Online Reviews: The New Word of Mouth

A Guide for Managing Your Restaurant’s Reputation on Online Review Sites
Inside

Overview ................................................................................................................. 2

How can I optimize my restaurant’s presence on online review sites? ....................... 4

Should I encourage customer reviews? ........................................................................ 6

How can I monitor online reviews? ............................................................................. 8

How can I use online reviews as a business tool? .................................................... 9

How should I respond to reviews? ............................................................................. 11

Can I get problematic reviews removed? .................................................................. 15

Should I pay for advertising and other services? Will it affect my rankings? ................. 16

How can I target mobile customers? .......................................................... 17

Health scores now on Yelp in select cities ................................................................. 19

Site-seeing: Check out these popular review sites and apps ................................... 20
Word of mouth

Those three little words have always been critical for restaurants, with customers spreading the news about their dining experiences to family and friends. Today, word of mouth is more pervasive and powerful than ever due to the increasing popularity of online reviews and social media. Customers air their opinions for all to see online. Whether a guest raves or rants about your service, it’s not just a passing comment to a friend or two. Reviews may remain online for years, influencing countless potential customers. Plus, the dramatic increase in smartphones puts reviews literally in the hands of millions of Americans and international travelers as they’re deciding where to dine out.

Review sites affect consumer dining decisions. More than one-third (34 percent) of diners report that information on a peer review site is likely to factor into their decision when choosing a restaurant, according to the National Restaurant Association’s 2012 National Household Survey. Online reviews hold even more weight with frequent diners and Millennials, today’s young adults. Over half (53 percent) of 18- to 34-year-olds report that online reviews factor into their dining decisions, as do 47 percent of frequent fullservice customers.

An online search for your restaurant is likely to find not only your website, but also your restaurant’s profile page on Yelp, Urbanspoon, TripAdvisor and other review sites. Google takes this one step further. A search on Google or Google Maps embeds a link for “Google reviews” within the listing for your own website. Often, friends and acquaintances comment on their dining experiences on Facebook or their blogs.

Online reviews are particularly influential in the restaurant industry. More consumers (61 percent) have read online reviews about restaurants than any of the 18 other business categories listed in BrightLocal’s Consumer Review Survey 2013. Almost twice as many consumers reported reading restaurant reviews compared to doctor/dentist reviews, the next popular category.

Simply put: Online reviews can help make or break your business. Harvard Business School Professor Michael Luca found that a one-star increase in a Yelp rating leads to a 5 percent to 9 percent bump in revenue. Luca’s findings are based on the sales of Seattle restaurants in 2003, before the emergence of Yelp in 2004 through 2009. The impact is greatest for independent restaurants, with their market share increasing as Yelp usage increased. The research seems to indicate that online reviews can raise the profile of independent eateries, spreading the word about little-known gems.

Restaurants with an extra half-star rating on Yelp are more likely to be fully booked, according to a
A 2012 study by the University of California, Berkeley. The study looked at competing local restaurants that have a ratings difference of a half star and found that those with the higher score were fully booked 1.5 times as often as restaurants with the lower score. “Our study concluded that getting higher Yelp reviews actually caused restaurants to be more likely to be fully booked,” says co-author Michael Anderson, an associate professor of agricultural and resource economics. “The effects we estimated were not simply an artifact of the fact that better reviewed restaurants tend to be popular.”

With so much riding on your online reputation, it’s important to understand the ins-and-outs of this new word of mouth. This guide is designed to help you optimize your presence on review sites. We’ll provide tips on everything from how to harness the marketing power of review sites to how to deal with dreaded negative reviews. We’ve gone to the review sites themselves, as well as to restaurants leveraging this new medium, for answers to some of your most pressing questions.
Like 'em or hate 'em, online review sites are a reality. Sites like Yelp and Urbanspoon view themselves as a public service and will not remove your listing even upon request. “Consumers have the right to share their opinions about the experiences they’ve had,” says Morgan Remmers, Yelp’s manager of local business outreach.

The good news is that most review sites welcome input and feedback from restaurants, allowing them to post content and respond to critics at no cost. Take advantage of this opportunity. As Charlee Williamson, executive vice president for the New Orleans-based Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group notes, “It’s your brand; you want to be the one positioning it.” Follow these 10 steps to optimize your presence. Unless we’ve noted there’s a fee, these marketing tools are available at no cost.

1) Check out the sites.
Identify which sites are most relevant to your business. Major review sites featuring free restaurant listings include, but are not limited to, Yelp, Urbanspoon, TripAdvisor and Zagat. OpenTable includes reviews of restaurants that use the company’s reservations/table management solutions. Google Places offers free business listings, including reviews, which show up front-and-center in Google searches. Foodspotting.com lets consumers use photos to recommend specific restaurant dishes. Other sites such as Citysearch, CityEats and Savored operate in limited markets. Check to see if these sites feature your region.

2) Get listed.
In an age where nearly everyone goes online for information, you’ll want your restaurant included. In addition to the “traditional” review sites, make sure you are listed in Google Places. “More and more people are going to the Internet when they want information about a restaurant,” notes Lori Randall Stradtman, author of Online Reputation Management for Dummies. “It’s only a small percentage today that still rely solely on the Yellow Pages.”

3) Claim your page.
Some review sites offer businesses the opportunity to “claim” their business page or listing. You’ll need to identify and register yourself as an official business representative to lay claim. Check out the Site-Seeing section for information on how to register. By claiming your page, you’ll gain greater control over your brand image. At no cost, you’ll be able to post the information and pictures you choose to highlight. On some sites, registering as the business owner also grants you the ability to respond to reviews. Many sites, including Urbanspoon, TripAdvisor, Yelp and Google Places, also provide you access to valuable metrics about how your listings are being viewed and used.

4) Check the facts.
Make sure the basic information about your restaurant is accurate, including your address and phone number. Be sure to post your hours. This free, simple step can make the difference between whether or not customers find your restaurant. For example, consumers can search Yelp for establishments that are “Open Now.” If your hours aren’t posted, you may not appear in these search results.
5) **Link to more information and services.**

Be sure to include links to your website and Facebook page. Urbanspoon allows restaurants to also link to their Twitter feed and posts the most recent tweet. Take advantage of any opportunity to drive customers to your site, where you have more control over your brand message. Yelp even lets you track the number of clicks from its site to your website. Making a reservation can also be just a click away on many review sites, thanks to partnerships with OpenTable.

