



ReviewPro Guide: How to Respond to Online Reviews

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Why review responses are so important

"In my experience, hotels that reply to all feedback - positive and negative - engage the most people become most successful. Responding to all reviews shows you're listening and caring about what the guest thought."

That comes from a recent conversation I had with Michele Perry , Director of Communications at TripAdvisor. Much is said about the social web providing opportunities for "conversations" - but you have to remember that any conversation goes two ways.

If guests are writing about you online, then you also need to be carrying part of the conversation. You need to pick up on what they're saying, and continue the conversation from there.

Hotel operations manager and blogger Michael Hraba says this:

"You need to respond to every single review that goes up in regards to your property. You can't reply to just one, because you will look defensive. You can't reply to negative ones only, because you will look even more defensive and possibly convey a negative overall image.

Don't think of them as some task, or problem. This is a fantastic opportunity to speak to potential guests...voyeurs reading the reviews, and searching for hotels in your specific area. Every word you say, and how you react, is to be scrutinized by future (potential) guests. It is an amazing way to speak about your property, to reinforce your brand, and to really get your hooks into guests."

For these reasons, I recommend responding to every single guest review you receive online. This guide will explain practical steps to take in doing this.

Where can I respond to reviews?

Not every review website permits management responses. Here's a chart with the ones that allow you to respond to reviews publically:

Websites that allow management responses to reviews

AlphaRooms	Picasa
City Search	Qype
Expedia	TravelPost
flickr	TripAdvisor
Global Hotel Review	Trivago
Holiday Watchdog	Venere
HolidayCheck	Vinivi
HolidaysUncovered	Yelp
Hotels.com	YouTube
LateRooms	Zoover

See the appendix to this guide for a detailed list of over 50 review sites with URLs and information on which ones allow hoteliers to respond.

For websites that do not allow you to respond to reviews on the site, I recommend using other channels to resolve issues and enhance your reputation. If possible, try to resolve complaints using email or a telephone call if you can identify the person leaving the message.

Basic tips for responding to reviews

Do...

- Thank the reviewer for the feedback.
- Respond to any positive comments.
- Apologize for any legitimate negative experience.
- Explain the steps you'll take to prevent that from happening again.
- Allow the guest to contact you offline if follow-up discussion is needed.

Don't...

- Take it personally. Avoid angry, abusive responses—or any type of personal attack.
- Question the reviewer's legitimacy. (Fake reviews do happen from time to time, but they can be very difficult to prove and it's better to avoid this accusation.)
- Reply with a discount or coupon (this indirectly encourages abuse).
- Use corporate-speak that contains no meaningful information. "We are sorry to hear about your inconvenience, and appreciate your comments here. We are happy that you have spoken up so that we may better our property. We will be working diligently to make your stays much more enjoyable in the future."

If I had a poor experience at a hotel, a generic type of management response would do absolutely nothing for me. *I want specifics!* It's unlikely I would return in the future to see if my stay is "much more enjoyable."

Basic tips for responding to reviews

If Something is Broken, Fix It

When a hotel has a poor ranking on TripAdvisor, it often reflects problems with the property — grounds, staffing, cleanliness, service, or something else. When you're listening, you'll know what you need to fix. Some have said that for every one person that complains, one hundred people will be complaining privately to their friends.

Of course, not all reviews are created equal. As any hotel marketing manager will confirm, negative reviews typically come in two forms:

1. Constructive criticism - these guests leave fair and balanced feedback, highlighting the good and bad points of their stay. Often, you'll be able to extract insights you can act on from their reviews.
2. Rants - some people just have an attitude problem, and are just about impossible to please. You can try to correct factual errors, but you may just have to avoid giving them much online attention.

If you receive consistently negative reviews, fix what's broken. There's no getting around this. Fundamental flaws that repeatedly leave guests unsatisfied cannot be glossed over with a slick marketing campaign. That's denial at best and borders on unethical.

Why don't you...

- Train or change your staff?
- Bring in a consultant?
- Hire a designer—or maybe just a plumber for that leaky sink?!

Do whatever it takes with the resources you have.

Basic tips for responding to reviews

Publicize all improvements made

If you made the changes, you need to go back to the audience and let them know you listened and acted on their suggestions.

