TrustLink.org

How to Fix a Bad Yelp Rating

Guide for Home Improvement & Professional Services

Many service businesses consider Yelp a hostile environment. Home improvement and professional services companies complain that scathing reviews without merit can live forever while 5 star reviews from happy customers are "filtered" from ratings.

Worse, Yelp deletes reviews related to company-sponsored rewards and solicitations. This practice may work for restaurants and bars, but it penalizes "dental" industries where success is defined as operating painlessly, or not being noticed at all.

"Most of my bankruptcy clients think I walk on water, but don't want to be linked to my service. The only unsolicited reviews I have on Yelp are from the few clients who didn't like their results."

Consumers that write epic reviews with photos of Texas BBQ and shiatsu massage can't find a keyboard when it comes to oil changes, roof repairs or bankruptcy attorneys – until there's a problem. So, plumbers, bail bondsmen and mortgage brokers may look terrible on Yelp, even if they give great service.

"… several hundred emergency calls last winter, must have cleared every other frozen sewage line in the valley. On time and budget…the only Yelp review we got was from a guy whose thawed pipes flooded his second story. "

Many review systems consider factors like longevity, customer volume, price points, complaint responsiveness and complaint rationality when determining ratings. Yelp does not. Their main concern appears to be whether consumers posted their reviews without company encouragement.

"…asked whether his <u>wife</u> would be attending. He hung up and posted a (1 star!) review saying our company doesn't respect the gay community."

"…sent letters to customers asking for feedback. Yelp deleted all but one: George A. claimed we overbilled for bullion sale escrow services. I went back almost 12 years and couldn't find a customer George A. The kicker is, we don't offer escrow services."

Fair or otherwise, bad Yelp ratings can hurt the bottom line.

❖ **Problem**: millions of consumers use Yelp and other review sites to choose service providers. "Dental" companies may receive poor ratings simply because they're busy or "no-frills". Consumers that follow Yelp may leave for smaller, high-priced upstarts with fewer complaints because they have fewer customers.

❖ **Bigger Problem**: hundreds of millions of consumers use search engines to help find service providers. Many consumers pick a few company names and Google them to learn more. When a bad Yelp rating appears prominently in search results for your company, consumers may turn away.

"…long time customer didn't know what Yelp was. She wanted to know if we changed management because we have so many complaints."

Bad Yelp rating? You're in good company. Many thousands of service businesses have voiced the same complaint.

"My (unfair) Yelp rating is like having a crazy person standing at the front door of my business, screaming at consumers to stay away."

Here are 10 proven steps you can take to improve your Yelp rating.

1) Small Businesses – Raise Topic of Reviews Tactfully with Customers

❖ If an owner or manager is part of the service/installation, a tactful face-to-face discussion can be effective. Use one of these conversation starters after a successful service:

    ❖ We really appreciate reviews in social media…

    ❖ Yelp has been a problem for us…

    ❖ Are you registered on Yelp by any chance?

❖ Happy customers will likely inquire further about how they can help. But, avoid blatant solicitations (*"Joe asked me to write a review and he was so nice I couldn't refuse"*) and rewards ("I can't wait for my free gift!"). If Yelp suspects you're soliciting or paying for reviews they may remove every questionable (good) review.

2) Larger Businesses – Use Thank You Cards and Small Gifts as a Mute Request

❖ If the company is too big for face-to-face interaction, a thank you card, or gift, accompanied by the company's review page addresses can work e.g. (https://www.trustlink.org/Reviews/Greenlight-Loans-205825230).

❖ This approach works over the long run, particularly where hundreds or thousands of customers are involved.

❖ As before, avoid direct solicitations and gifts that may look like rewards.

TrustLink.org: How to Fix a Bad Yelp Rating

3) Solicit Yelp's Help with Factual Errors and Provable Bias

❖ Talk to Yelp directly about suspicious reviews that may come from confused customers or unethical competitors. Yelp is sensitive to wildly inaccurate information and bad actors.

   ❖ *"We don't do business in Philadelphia", "Mrs. Jenkins is confused. We install custom fireplaces, not swimming pools"* and *"Marshall P. is the Sales Manager of our biggest competitor"* are good arguments.

   ❖ *"That customer is crazy and their opinion stinks"* is not.

4) Add Impressions From Many Other Sites

❖ A fast, effective way to change an online impression is to add more impressions. Remember, almost all your customers will look you up with a search engine, but fewer will do research through a review site.

❖ Review ratings in search engine results are much more important than the review sites themselves. In this case, the more review site grades, the better.

❖ Here are some other review sites with free or low cost registrations.

YP.com	TrustLink.org	Bizratings.com
Local.com	Merchantcircle.com	Insiderpages.com
Showmelocal.com		Kudzu.com

TrustLink.org: How to Fix a Bad Yelp Rating

5) Add High Ranking Impressions from Other Respected Sites

- ❖ The biggest problems with bad Yelp ratings is high visibility in search results. Dilute Yelp's impact with ratings from reliable sources that rank just as high.

- ❖ Yelp ratings are often based on a small number of reviews. Sites with lots of traffic, search engine "trust" and reviews on your company can quickly equal or surpass Yelp in search results.

- ❖ BBB, Angie's List, TrustLink and Google+ offer ratings for most service businesses. Avvo, TripAdvisor, DealerRater and HealthGrades specialize in single industries.