6) **Tell your story.**

Specify all the details allowed about your restaurant. Tell customers whether you have free parking, offer carryout, feature live music or are kid-friendly. List the type of cuisine and post your menu. “The more information a restaurant has, the better the chance the establishment will be selected,” says Brandi Willard, Urbanspoon’s director of communications. Google Places notes online that “extra information can match your listing to more searches, which might increase the number of views your listing gets.”

7) **Remember: A picture says a thousand words.**

Highlight your ambience and your specialties, and include an external shot to make it easier for customers to find your business. Yelp reports that consumers stay on a business listing on its site two and a half times longer when photos are featured. “Photos are a great selling tool,” says Michael Ungaro, director of strategic marketing and chief operations officer for California’s San Pedro Fish Market and Restaurant. “We love to wow customers by showing off mountains of fresh shrimp and lobster.” Arrange the shots so the most compelling ones are first, he advises. Likewise, a short video can help get your message across; there’s sometimes a fee for this feature when available.

“Photos are a great selling tool.”

Michael Ungaro, director of strategic marketing and chief operations officer for California’s San Pedro Fish Market and Restaurant

8) **Keep the content fresh.**

Update your online listings any time you change your hours, menu or offerings. Use recent photos and updates to drive traffic to your restaurant. Review each listing at least monthly to ensure everything is current.

9) **Make an announcement.**

Some sites, like Urbanspoon, allow restaurants to announce events and specials for free. Use this medium to supplement other marketing efforts, including website and Facebook posts and signage in your restaurant. Urbanspoon’s editorial team might choose to highlight your event in its newsletters.

10) **Consider discounts and deals.**

If it fits with your marketing strategy, entice customers with discounts.
Given the growing role of review sites, you’re probably wondering how you can improve your online ratings. For starters, focus on the basics of your business — food, service and ambiance. The good reviews should follow. Beyond that, remind customers about your presence on review sites as a way of encouraging them to give their feedback.

Online reputation analysts report that the quantity of reviews a business has plays a role in consumer decisions. “A 4-star rating for a company with just five reviews carries less weight than a 4-star rating from a company with 190 reviews,” reports the BrightLocal Consumer Review Survey 2013.

Rankings on some sites, such as TripAdvisor, are based not only on individual ratings but on the number and recency of reviews. With fresh reviews counting more and older reviews carrying increasingly less weight, TripAdvisor recommends that businesses actively encourage customer reviews.

Yelp advises that you simply let customers know about your presence on the site and then let the reviews grow naturally. “While you might be eager to fill your page with positive reviews, we don’t encourage you to solicit them from customers,” according to Yelp’s online information. “Positive feedback is best, and most accepted, when it comes organically from customers who have had a genuinely great experience with your business.”

You’ll need to decide how proactive to be in encouraging reviews. Here are some techniques:

- **Spread the word at your restaurant.** Use signage, window clings, flashing messages on big-screen monitors or a mention at the bottom of the check to remind customers to visit your restaurant on online review sites.

- **Send an e-mail reminder.** E-mail diners thanking them for their visit and encouraging them to review your restaurant online. TripAdvisor offers a free Review Express option that makes it easy to invite customers to write a review. Of course, that option links customers only with TripAdvisor and not the other review sites.

- **Create a modern comment card.** Print business cards that invite customers to share their opinions about your restaurant online. TripAdvisor offers businesses personalized comment cards reminding consumers to post reviews.

- **Work it with a widget.** Yelp, TripAdvisor and Urbanspoon offer widgets or badges that you can add to your website, making it easy to encourage customers to review your restaurant.

- **Inform your staff about the “ReviewerCard.”** Some active online reviewers might present a plastic ReviewerCard that notes, “I WRITE REVIEWS.” This card is not affiliated with or endorsed by any review sites, and it is granted for free to active reviewers who apply online. Provide cardholders with the same great dining experience that all customers deserve. “This card is not intended for freebies, but rather to ensure the experience goes seamlessly for everyone,” says card creator Brad Newman. The ReviewerCard’s website notes that “any attempt to bully, extort, or browbeat a business for special treatment is not accepted and is explicitly prohibited.”

- **Use incentives when appropriate.** Instagram has become a popular way to give a quick visual review of a restaurant dish. Consider creating a contest that encourages customers to post their favorite dishes. For example, The Melting Pot, with 138 units, challenged its customers to upload photos of their favorite fondue dessert to Instagram. The Tampa, Fla.-based company awarded the best picture a $100 gift card. Traditional review sites, like Yelp and Urbanspoon, discourage businesses from offering discounts or free items to encourage reviews — even if you’re not specifying the type of review.

Never step over the line of acceptable behavior when encouraging reviews. Some guidelines:
• **Focus on impartial customers and firsthand reports.** Never write reviews yourself or ask friends or employees to do so. Don’t take comment cards and enter the feedback onto an online review site yourself.

• **Never pay for a review.** Play by the rules — just as you do with all other aspects of managing your restaurant. Shortcuts usually don’t work. Aside from being unethical, paying for reviews could come back to bite you. “You don’t want to game the system,” says Lori Randall Stradtman, author of *Online Reputation Management for Dummies*. “If you’re caught, that’s terrible for your reputation.”

TripAdvisor places a large red penalty notice on the listing page of businesses with suspicious reviews. Yelp flags culprits by posting a warning message for 90 days, saying: “We caught someone red-handed trying to buy reviews for this business.” Some unscrupulous businesses have advertised on Craigslist for paid reviewers. At times, Yelp has gotten its own staffers to pose as applicants for these “ghost reviewer” positions, and has caught the businesses and slapped them with the online consumer alert warning. If you suspect that a business is manipulating the system, report it to the appropriate review site.

Yelp is fighting to maintain the integrity of positive reviews on its site.

Source: Yelp
How can I monitor online reviews?

Keep on top of what customers are saying about you online. “I strongly believe in monitoring what people are saying about your brand,” says Lori Randall Stradtman, author of Online Reputation Management for Dummies. “You want to be in a position to take control of your reputation so that a few people with sour grapes can’t sully your name.”

Delegate the responsibility to someone who will make the time to follow the information flow. It could be a general manager, marketing manager or a social media specialist. Otherwise, with all the daily responsibilities within the walls of your restaurant, it’s easy to overlook what’s going on online.

Monitoring strategies, listed below, range from free alternatives to sophisticated paid services.

• **Sign up for instant notifications.** Some review sites, including Yelp and TripAdvisor, offer businesses the free option of receiving e-mail notification every time a review is posted. Be sure to sign up for this service and to appoint someone on your existing staff to actively monitor these notifications.

