HOW TO RESPOND TO NEGATIVE CUSTOMER REVIEWS
YOU WIN SOME, YOU LOSE SOME.

Sometimes, the problem will be your fault. Other times, well... we all have bad days.

The reality is, no matter how well-oiled your kitchen line, no matter how attentive your servers, or delicious your product, you can't please everyone all the time. Eventually, a mistake will happen, a customer will get fired up and all the free-desserts in the world will be not able to appease them.

If they air their grievance on Twitter, it's no problem. Just a passing blip, so quickly forgotten with a quick 140 character response, a gesture of goodwill, and a heartfelt apology. But the unrelenting may take to Yelp, Trip Advisor, or Google Places, immortalizing their complaint in internet infinitum for all to see.

Customers want proof that they'll get the most of their precious pennies. Studies show that over 70% of Americans say they look at reviews before making a purchase. If there's one way to spark fear in wary future customers, it's a series of negative reviews. And since people are more prone to air their frustrations opposed to their positive experiences, this is a likely scenario.

Today, restaurants are faced with the fact that reviews are a pivotal part of the buying process and that negative reviews are inevitable. So how do you recover from some bad review site press?
TURN A BAD REVIEW INTO AN OPPORTUNITY

1. Read the Review and Identify the Real Problem

Sometimes a negative review is the result of a complete anomaly, but other times it can signal a larger underlying issue that you need to address. Take time to read the review and try to discern what the customer is telling you. Was service slow because you’re understaffed? Should you finally switch to that new supplier? Was the customer just having a bad day?

2. Respond Quickly, Coolly, and Briefly

While you don’t want to respond hot headed and hasty, the faster you can compose a cool response, the better. The last thing you’d want to happen is the dreaded snowball effect where a bandwagon of negative reviewers join forces to leave a giant stain on your Yelp page. Here are some things to consider when you’re crafting a response.

**A brief apology:** “Hi Anna, I hear you and I’m so sorry you had a negative experience.” The customer is never wrong applies here... even if they are.

**Express concern:** Be genuine in your response and in your desire to make the dining experience more favorable in the future. Own up to your mistake if there was one. Honesty is the best policy.

**Remember, you’re responding to the customer, but also future customers:** The review walls have ears. Don’t make excuses but do give a brief context so that future customers have a fair picture of the situation.

**Make it personal:** On occasion, as a manager or owner, you may want to provide your business email or connect through a private message where possible, so you can get in touch directly and you can ensure them that their next experience will be a positive one. While this isn’t always possible, it does add a nice personal touch. Everyone wants to be heard, especially by the person in charge. That said...

**Invite them back:** You’ve heard the adage, “It costs more to gain a new customer than to keep an existing one.” In the age of Yelp, it costs you even more when you lose one. Invite back your disgruntled customer, with an incentive and take special care of their next visit. While there are no assurances, at least the extra attention will make them feel valued and hopefully, repair the experience.
3. Get a Second Pair of Eyes on Your Review

Responding can be emotional and, over the internet, perception is everything. Have a second pair of eyes take a look at the review to check for tone, spelling, and grammar.

4. Think Ahead: If you know a guest had a great time, ask them for a review!

While negative reviews often dominate the web, if you get the sense a customer had an exceptional experience, there’s no harm asking them to write a review and provide feedback. A little positivity can go along way.

5. Don’t Just Respond to Negative Reviews

Positive and negative, respond to as many reviews as you can. A quick, “Thank you for taking the time to share your experience. We hope to see you again soon!” can let your customers know you’re listening and that you appreciate their review.

HERE ARE A FEW SAMPLE RESPONSES YOU CAN KEEP FOR LATER.
(Make sure you customize them!)

The “we could have done better”: Thanks for bringing this to our attention. We’re sorry your experience was a less than favorable one. We take pride in our dining experience and strive to ensure every guest leaves satisfied. We offer our sincere apologies that your recent visit wasn’t up to our standards. We hope you’ll try us again. (This is a great opportunity to follow up with a personal response as well!) Our general manager will follow up with you personally.

The “it costs what it costs”: We strive to offer the best dining experience and service possible for a fair value. We’re sorry that wasn’t your impression. Our sincere apologies.

The “dignified response” in the face of “the passionate and angry reviewer”: We’re sorry to hear that this was your experience. We value our customers above all else and are constantly striving to improve. Please accept our apologies. We hope you’ll give us a try again in the future.

The delicately put “you got the info wrong”: We regret that you were misinformed about our hours/special/promotion. Here is the correct information. We hope you’ll try us again soon!
CONCLUSION

The internet can be a cruel, cruel world. It’s not always just and it can expose your smallest flaws. But it’s up to you to always show up looking your best and with your customer’s experience top of mind. A short response is often the best response. A kind, professional response always wins.

Just, whatever you do, don’t do this.

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