- ❖ Focus on one or two review sites by driving your customers to them. The sites listed here don't prohibit companies from soliciting customer reviews (as long customers aren't compensated for good reviews).

- ❖ Include links on correspondence, throughout the company website, and on thank you letters and invoices. Take advantage of free services by posting content and responding to all reviews.

TrustLink.org: How to Fix a Bad Yelp Rating

6) Address the Company's Service Problems

❖ We've assumed thus far that bad Yelp ratings are cosmetic problems, or caused by the review biases noted. However, if there are real service problems, complaints will mount up because customers aren't happy.

❖ Look for common themes in bad reviews. If the receptionist is nasty, parts are delayed, or billing errors recur, fix the problem or provide an alternative.

❖ If a problem isn't fixable, reset customer expectations with advance notice that some things are beyond your control. But, have a backup plan for that problem ready. In the event something fails, customers should feel like you're still in control and that they will be satisfied.

7) Respond to Favorable Yelp Reviews with Gratitude

❖ Your audience is the reviewer and other satisfied customers.

❖ Most companies are grateful if they've pleased a customer and are receiving public praise (if not, re-visit step 6). Accept compliments gracefully.

❖ Public gratitude is a reward for the reviewer, and may encourage other satisfied customers to step forward.

"Thank you so much for working with us, Henry. We know you had other options and we're glad you chose our team. We're proud to know you recommend us to your family and friends."

8) Respond to Unfavorable Yelp Reviews Humbly and Soberly

❖ This is your chance to show prospective customers how you handle problems.

❖ If the bad review has merit, acknowledge the errors, apologize, and offer to make good where possible.

❖ If the review is inaccurate, briefly describe the differences.

❖ Avoid attacking the reviewer or describing them as unreasonable. The goal is not to win an argument, but to show others there's another side to the story.

"Thank you for the feedback, Joan. I'm sorry we didn't meet expectations the first try. We've made some process changes and chosen a new supplier so that can't happen again. More importantly, we hope the re-work, successful completion and free services will be remembered long after the initial missteps are forgotten. Please let us know if there's anything else we can do."

9) Improve the Chances Customers' Favorable Reviews Stick on Yelp

❖ Encourage customers to write full biographies, detailed reviews and to review other businesses. The Yelp filter system penalizes first time reviewers and those without friends, followers or pictures. The system also penalizes:

❖ Generic: *"I loved the service and the price. They were so nice." vs.*

  ❖ Specific: *"They found the wiring problem and fixed it for less than $100. Then they detailed the car – which was worth about $100 all by itself.*

❖ Over-The-Top Raves: *"THE BEST MORTGAGE LENDER IN THE WORLD!" vs.*

  ❖ Factual: *"They kept us informed about the process and the risks. Where there was doubt they always had a contingency plan…"*

❖ and Sales Pitches: *"Don't waste your time with other carpenters…" vs.*

  ❖ Sober: *"We got 4 bids and they were the second highest. But, they promised to use their top crew and finish in six weeks… and they did."*

10) Monetize Yelp Losses and Create a Budget to Address the Problem

❖ In competitive industries, customers are easily scared off by a hint of bad reputation. For every prospective customer that calls and mentions a bad Yelp rating in many cases there are five to ten or more that didn't call.

❖ Assuming every call received is "saved" (no losses due to bad reputation or a bad start) the biggest losses are from calls your company doesn't get.

❖ To calculate lost gross profit in a single year use the following formula:

❖ # Calls mentioning Yelp problems x 5 (ratio of prospective customers mentioning Yelp problems to those that don't call because of them) x Close Ratio (average winning bid percentage) x Average Order Size x Average Gross Profit Ratio (gross revenue minus direct materials and labor) = Lost Gross Profit.

    ❖ See further explanation on the next page.

10) Monetize Yelp Losses and Create a Budget to Address the Problem

- ❖ Example: in 2014 three customers called for bids but expressed some hesitation due to bad Yelp reports; average close ratio = 40%; average order size = $10,000; average gross profit margin = 50%. This company lost $30,000 in 2014 due to its bad Yelp rating.

- ❖ 3 calls x 5 = 15 missed bids x 40% close ratio = 6 lost customers x $10,000/customer = $60,000 lost revenue x 50% average gross margin = $30,000 lost gross profit.

- ❖ Unfortunately, the company lost $30,000 in 2014 due to its poor Yelp rating. Worse, Yelp reviews don't go away so the company can expect to lose another $30,000 every year unless it takes action.

- ❖ Fortunately, there's a big budget in 2015 to fix the problem. Most companies will find that an investment of $20,000 or less in reputation management that earns $30,000 is a profitable investment (50% ROI).

For Additional Information and Help Fixing a Bad Yelp Rating Contact TrustLink.org

- ❖ TrustLink.org has services designed for great companies with bad Yelp ratings
  - ❖ Automatically collect and verify independent customer reviews
  - ❖ Popularize your company's TrustLink.org reviews and ratings on major search engines. Trustlink's SEO programs are guaranteed to generate first page results for the most popular search terms
  - ❖ Drive consumer traffic to custom profile pages and company websites with links and widgets
  - ❖ Include real time company TrustLink ratings on corporate websites with links and social network compatible widgets
- ❖ info@trustlink.org
- ❖ 855.364.8995