• **Set up Google Alerts.** This is another free way to keep tabs on what’s being said about your business online, including on review sites. Go to www.google.com/alerts to create a search query. Google will e-mail you when it finds new matches. Be aware, though, that Google Alerts might not catch every review of your restaurant. “It currently just scratches the surface,” says Stradtman.

• **Manually check the sites.** Log on to the review sites periodically to read the reviews. Start by figuring out which sites you need to monitor. We’ve described some of the major sites here, but depending on the city where you’re located, you might want to track some of the other review sites, including Citysearch, CityEats and Savored. For tips on how to track your restaurant on Twitter, Facebook, Foodspotting, Instagram and other social media sites, check out this resource.

• **Monitor the metrics.** Take advantage of any free data provided about your restaurant’s online presence. For example, Yelp tabulates user views, clicks to your website, mobile check-ins, mobile calls to your business and requests for directions to your business. The Google Places dashboard lets you know how many people are searching for you on Google, what they searched for to find you and which zip codes they’re coming from when they request driving directions to your restaurant. Use this data to track trends and gather insights that can guide business decisions.

• **Consider enrolling with a monitoring or reputation management service.** “Nobody has the time to chase down every single review, but every single review is important,” says Charlee Williamson, executive vice president for the New Orleans-based Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group. When monitoring online reviews became too time-consuming, the company, which owns six restaurants, decided to outsource the job to the Revinate software service. With Google Alerts not catching every review, “we tried to go online periodically and read customer responses,” says Williamson, “but it’s hard because restaurant managers are usually out on the floor, not in front of their computers.” The software service pulls customer feedback from several review sites, placing them together in one portal. Other monitoring services include Heartbeat, Main Street Hub, Bazaarify and Sprout Social, to name just a few. If you find that you want to use a service, do your homework to find one that meets your needs.

With 90 units, Zoës Kitchen finds it essential to use monitoring tools to track the trends, says Lauren Hopkins, senior marketing manager. The company, based in Birmingham, Ala., uses newBrandAnalytics to analyze the reams of feedback and translate it into operational insights at local, regional and brand levels. For example, the company recently tested “Salmon Kabobs” on the menu at select locations. When the testing period ended and Zoës removed the item, customers made it known through review sites and social media that they missed the dish. Now, Zoës is preparing to roll out “Salmon Kabobs” at all of its locations.
How can I use online reviews as a business tool?

Tracking your reviews is a great way to keep your finger on the pulse of your restaurant. Online feedback — both positive and negative — provides insights never available before. “One of our challenges has always been having enough data,” says Charlee Williamson, executive vice president for the New Orleans-based Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group. “Now, we can measure the trends.” Make the most of this valuable feedback. When reviewer after reviewer gushed about the BBQ oysters at the group’s Red Fish Grill, management decided to highlight the dish as a signature item. When numerous customers noted that the restaurant was noisy, the leadership took steps to control the sound level.

Accentuate the positive

Everyone loves positive feedback, and the majority of online reviews are favorable. The average score on TripAdvisor is 4.08 out of 5, and 79 percent of Yelp reviews are 3 stars or higher.

- **Highlight the favorites.** If an item receives glowing reviews, consider elevating it to a signature item, like Red Fish Grill’s BBQ oysters. If customers rave about a special, consider making it a permanent menu item.
- **Celebrate your successes.** Motivate staff by sharing positive feedback at pre-shift meetings. Thank and acknowledge staff members whose accomplishments are specifically noted in reviews. Avoid big incentives, though, since you don’t want to tempt employees to encourage friends and family to fabricate reviews.
- **Use the feedback to guide expansion efforts.** When customers in Huntsville, Ala., expressed online that they wished Zoës Kitchen would open near them, management listened. A line of customers stretching out the door welcomed the fast-casual Mediterranean restaurant to town last year.
- **Publicize your popularity.** Some restaurants post “People love us on Yelp” signs on the door or boast about their ratings in advertisements. You can include widgets on your website that highlight your ratings on Yelp and TripAdvisor and link customers to those sites to read the complete reviews.
- **Announce any awards.** TripAdvisor awards a Certificate of Excellence to high-ranking restaurants; OpenTable announces Diners’ Choice Winners in categories like “Most Romantic” or “Fit for Foodies.” Promote these awards on your website (TripAdvisor has a widget), with a press release to the local media, an e-mail announcement to guests and a certificate displayed onsite at your restaurant.

’If day in and day out you’re providing great value, great service, the reviews are going to reflect that.’

Yelp CEO Jeremy Stoppelman
• Hook into social media. Tweet about stellar ratings and awards, and post updates on your Facebook page.

Brace yourself for some negativity

Unfortunately, every review won’t be positive. In fact, some might downright sting, and others could border on libel and defamation.

• Be prepared. “The first step is to understand that every restaurant is going to get some negative reviews,” says Ann Shepherd, OpenTable’s senior vice president of marketing. “Not every experience is going to be 100 percent perfect.”

• Look at the big picture. “If day in and day out you’re providing great value, great service, the reviews are going to reflect that,” says Yelp CEO Jeremy Stoppelman. “One negative review doesn’t count for everything. It’s not the end of the world.” Stradtman adds, “Most people will dismiss one glaring negative review.”

• Take the feedback to heart. Ask yourself: “Is this person just a negative Nancy, or are they providing constructive criticism?” says Yelp’s manager of local business outreach, Morgan Remmers. Did the customer make some valid points? How can the restaurant improve and get more positive reviews? Track the trends and address recurring issues. For example, when customers complained that service was too slow at California’s San Pedro Fish Market and Restaurant, the eatery expanded its kitchen and streamlined cooking processes.

• Concentrate on the customer’s message, not the tone. Reviewers sometimes forget their manners, hiding behind the protective shield of a computer screen or mobile device. Their words can be scathing and hurtful. Develop a thick skin, and focus on what the reviewers are saying, rather than how they’re saying it. “Reviewers can be sarcastic and rude,” says Williamson. “Look past that part. Just assume the reviewer had a bad day.” Dan Simons, a Principal with Vucurevich Simons Advisory Group (VSAG), the management company for the Washington, DC-based Founding Farmers restaurant says, “Take the review and drop it through the ‘Neutralizer.’ Strip away the emotions, and get to the bottom of what went wrong. Then find a way to inject hospitality back into the situation.”

If a review crosses the line to become libelous and defamatory, you’ll want to take steps to try to get it removed.