- Tell the guests directly—in your replies on TripAdvisor and other guest review Web sites.
- Tell the story of how you did it—through videos posted to YouTube or interviews published on your hotel blog.
- Tell the media—with a press release or full-scale PR campaign (depending on the changes you made).

For a good example of this, search Google for *"100 Starbucks ideas in action."*

Could you publish a list of changes and improvements you made based on guest feedback?

How to respond to positive reviews

Some think that if you receive a positive review, there's nothing to reply to. But that's missing an opportunity. I encourage all hotels to respond to positive reviews by:

- Thanking the reviewer for taking the time to share their experience
- Confirm what they enjoyed (reinforcing the positive)
- Use the opportunity to congratulate your staff on providing excellent service (Do this by name, if possible)

Repeating a positive review helps introduce more people that aspect of your hotel experience. If one person liked it, chances are good others will as well.

Affirming happy guests often starts a positive feedback loop - encouraging them to share their story with others.

How to respond to negative reviews

Even if you run one of the best hotels in the world, chances are good that a negative review will eventually show up. To limit the damage negative reviews can have on your reputation, create a solid action plan to deal with these reviews. Many times negative reviews require action at an operational level, so it helps to have a system for sharing this information with the management team. I recommend creating a review response policy guide that includes:

- Your target response time (eg, within 24 hours)
- Who on your team should take ownership of the response
- The process used - and steps involved - for resolving issues
- How the incident should be documented (for records or future staff training)

Additionally, I mentioned the following items earlier in this guide, but they deserve a little more elaboration.

Avoid taking negative reviews personally. Angry, abusive responses—or any type of personal attack—could affect what others think of your professionalism. Everyone knows some guests are impossibly difficult, so there is no need to get emotional in your responses.

Avoid questioning the reviewer's legitimacy. Fake reviews do happen from time to time, but they can be very difficult to prove and it's better to avoid this accusation. If you have reason to suspect a review is fraudulent, report it directly to the review website. If the review site does not respond to you, try responding to the guest using your records to verify your case.

Avoid automatically replying with a discount or coupon. I've seen this approach lead to abuse when not used with discretion.

Avoid corporate-speak that contains no meaningful information. Generic comments like “We're sorry to hear about your experience” can be viewed by others as you avoiding responsibility. Instead, own up to your mistakes and give concrete action steps you took to prevent the situation from happening again.

Case Study: The Landmark London

The Landmark London aims to reply to any negative reviews they may receive.

The hotel does not attempt to hide or ignore negative reviews. Rather, they choose to post a management response where possible. This gives the hotel the chance to explain their view of things. "People see that we take the time to respond and are aware of any issues", explains Joi Chuku, Marketing Manager at The Landmark London.

**Management response from Executive_Office222,
Manager**

(Management representative)

Oct 13, 2010

Thank you for taking the time to send your review of your stay at The Landmark London. We are very pleased that you enjoyed the facilities in our Hotel and the surrounding areas.

Your point about having flat screen TVs in the bedrooms is very valid and we are currently undergoing an upgrade of our TV system in all the guest bedrooms. This will be completed by Spring 2011 along with new mini bars and safes. We hope you will have an opportunity to return and enjoy The Landmark again in the future.

Note: To read more about The Landmark London, go to reviewpro.com/blog to see the full case study.

How to respond to negative reviews

A slightly unusual approach to negative feedback

I've even seen some hotel managers take a more radical approach to negative reviews. They display them on their websites to qualify their audience, discouraging people who aren't a good fit for their hotel, and encouraging their target audience.

For example, if you've found that guests with young children aren't the best match for your boutique hotel, post a review from a family that says the hotel was nice – except there weren't many activities for the kids. This way you do everyone a service: from the family looking for the best hotel to your guests who love a quiet environment.

Unfulfilled expectations: the #1 source of negative feedback

If you want to avoid receiving negative feedback, make sure you're setting guest expectations at an appropriate level in your sales and marketing communications. Many hotels encounter problems when they hype up their properties online, and the guest experiences something different.

A good way around this is to avoid using superlatives in your marketing, and instead highlight guest reviews that are very positive. By letting your guests become the spokespeople, others will find these messages more credible.

