to actually leave reviews.

Many of them probably don't even know that you have a Google+ Local page or Yelp listing. By making them aware that you do, you will drastically increase your chances of getting more reviews from them.

Be sure to include a call to action telling your visitors what you want them to do, which is to check out your reviews.

4. **Create a Review Space on Your Website to Collect and Showcase Reviews:** You are not limited to using third-party review sites to help build your online reputation.

You can actually have a section on your website dedicated to collecting and displaying private reviews and testimonials from your customers.

This is something that you, or your online marketing consultant, would manage and post to your site. You have full control over which reviews will be posted, as well as how many you want to display.

There are many different ways to accomplish this, including different types of software that can make this process easier.

Displaying your reviews on your website can be extremely powerful in converting some of your visitors into new paying customers.

5. **Simply ASK Your Customers for Reviews:** Many businesses shy away from asking their customers for reviews, which is not a good idea as mentioned before. But if you don't ask, you will not receive in most cases.

Of course, there are some mistakes you should avoid when implementing a plan to gain reviews from customers. Otherwise, you could do a lot more damage than good when it comes to your reputation.

For instance:

<sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Don't pressure anyone to leave reviews; the keyword is to "encourage" reviews, so be passive in your approach

<sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Don't pester anyone to leave reviews; don't make it a habit to ask over and over and over again as this could be a turn-off

<sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Don't pay, bribe, or offer incentives to anyone to leave reviews; you want sincere, honest reviews only. Some businesses do actively offer incentives, but just be careful you are following the guidelines of the review site in question

<sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Don't write fake reviews and don't ask others to write fake reviews; consumers can usually smell this a mile away which could seriously hurt your company's reputation

<sup>35</sup><sub>17</sub> Don't tell anyone HOW to review you – for instance, don't tell them to rate you at 5 stars; if they're completely satisfied, they will

What are some ways you can actually ask for reviews?

6. **Ask Customers for a Review at the Point of Sale:** Asking for reviews while at your establishment can boost the likelihood that they will leave one. When a consumer is emotionally charged about receiving a great product or service, asking them to leave you a review can be the icing on the cake.

Train your staff to occasionally ask customers to leave reviews. You can also put signs on your tables, a note at the checkout counter, on receipts, etc... which tells customers to check out your reviews on the various review sites, as well as ask them to tell the world what they think about you.

7. **Ask for Reviews in Surveys:** If you're doing a survey, it's the perfect time to ask those surveyors to review your business; they go hand-in-hand. After surveying your business, it's almost a natural step to leave you a review; provided that you ask them to do it and make it easy for them to do so (such as providing a link to your review listings at the end of the survey).
8. **Ask for Reviews in Your Emails:** If you have an email list, you should add a link to your review sites when you send out emails. This will help you show off reviews as well as ask for new ones.

Many people tend to forget to leave reviews when they're satisfied with a business. Email is a good way to remind them. For instance, whenever you send a thank you email out to your new customers, this is a great time to ask for feedback about their experience.

9. **Ask for Reviews in Direct Mail:** If you have a direct mail campaign that goes out to your existing customers, it's also a great way to get reviews from your customers. Regardless of what you are promoting in your mail, it's a great opportunity to shed light on the fact that you would love to get their opinions about your products and/or services.
10. **Ask Your Social Media Followers and Fans:** They already love you; if not, they wouldn't be following you on social media. So this is a great opportunity to build more positivity surrounding your brand.

These days, many consumers actually go to social media specifically looking for reviews about businesses.

In fact, some research shows that being active on sites like Facebook and Twitter actually leads to more favorable feedback posted online from customers. Just be sure to stay active on your accounts and engage with your fans and followers on a consistent basis to build a trusting relationship.

Not only is social media a great place to ask for and show off reviews, but it's the perfect place to collect them as well. Some social media sites even have apps that will help you collect customer reviews right there on the spot.

So it's important to ask your audience to let you know how you're doing every now and then right on your social pages; this way, you will also impress those who are checking you out on social media because they will see that you care about what your customers think.

Facebook, Twitter, and Google+ actually allow you to re-share content that people post on your pages; so if you get some great customer feedback, turn around and re-share it with your entire following. This could have a huge impact on your ability to convert some of those leads into actual customers.

11. **Respond to Both Positive and Negative Reviews:** Responding to your reviews actually shows your audience that your main goal is customer satisfaction. This is true for both negative and positive reviews.

When your prospects see you respond to negative reviews, it builds trust by showing them that you are trying to correct the situation.

When your satisfied customers leave good reviews, it's refreshing for others to see that you acknowledge and thank them. This could also lead to others leaving reviews without you even having to ask.

12. **Use QR Codes:** Mobile devices are being used by millions of people to read local business reviews. In fact, most mobile users are actually looking to do business right away when searching for businesses using

their devices. So if they can see that you have a positive online reputation, more of those hot leads are likely to come your way.

Mobile devices can also be used to easily collect more reviews and direct potential customers to your listings. You've probably noticed that most of your customers are glued to their smartphones while in your establishment. Since they have the internet right there, it's a good time to ask them to review your company.

One way to do so is by using QR codes with a call to action that reads something like "Check out what our customers are saying about us on Yelp" or "Let us know what you think about our products on Google."

After scanning the QR code with their smartphones, your customers and prospects will be sent directly to your review pages.

You can place these – and any other forms of call to action - just about anywhere you want. For instance, you can place these inside your business establishment, on marketing materials, receipts, and more.

13. **Simplify the Process for Your Customers:** People today are busy so they could use a little hand-holding when it comes to leaving customer reviews. So be sure to tell them exactly which review sites you're listed on, and as stated before, provide direct links to get there. Some businesses even give out instructions on how to leave reviews on certain sites, which is not a bad idea. Just remember not to be overbearing about it and simply offer help. Your customers who are not so internet savvy would appreciate that extra step.

As you can see, your online reputation is now a critical part of your business growth. Without that great first impression, you will struggle to capture the attention of online consumers who are looking for what you have to offer.

If you have more negative reviews than positive ones – or no reviews at all – it's time for you to start taking control of your ability to profit from the new way consumers are choosing companies to do business with.

Even if you have mostly positive reviews, you should still strive to keep the momentum going by encouraging your customers to leave reviews. Not only will this help you brand's reputation, but it could result in a significant increase in revenue over time.

The internet is a very massive place and customer reviews are just ONE facet of managing your reputation. It is critical that you consistently stay on top of what is being said about your business, responding to those mentions, and correcting any negativity that could be crippling your success.

If you are ready to take TOTAL control of your online image, contact me at for a free consultation.

*Greg C Johnson*



Email: [greg@familyofficebenefits.com](mailto:greg@familyofficebenefits.com)

<http://familyofficebenefits.com>

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