• Make sure the feedback trickles down. Incorporate lessons learned into your staff training and share new insights at pre-shift meetings. Use shortcomings and mistakes as teachable moments. Address problems with specific staff members on a one-on-one basis, advises Williamson. Chains should regularly share information with each unit about the “overall sentiment expressed” as well as any particular issues specific to the unit, recommends Lauren Hopkins of Zoës Kitchen.
When a customer criticized an upscale Boston restaurant on its Facebook page last November, claiming the pumpkin pie “tasted like vomit,” the chef/owner quickly fired back. In a series of angry responses, he lashed out with obscenities and quipped, “Judging by how fat your face looks, you most likely shouldn’t be eating anymore desserts anyway.”

“That’s a great reference guide for what not to do,” says Lori Randall Stradtman, author of *Online Reputation Management for Dummies*. “Do not throw gas on the fire. That’s the worst thing that you can do.” Realizing his blunder, the chef posted a Facebook apology, saying, “I overreacted.” Still, the exchange left some in the online community with a bad impression of the restaurant’s professionalism.

While scathing reviews can hurt, never respond by being nasty. Instead, consider the approach of Michael Ungaro of the San Pedro Fish Market. “I’ve found every complaint to be an opportunity,” says Ungaro. “It’s been a great tool. I’ve never had an effective means to communicate with customers after they leave the restaurant.”

Some sites, like Urbanspoon, Yelp or TripAdvisor, let restaurants respond publicly or privately to reviews for free once they “claim their page.” Others, like OpenTable, allow for private responses only. Either way, choose your words carefully because they can impact consumer decisions. In a 2012 consumer survey commissioned by TripAdvisor on the topic of hotel reviews, 84 percent of respondents reported that “an appropriate management response to a bad review improves my impression of the hotel.” Meanwhile, 64 percent said that an aggressive/defensive management response makes them less likely to book at the hotel. TripAdvisor users were randomly invited to participate in the survey; more than 2,700 participated.

If you find that crafting an appropriate reply is more challenging than creating a new dish, try out these steps for serving up satisfying responses.

1. **Prep work**

   - **Designate a point person.** Appoint a person or a team to respond to online reviews. At the Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group, the responsibility is delegated to each restaurant’s general manager or marketing department. “It’s important that the responses are on brand and that the person replying has the authority to speak on behalf of the property,” says Executive Vice President Charlee Williamson. At Zoës Kitchen, the home office decides when and how to respond, getting input from a regional operator or the local general manager when necessary. At Founding Farmers, Dan Simons of VSAG responded to every review personally for the first two years of operation, taking him 45 minutes a day, seven days a week. As the company expanded to three units, he delegated this responsibility to a couple select employees, whom he carefully trained in the restaurant’s “voice.” Make monitoring and responding to reviews part of someone’s job description, stresses Simons, to ensure that it is a priority and that time is scheduled.

   - **Lay the groundwork.** “Think through the worse-case scenarios and develop appropriate responses,”

   “I’ve found every complaint to be an opportunity. It’s been a great tool. I’ve never had an effective means to communicate with customers after they leave the restaurant.”

   Michael Ungaro of the San Pedro Fish Market
advises author Stradtman. This “fire drill” lets you craft responses in a level-headed, unemotional mode. When a situation arises, you can use these stock responses as a starting point, adjusting the wording as needed. Simons advises drafting and categorizing potential responses to ensure that your message aligns with your brand strategy.

• **Determine whether a response is needed.**
  “Negative reviews should absolutely be addressed,” advises April Robb, senior content manager at TripAdvisor. “If someone commented negatively at your restaurant, you wouldn’t turn your back and walk away from them.”

  Founding Farmers responds publicly to any 1- or 2-star review, and others as deemed necessary. “To show engagement with customers, we always make sure there’s at least one management response on the main page,” says Simons.

  “You don’t want to use the public comments just to respond to negative reviews,” says Morgan Remmers, Yelp’s manager of local business outreach. “It’s good to pepper in a few public comments in response to positive reviews as well” to draw attention to your successes.

  • **Decide whether a public or private response is warranted.** A public response allows you to get your message across not only to the individual who expressed a concern, but to everyone reading your reviews. “A public comment can be your greatest PR tool, if you use it properly,” says Remmers. Think of it as an opportunity to show that you take customer concerns seriously and to demonstrate that you’re remedying the situation. For example, if a customer complains about the waitstaff, you could use a public comment to stress that you’re committed to top-notch service and apologize that they caught you on an off night.

  You can also use a public response to politely correct inaccurate customer claims. For example, if a customer complains that your eggplant parmesan was tough — when you don’t even offer the dish — consider pointing out that he might be mistaking you for another establishment.

  Use private messages to hash out the details that the public doesn’t need to hear. In a private exchange, you can find out exactly what went wrong, so you can rectify the situation. You can also use this mode when offering customers an incentive to try your restaurant again.

  Urbanspoon’s Brandi Willard recommends using private messaging to ensure you reach the reviewer. “Messaging is the best way to reach somebody,” she says. “We have seen many customers give a restaurant another chance after their concerns and questions were directly addressed.” Some restaurants overlay a private message with a public one to ensure they reach both audiences.

  “A private message is also the best way to thank users for a good review,” says Willard. Of course, it’s also appropriate to occasionally comment publicly in response to a positive review. “There’s a real market-

“Getting a bad review can feel like someone flippantly doused you with gasoline and anonymously lit a match,” says small-business owner Wade Lombard, who serves on Yelp’s Small Business Advisory Council. One way to put out the fire, he says, is to “**stop, drop and roll.**”

1 **STOP**
   Stop. If your first instinct is to lash out in anger, give yourself a few hours to cool down before posting a response.

2 **DROP**
   Drop. Drop the prideful, defensive and harsh response. Let a trusted co-worker or friend read through your response before posting. Remember, taking the high road is rarely a bad idea.

3 **ROLL**
   Roll. Roll with it. Attempt to mend any valid issues. Keep providing the best possible service and products. Do those things and the more affectionate reviews will exponentially multiply!
ing opportunity there,” says TripAdvisor’s Robb. For example, if a patron mentions how much she enjoyed dining on your patio, you might chime in to thank her for her business and kind words, and then go on to say how you recently renovated the patio and are excited to be serving customers there.

2. Recipe for successful responses

• **Reply promptly.** Today’s 24/7 world necessitates that you respond quickly to any concerns so you can do damage control. Zoës has a policy of responding within 24 hours. In a situation where you don’t have all the answers yet, Stradtman advises being open about that, and letting customers know you’ll get back to them once you have more information.

• **Treat customers with respect.** Thank customers for their feedback, and take the time to listen with an open mind. “At Zoës, our philosophy is to share Southern hospitality with every guest, whether they’re in our restaurant or online. We always give the customers the benefit of the doubt and the utmost respect online, just as we do in the restaurant,” says Zoës’ Lauren Hopkins. After making it clear in a public comment that management is addressing the issue, her team reaches out offline for more information to better understand the problem and determine how Zoës can fix the situation.