Working in New York's competitive, sophisticated hotel market, Adele Gutman knows the importance of exceeding expectations. Vice president of marketing for HKHotels, Gutman says merely satisfying your guests' needs won't get you anywhere. "If you want your guests to shower your hotel with good word-of-mouth, both on and offline, you have got to wow them with exceptional service and a unique experience that leaves them with something to talk about," she says. "If they get home and their friends, colleagues and associates ask them how their trip was, you want them to be able to say, 'You'll never believe what an awesome hotel we stayed at. They had this, that and the other thing, and the people there – that was the best part of all.'"

On the flip side, creating false expectations by planting fake reviews on sites like TripAdvisor is a dangerous move, warns Mariquel Waingarten - founder of Tailor Made Hotel in Buenos Aires. "If you create false reviews, people could come to your hotel and be disappointed, and that is the worst thing that could happen. A customer with failed expectations is impossible to satisfy."

Dealing with Negative Reviews FAQs

Can I remove negative reviews?

Yes and no, this depends on the circumstances. TripAdvisor for example lets you start over with a clean slate if there was a change in management, but not if you did a renovation.

Can I contact a guest to resolve a problem?

Usually you can only use a website's management response function to publish a reply. You may try leaving a customer service phone number to encourage offline resolution.

I think a competitor is writing negative reviews.

I recommend you contact the review site directly, and explain your reason for concern.

Can I ask someone to remove their negative review?

Most sites do not allow this. You'll need to follow the steps outlined earlier to improve your reputation.

Twitter reviews and mentions

Twitter reviews often take a very different format, but they're no less important. Often people mentioning your hotel on Twitter will do so quickly, in passing. But even a quick tweet can have an impact on your online reputation, so it's important to have listening mechanisms in place to capture this.

It's a good practice to respond to every single mention of your hotel on Twitter. When someone says something about you - good or bad - send an "@" reply to the author. For negative mentions you might connect them with someone who can resolve the situation.

For positive Twitter mentions, try re-tweeting so the rest of your followers can see the positive feedback.

To provide the best service on Twitter, many hotels use tools to auto-follow every person that follows their Twitter account. This way, you can communicate through direct messages if the guest prefers not to have the discussion take place on the public website.

Case Study: Kimpton Hotels

Look how Kimpton Hotels used a single tweet – along with some compassion – to turn a complaint into a very happy guest:

Wow my first ever disappointment with @kimpton. Hate hotels that hit my credit card for \$100/nite for 'incidentals' that I won't use.

@Jeff_Dodd Hearing that we've disappointed you is like a dagger through r hearts, Jeff. We'll look into this & let u know what we find out.

@Kimpton rec'd call from billing office. Will chat tomorrow. All is well. THANK YOU. Palomar Chicago is beautiful. Will post pix soon.

Case Study: Apex Hotels

Apex Hotels provides customer service on Twitter to guests before they arrive, and answers any questions they may have. Sam Weston, E-Marketing Manager at Apex Hotels explains their strategy:

"We see Twitter as an invaluable online channel to engage with our guests, hear their feedback and provide responses to any questions. It reinforces our belief of the importance of online feedback in general and our overall company ethos: to constantly and consistently improve our brand based on what our guests want.

We quite often go a little bit beyond their requests. We watch Twitter for terms like 'does anyone know' + 'Edinburgh' to try and provide general assistance to those visiting Edinburgh, whether they're staying at our hotels or not. An example tweet we respond to might be "Does anyone know what time the Castle opens in Edinburgh?" While answering this doesn't provide any immediate business benefit, we see it as an excellent way to both introduce someone to our brand and help promote the cities in which our hotels are based: London, Edinburgh & Dundee."

Crossing my fingers that the weather in Edinburgh improves ahead of arrival on Sunday. Staying at @ApexHotels Waterloo Place again :-D

@ [redacted] Weather looking improved for Sunday so fingers crossed! BBC 5 day forecast: <http://bbc.in/fdnVJ9> ^SW

Now that's what I call customer service @ApexHotels !! Thank you.

@ [redacted] Our pleasure! If only we could guarantee the weather! :) ^SW

The best way to reward reviewers

Because reviews play such an important part in your business, how can you reward the people that take time to promote your hotel in social media? The best way to reward reviewers is to turn them into your online spokespeople.

Give attention and recognition in your own online presence. If you want people to promote you, promote them. Turn the spotlight on your most active supporters.