• **Address the issues.** Let customers know you’ve heard their concerns and that you take their feedback seriously. Apologize when appropriate, and let them know how you are rectifying the situation, such as training the staff to better describe a menu item or improving your kitchen procedures.

• **Never trash yourself.** Watch the wording of any apologies. “The last thing you want to say is, ‘I’m sorry you had a terrible experience at so-and-so restaurant,’” says Williamson, since you wouldn’t want a search on your restaurant’s name to bring up that wording.

• **Tell your side of the story.** “The perception of what’s happening in your restaurant is just as important as what’s actually happening in your restaurant,” says Hopkins. “At Zoës, it’s important to us that guests know that we truly do care about

### REAL-TIME REVIEWS

Today’s restaurant reviews can come hard and fast. While customers are still dining in your restaurant they can be tweeting about their experience, leaving a tip on Foursquare or posting an Instagram of their dinner. Here are some tips for dealing with instantaneous feedback.

• **Listen in.** Applications like HootSuite, TweetDeck and Tweetcaster can help you monitor tweets in real time.

• **Verify and remedy the situation.** Instant feedback provides an opportunity to address complaints while guests are still onsite—if you act quickly. At Founding Farmers, the hospitality coordinator is alerted about any real-time issues posted on social media. She notifies the manager on duty, who verifies the situation and can often connect directly with the guest at the table to solve the problem. Best-case scenario: The problem is fixed, and the customer tweets about how the restaurant made good, in real-time.

• **Don’t retreat from the situation; retweet instead.** When a customer tweets a complaint, the fast-casual Wow Bao quickly remedies the situation. For example, if a guest doesn’t love a menu item, management might tweet her to “try something different on us.” Wow Bao retweets the customer complaint along with a message about how it handled the situation, publicizing the chain’s commitment to customer service.

• **Document.** Record the feedback and interactions in your digital logbook. You’ll be able to track trends to help guide your operations. Documentation will also help you keep an eye out for customers who are active in social media.
their experience and value their feedback. We want to be a part of the conversation so that we can continue to serve them with Southern hospitality, every day.”

A management response can help set the record straight and clear up misconceptions. “Sometimes complaints are legitimate, and sometimes they’re not,” says Ungaro of San Pedro Fish Market. “When needed, I politely put the facts out there.”

• Avoid sounding defensive. Stay diplomatic and polite. “Some people complain, just to complain,” says Ungaro. “I respond by killing them with kindness.” If needed, take time to cool off before posting a response. Check out the “Stop, Drop and Roll” strategy developed by a member of Yelp’s Small Business Advisory Council.

3. Finishing Touches

• Invite them back. Reassure customers that you take their feedback seriously and invite them to come back and try your establishment again.

• Make a return trip easy. In an offline conversation, Ungaro occasionally offers customers a gift card so they’ll give the restaurant a second chance. Never give the impression that the gift is an incentive for a good review. “I don’t see it as buying a review,” says Ungaro. “I never make the request that they change their reviews.” Remember, customers don’t always expect freebies; sometimes they just want to be heard.

• Go the extra mile. Rather than simply fixing the situation, find a way to wow customers, says Simons, who refers to this as “Recovery +1.” For example, if a guest complains about his dessert, offer up a free dessert plus an extra perk. “This creates good vibes; guests know you’re listening and trying to make the situation right,” he says. Simons views this as an extension of the restaurant’s “no-fail culture,” where Founding Farmers is committed to rectifying any problem.

• Transform a negative review into a positive one. Address customer concerns, and watch the positive reviews grow. “I’m a definite believer in responding to reviews,” says Michael Holstein, owner of Quench in Rockville, Md. When one diner complained about the quality of the service, Holstein apologized and invited the guest back. After being impressed on a return trip, the customer gave Quench a higher rating.
Can I get problematic reviews removed?

When President Obama made a 2012 campaign stop at Big Apple Pizza in Fort Pierce, Fla., owner Scott Van Duzer became famous for giving the president a giant bear hug that lifted him off the ground. As the news spread, the pizza shop’s Yelp page became flooded with politically charged reviews from people who had never dined there. In response, Yelp soon removed the extraneous reviews that it felt violated its terms of service.

While chances are your online reviews aren’t going to headline a national political debate, if you feel a review is libelous, fraudulent, or otherwise inappropriate, it’s up to you to defend your brand. Contact the review site immediately to inform them about the inappropriate contact and request a removal. (See our review site “bios” for information on how to contact the sites.) “Make a reasonable, factual request stating why the review is libelous and grossly unfair,” advises Stradtman. “The more objective you can be, the better chance you’ll have of getting it removed.”

Some restaurants report that they’ve successfully had damaging, inaccurate information removed. The “terms of service” for review sites typically ban profane, vulgar, harassing, libelous and hateful speech as well as personal attacks and legal/criminal allegations. Most sites also require that the content be a firsthand account. Check a site’s specific terms to make a case for removal. Sites generally state that they have the “sole discretion” to decide what content to remove and are not obligated to remove items that violate their terms.

Removal requests are frequently denied. Michael Holstein, owner of Quench restaurant in Rockville, Md., contested several Yelp reviews in the past year for what he considered inaccuracies (such as incorrect pricing) or defamatory words (including a claim that employees were getting drunk on the job). The response from Yelp: the reviews will remain intact because they appear to reflect the user’s “personal experience and opinions.” Unfortunately, there are few legal remedies for restaurateurs to fight these negative or defamatory opinions on third-party content websites. If the review meets the legal standard of libel, defamation or slander, the owner can pursue civil actions against the service. However, the burden of proof is high and the cost to pursue such actions is expensive. Direct mediation with the author of the offending review is preferable.

When a site elects not to remove a review, it typically recommends you resolve the issue directly with the customer or post a public management response. “That way you can tell your side of the story,” says TripAdvisor’s April Robb. She advises posting the response as soon as possible, so that you can have your say publicly while you await a decision on removal.

Unfortunately, some guests have tried to manipulate the review system by threatening to write a negative review unless a check is comped or discounted. Train your staff to immediately report “blackmail” threats to the manager on duty. Management should alert the review site as soon as possible about the incident. The online TripAdvisor Management Center even features a tool on its “Dispute a review” form to “report blackmail.”

“... The more objective you can be, the better chance you’ll have of getting it removed.”

Lori Randall Stradtman, author of Online Reputation Management for Dummies
You’ve probably received a phone call from Yelp trumpeting the rewards of advertising online. Is this just a sales pitch, or is there value in paying for expanded services and advertisements on review sites? If you don’t buy in, will it affect your ratings?

Some restaurateurs report that the phone pitches come with a promise that by advertising they will gain control over which reviews are highlighted and which are filtered. The major review sites say that advertising has no effect on which reviews are shown (and which are filtered out) or the order in which reviews are displayed. “Advertising is kept completely separate,” says Yelp’s Morgan Remmers. “We’ve never been a pay-to-play site. There’s no amount of money that you can pay to impact the reviews on any business page on Yelp.”

As for Google, its online information notes that ranking is completely automated. “We can’t manually change the order of individual reviews, even if requested by our users.”

An exception is OpenTable, which lets restaurants handpick which reviews are displayed on their OpenTable profile pages. If a restaurant doesn’t make a selection, “We automatically highlight positive recent reviews,” says OpenTable’s Ann Shepherd. Users can click “More reviews” to see the remainder. OpenTable differs from the other sites because every listed restaurant pays for its table-management solutions.

While it won’t eliminate negative reviews, advertising is an option to consider. Review your business plan to determine whether you should invest in online marketing, taking a close look at your budget, your target audience, your goals and the ROI of your current advertising efforts. In a survey of 550 small business owners, the Boston Consulting Group found that small businesses spend only 3 percent of their advertising budget online, focusing instead on traditional marketing vehicles like coupon mailers.

Given the growing role of online marketing, you might want to test the waters. Consider experimenting to see if the added online exposure brings returns. Before signing on, review the contract terms, including any lock-in period, to make sure you’re comfortable with it. Check to see if there are penalties for breaking the contract. Network to see what options have worked for other restaurateurs — and check the online reviews!

Some paid marketing strategies to consider:

- **Enhance your profile page.** Stand out from the crowd by adding more features, like a video on Yelp or a custom message on Urbanspoon.

- **Facilitate reservations.** Make it easy for customers perusing the review sites to book a table at your restaurant. Foursquare, Google/Zagat, TripAdvisor, Urbanspoon and Yelp all have partnerships with OpenTable. Urbanspoon’s reservation service, Rezbook, was recently acquired by OpenTable, and eventually Urbanspoon users will be able to make reservations at all OpenTable restaurants.

- **Offer a deal, when appropriate.** While some restaurants shun coupons and discounts, saying they devalue their brand, others find them to be valuable marketing tools. Yelp lets you sell discount vouchers to entice customers to transact with your business before they even walk through the door. For example, you can sell a $20 restaurant voucher for $10 on your Yelp business listing page. Yelp Deals are free to set up, but Yelp collects payment from the purchaser and retains a 30 percent share of the purchase.

- **Sponsor a link.** Your link will appear on related searches — sometimes even on the profile page of a competitor.

In our Site-Seeing section, we’ve listed some of the paid services available on each site. Of course, make sure you’re also taking advantage of the free marketing opportunities we’ve already mentioned.
How can I target mobile customers?

Given the explosion in smartphone usage, consumers are increasingly accessing restaurant information on the go. Searches on Yelp’s mobile app were responsible for 46 percent of all Yelp searches in the second quarter of 2013. Mobile customers are often looking to make immediate dining decisions; your challenge is to capture this audience that is primed to go.

Check-in offers provide a great way to entice mobile customers. Using their mobile devices, customers can “check in” to your restaurant on Foursquare or Yelp. Consider creating incentives for them to do so. On Foursquare, a business offering these specials stands out in searches as an orange pin on the map. On Yelp, mobile customers can search specifically for restaurants offering check-in specials.

Some check-in tips:

• Bring in newbies and keep the regulars coming back for more. For example, reward diners with a 10 percent discount on their first check-in and a free

FILTERS AND FRAUD

Imagine that your restaurant just received a glowing 5-star review on Yelp, giving you a boost in your overall rating. But the next day when you go back to look for the review, it’s gone, and your rating has decreased. What happened? Chances are that Yelp’s automatic filter removed the review as part of the company’s anti-fraud efforts.

Unfortunately, fake reviews are a reality in a world where anyone can post a review. Disgruntled customers and pranksters post fraudulent reviews for retaliation or just for fun. And, some businesses game the system to get more positive reviews for themselves and negative ones for their competitors.

Filters and other anti-fraud measures are designed to protect the integrity of reviews. Yelp’s automated system uses an algorithm to filter out suspicious content. Because the filter continuously reassess content, it’s common to see reviews come and go.

TripAdvisor also takes fraud seriously, and recently announced that it was cracking down on fake reviews by tapping into anti-fraud techniques pioneered in the finance industry. Urbanspoon also reports it uses an automated fraud detection system to remove suspicious reviews.

Yelp’s filtered reviews do not count toward a restaurant’s overall rating and are relegated to a harder to access page. Many restaurants complain that legitimate reviews are filtered, often the most positive ones. “Most of the ones filtered for my restaurant were 5-star reviews,” says Michael Holstein, owner of Quench in Rockville, Maryland.

Yelp notes that “even though [the filter] inevitably affects legitimate reviews from time to time and misses some fake ones, too, it helps protect the integrity of the site.” If it seems that positive reviews are filtered more often, that’s “simply because Yelp users write more positive reviews in the first place,” according to Yelp’s online information.

Even if a legitimate review is filtered out, there seems to be little legal recourse. Federal law specifies that websites aren’t liable for third-party content. In 2011’s Levitt v. Yelp! Inc., the judge found that Yelp’s decisions to remove or reorder user content fall within a publisher’s “traditional editorial functions.” Again the commitment to litigate is costly and time consuming. Unless there is an organized attempt to defame or harm a particular business or owner, individual actions against positive or negative reviews are difficult to justify.
entree on their tenth. Wow Bao, a fast-casual Asian restaurant with four brick-and-mortar units and a food truck, uses this strategy to encourage repeat business. Operated by Chicago’s Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises, Wow Bao frequently runs Foursquare check-in specials, offering deals like a free order of potstickers or a frozen yogurt to customers on their fifth check-in.