Reward your brand ambassadors with attention.

Re-tweet their comments, interview them for your blog, post their material to your Facebook page. Highlight them in your email newsletters, and consider inviting them to guest-post an article on your website.

It amazes me how some businesses expect customers to spend time creating free promotional material for them – without even recognizing their efforts.

How do you support the people writing about you?

Appendix: List of Review Sites

Source Name	URL	Can Hotelier Reply to Review
Ab-in-den-Urlaub	www.ab-in-den-urlaub.de/	No
ActiveHotels	www.activehotels.com	No
AlphaRooms	www.alpharooms.com	Yes
Atrapalo	www.atrapalo.com	Privately only
Bookassist	www.bookassist.com	No
Booking.com	www.booking.com	No
Cheqqr	www.cheqqr.nl	No
Ciao	www.ciao.com	No
City Search	www.citysearch.com	Yes
Easy to Book	www.easytobook.com	No
Ebookers	www.ebookers.com	No
Expedia	www.expedia.com	Yes
FastBooking	www.fastbooking.com	No
flickr	www.flickr.com	Yes
Fodor's	www.fodors.com	No
Frommer's	www.frommers.com	No
Global Hotel Review	www.globalhotelreview.com	Yes
Holiday Watchdog	www.holidaywatchdog.com	Yes
HolidayCheck	www.holidaycheck.com	Yes
HolidaysUncovered	www.holidays-uncovered.co.uk	Yes

Appendix: List of Review Sites

Source Name	URL	Can Hotelier Reply to Review
Hotel.de	www.hotel.de	No
Hotelcheck	www.hotelcheck.de	No
Hotelpia	www.hotelpia.com	No
Hotels Combined	www.hotelscombined.com	No
Hotels.com	www.hotels.com	Yes
HotelSearch	www.hotelsearch.com	No
HRS	www.hrs.com	No
IgoUgo	www.igougo.com	No
LateRooms	www.laterooms.com	Yes
Myhotel.de	www.myhotel.de	No
Orbitz	www.orbitz.com	No
Picasa	picasaweb.google.com	Yes
Priceline	www.priceline.com	No
Qype	www.qype.co.uk	Yes
Splendia	www.splendia.com	No
Super Break	www.superbreak.com	No
Tablet.	www.tablethoteles.com	No
ThomasCook	www.thomascook.com	No
Thomson	www.thomson.co.uk	No
Travbuddy	www.travbuddy.com	No

Appendix: List of Review Sites

Source Name	URL	Can Hotelier Reply to Review
Travelocity	www.travelocity.com	No
TravelPost	www.travelpost.com	Yes
TripAdvisor	www.tripadvisor.com	Yes
TripTake	www.triptake.com	No
Trivago	www.trivago.com	Yes
TUI	www.tui.com	No
Venere	www.venere.com	Yes
Vinivi	http://www.vinivi.com/	Yes
Virtual Tourist	www.virtualtourist.com	No
Weg.de	http://www.weg.de/	No
Yahoo! Travel	http://travel.yahoo.com/	No
Yelp	www.yelp.com	Yes
YouTube	www.youtube.com	Yes
Zoover	http://www.zoover.com	Yes

What's next?

Responding effectively requires you to first have a powerful listening system in place. Use a tool like [ReviewPro](#) that allows you track 50 million reviews in 8 languages from 55 of the most relevant OTAs and review sites.

Next, define your online review response policy. Make sure it covers the expected response time, content, and any follow-up actions. Include some positive examples of review responses done well, so your staff can learn how to do this right.

Finally, appoint an online brand ambassador to manage and delegate action items. Having one person responsible for the communication helps ensure nothing gets overlooked.

If you have any questions about this process, don't hesitate to contact me:

Email: josiah@hotelmarketingstrategies.com

Twitter: [@reviewpro](#) / [@HmarketingHelp](#)



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About

ReviewPro

[ReviewPro](#) offers the most complete global solution for online reputation and social media management for the hotel sector. The company offers hoteliers a web based analytical tool that enables them to maximize direct reservations and online distribution revenue as well as increase market share. By providing invaluable analysis, business intelligence, competitive benchmarking and reporting functionality, ReviewPro gives hotels the means to improve guest satisfaction and make better decisions on where to focus marketing resources and sales activities.



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