• **Create a buzz about your restaurant.** When customers “check in” to your restaurant, they often also spread the word on Facebook and Twitter. This social networking component is Foursquare’s real value, says Wow Bao managing partner Geoff Alexander. If 60 guests check in, and they each have 100 followers, you’ve gotten your restaurant’s name out to 6,000 consumers. If any of those 6,000 comment — saying anything from “You’ve got to try the coconut custard bao!” to “What’s a bao?” — you’ve prompted more chatter about your restaurant. (The answer: A bao is a steamed bun with fillings like teriyaki chicken or bbq pork.) “Our goal is to create a viral conversation and build brand awareness,” says Alexander. To fuel the conversation, Wow Bao offers every customer who checks in a “buy one bao, get one free” offer. Alexander views the freebies as a relatively inexpensive marketing technique. “The potential growth is so much bigger than the cost of what you’re giving away,” he says.

Consider fostering this social media marketing with an offer like “tweet your check-in to be entered in a raffle to win a free dinner-for-two.”

• **Invite the whole gang.** Leverage the social aspect of mobile apps by creating a special that’s redeemable once a minimum number of friends checks in.

• **Train your servers.** Make sure your staff knows how to redeem check-in offers and that they encourage customers to start checking in.

• **Keep the reviews coming.** Customers who check in with Yelp are reminded of the visit the next time they use Yelp’s desktop platform and are asked if they’re interested in leaving a review.

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**BE OUR GUEST: KEY POINTS OF CUSTOMER SERVICE**

**FOSTER POSITIVE REVIEWS BY FOCUSING ON YOUR “GUESTS”:**

- **Guidelines.** Develop customer service guidelines that detail your procedures. These guidelines should specify everything from greeting customers promptly to thanking them when they leave.

- **Uniform yet Unique service.** Provide consistent quality service, no matter the time of day, the staff members on duty or which customers you’re serving. Within this framework, leave room to tailor your service to each guest’s individual needs and wants. Become adept at reading guests and meeting their specific needs. Get to know regular customers by name, or at least make it clear that you value their repeat business with a simple, “Nice to see you again.”

- **Exemplary Examples.** Rather than just telling staffers the importance of quality service, managers can show them by pitching in and being attentive to customers. Check in with your diners to make sure their needs are being met.

- **Surroundings.** Ensure that everything in and around the restaurant is picture perfect. A sloppy or dirty dining room sends the message that you don’t care about your customers. Check that tables are clean and inviting. Keep the restrooms tidy. Cater to all of your customers’ senses—make sure servers avoid wearing strong perfumes and cologne, that the temperature is comfortable and that the music and lighting levels are appropriate.

- **Training.** Good customer service starts with a well-trained staff. Teach new employees the basics of customer service and provide reminders at pre-shift meetings. Stress feedback from your reviews.

- **Smiles.** Encourage staff members to come to work with an aim-to-please attitude, including a welcoming smile that will put customers at ease. Start by hiring employees with a pleasant disposition and a natural flair for customer service.
Health Scores Now on Yelp in Select Cities

The restaurant industry is expressing concern about one of the newest features on Yelp — health score information. Health inspection scores are currently available only for restaurants in San Francisco and Louisville, Kentucky, but Yelp is hoping many other municipalities will come onboard. The new feature is receiving negative reviews from industry leaders who say the information could be incomplete and out-of-date.

“It is critical that the data is reliable and up to date,” says Liz Garner, National Restaurant Association director of commerce and entrepreneurship. “We have concerns that this is ever-changing information and there’s limited, if any, oversight function to ensure the Yelp numbers are current.” Some San Francisco restaurants report that their upgraded health scores weren’t reported on the site for more than two weeks after a health inspection.

While Yelp collects the inspection data directly from local health departments on a daily basis, it admits that the information may not be up-to-date. “Due to the city health department’s inspection schedule as well as the time it takes to pass that information on to us, it is possible that we may not display the most recent inspection data,” the site notes, advising businesses to “report any unreasonable delay and data inaccuracies to your city’s health department.”

Yelp hopes to “see positive effects both on the industry and for consumers by making this publicly available data easier to find,” says Morgan Remmers, Yelp’s manager of local business outreach. In a January 2013 blog posting announcing the new feature, Yelp CEO Jeremy Stoppelman wrote, “While ratings and reviews are incredibly powerful ways to guide spending decisions, we’re always looking for new ways to supplement the information to provide a better experience for consumers.”

Industry leaders also say that Yelp is not providing consumers with all the facts. For example, the risk level posed by the health code violation — key information to provide consumers some context — is generally not listed. The general public could also have difficulties interpreting health scores on a site like Yelp, says the Association’s Garner. “Without a consistent health code disclosure standard across the country, there could be confusion as people review brands in different jurisdictions,” she says.

The municipalities share information with Yelp through a new open data standard, LIVES (Local Inspector Value-Entry Specification). Yelp collaborated with the technology departments of the cities of San Francisco and New York to develop LIVES.

But the legitimacy of LIVES has been questioned. “A true standard needs to be adopted by a majority of industry participants (restaurants, governments, vendors, etc.) and should consider following guidelines endorsed by a standards organization recognized internationally such as the American National Standards Institute (ANSI),” says David Matthews, National Restaurant Association executive vice president of innovation and membership advancement. ANSI accredits standards development organizations that follow procedures based on openness, balance, consensus and due process. While questions persist about LIVES, Yelp continues to reach out to more jurisdictions, encouraging them to provide their health inspection data.
Site-Seeing:
Check Out These Popular Review Sites and Apps

Current as of Sept. 2013

KEY

Getting listed
✓ Claiming your page
👤 Who can write a review
🎁 Free to post
$ For a fee
💬 Responding to reviews
✉ Reporting inappropriate reviews
_hz Table-reservation management
➕ Other free services
A mobile app and website that lets users share their locations with friends and find new and interesting businesses nearby. When visiting a business, customers can “check in” through the app and leave photos and “tips” for other diners, including recommendations.

Log on to https://foursquare.com/venue/claim to join Foursquare and claim your business listing.

Business listing management: Address/contact information, business description, listing categories, event listings, hours of operation, links to your menu, website, Facebook page and Twitter handle, other details (ie. Accepts credit cards, reservations, delivery, outdoor seating, etc.) “local updates” to promote news, events or featured items at your business; “specials” to attract new customers or reward loyal ones by giving them an incentive to check in to your restaurant.

Foursquare Ads that appear to potential customers who are nearby. This advertising program is still in the pilot phase and may not be available to all businesses.

Reservation link available for OpenTable clients.

Foursquare tips are meant to be an open forum for customers to share their favorite things about a business with their friends. Foursquare does not facilitate responses from businesses, but does allow them to report inappropriate reviews (see below).

Restaurant managers can report inappropriate tips within the app or website. On your business listing page, click the “Report” button beneath the tip in question.

Free analytics that provide demographic data about your top visitors, track check-ins and identify how many check-ins are shared on Facebook and Twitter. Foursquare will send you weekly e-mails with key statistics and insights about your restaurant. Foursquare also offers free window clings that invite customers to “check in here.”

By the #s:

Over
35 million
users worldwide

Tidbits:
When customers check in at your restaurant, their friends are more likely to be recommended to go there when they’re looking for a place to dine.
Go to Google Places and sign in with your Google account. If you don’t already have a Google account, click “Sign up” to create one.

Business hours, general information, offers, videos, photos, link to your website, real-time updates like weekly specials.

Sponsored links from AdWords, which are targeted to the topic and location of a search.

As a verified Google Places business owner, you can publicly respond to reviews posted directly on Google in the “Reviews by Google users” section on your Place Page.

Click the “Flag as inappropriate” link found near the review and submit a report. If Google finds that the review is in violation of their policies, they’ll remove it.

Tidbits:

After experimenting with a 30-point rating scale, like Zagat’s, Google is transitioning back to a 5-point rating scale.
The world’s leading provider of online restaurant reservations lets consumers who booked with them share their dining experiences. About 24 hours after dining at the restaurant, customers receive an e-mail inviting them to provide feedback.

Restaurants are included only if they subscribe to OpenTable’s reservation and table management solutions.

(for OpenTable subscribers): Business hours, general details, message from your restaurant, menu, photos (through Foodspotting, which OpenTable recently acquired), links to your website and Facebook page.

Reviewers are invited to supply their name and e-mail address, so the restaurant can reach out to them. Businesses can access this information through their OpenTable portal. There’s currently no means for public responses.

Click the “Report inappropriate content” link at the bottom of the review.

By the #s:
Each month, more than 12 million diners are seated via OpenTable across more than 28,000 restaurants.

Tidbits:
Restaurants can designate which reviews are featured on their main OpenTable page. “We encourage them to select those that they think are particularly representative of the dining experience,” says Ann Shepherd, OpenTable’s senior vice president of marketing.
By clicking on “More Reviews” users can see the rest of the reviews.
Reviews expire after 120 days to help diners make their decisions based on recent feedback.
Go to http://www.tripadvisor.com/Owners and click on “Restaurants” to register your business with the TripAdvisor Management Center.

Business hours, general details, photos, videos, links to your website and menu.

Reservation link available for OpenTable clients.

Businesses that register with the Management Center can send private and public responses. At the bottom of your profile page, click on “Manage your listing.” Then click on “Write a management response.”

Log into the Management Center and click “Manage my reviews” to dispute a review.

E-mail notification of new reviews, widgets and badges to promote your business, links to webinars to help you optimize your presence on the site, access to your TripAdvisor snapshot with stats on how you’re engaging with customers online.
Go to [www.urbanspoon.com](http://www.urbanspoon.com) to find your restaurant’s listing page. Then click the “Is this your restaurant” button on the right side of the page.

Business hours, general details, photos, links to website, menu, Facebook page, latest tweet and Twitter handle.

Enhanced Listings that let you add a custom message and photo at the top of your listing; Premium Listings that highlight your restaurant across all relevant directory pages (cuisines, special features, neighborhood, etc.).

Reservations through Rezbook (in the future, Urbanspoon users will be able to make reservations though OpenTable, which recently acquired Rezbook).

Urbanspoon offers both public and private methods of communicating with users. From the User Reviews area of the Owner Dashboard, you will be able to view and respond to comments. To send a private message, click their user name to reach their profile, then click “Send a Message.”

Click on “Contact Us” at the bottom of your listing’s page.

Instant e-mail notification of reviews; badges to embed on your website encouraging customers to “vote for us!” on Urbanspoon; Profile Views Summary that tallies your “up votes” and “down votes,” the number of people who’ve placed your restaurant on their “wish list” and more.

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By the #s:

More than 26 million mobile app downloads and 1.3 billion shakes in total

Tidbits:

You may want to avoid “Vote for us on Urbanspoon” messages on Facebook and Twitter. “Our automated fraud detection system can have difficulty distinguishing between a sudden burst of legitimate votes and an attempt at gaming our system,” says Urbanspoon’s online information. “A hundred votes in an hour for a listing that had 20 in the past year can look pretty suspicious to our system.”
Yelp connects consumers with local businesses of all types; about 20 percent of reviewed businesses are restaurants.

By the #s:
Yelp had an average of approximately 108 million monthly unique visitors in Q2 2013.

Tidbits:
Yelp has an automated filter that suppresses a portion of reviews. The filtered reviews are not factored into a restaurant’s rating, are removed from the primary listing of reviews, and are placed on a secondary listing that indicates their filtered status. Yelp users can access filtered reviews by clicking on the link at the bottom of the business’s profile page.

- Log on to www.biz.yelp.com and click on “Create your free account now.”
- Business hours, general information, photos, links to your website and menu.
- Photo slideshows and videos; gift certificate sales and Yelp Deals (free to set up, but Yelp retains a share of the purchase price); advertisements to be placed on search result pages, including the business pages of nearby businesses in your category. Advertising on Yelp will also remove competitor ads from your Yelp business page.
- Reservation link available for OpenTable clients.
- Yelp gives businesses the option of responding publicly or privately to reviews. To respond, go to the “Reviews” tab after logging into your business account at www.biz.yelp.com.
- Click the “Contact Yelp” link at the bottom of each page or go to www.yelp.com/contact. Select “Questionable content.”
- Instant e-mail notification of reviews, Yelp metrics that help you analyze how consumers are using the information of your Yelp page, widgets to promote your Yelp ratings, webinars and videos on how to optimize your presence on Yelp.
Zagat.com currently covers restaurants only in select cities. Local editors create a list of notable restaurants in a city to be included on Zagat.com. If your restaurant is not yet Zagat-rated and you’d like it considered for inclusion, click here.

Users can visit Zagat.com throughout the year to vote in a featured survey, where they will be asked to rate restaurants on Food, Decor and Service on a 0-3 scale, and to provide witty and insightful comments about the places they’ve visited. These user ratings are then averaged and presented on a 30-point scale. Zagat editors pull together a brief restaurant review that mixes in select comments from these user reviews.

General details, photos, link to your website. To submit your menu, click here.

Reservations through OpenTable.

Restaurateurs cannot respond directly to consumers or post responses publicly on Zagat.com but are welcome to send input to feedback@zagat.com.

All content is reviewed by Zagat editors who handpick which consumer comments to highlight. Restaurants can send feedback to feedback@zagat.com.

Known for its print dining guides, this pioneer in user-generated content was acquired by Google in 2011. Zagat reviews are now free online.