

## How Businesses Can Stand Out on Yelp



Last week, we discussed [why Yelp is essential for online reputation](#): as the ultimate destination for online opinions, Yelp is prominent on search engines and popular with customers -- and it can make or break your business.

As such a high stakes resource, it is important that businesses take full advantage of what Yelp has to offer. That means businesses will be able to connect with customers, earn great reviews, and enjoy the benefits of having good social proof available online.

We asked a number of experts about the steps they recommend businesses take to succeed on Yelp. They encourage businesses to be worthy of great reviews, complete their profile, and stay active and interact with customers -- while also taking bad reviews in stride. Read on to learn more about these and other ways to stand out and do well on Yelp.

### **Be Worthy of Great Reviews**

The most obvious -- but sometimes, most difficult -- way to do well on Yelp is to be a great business that naturally attracts lots of positive reviews. Delivering excellent service means your customers will be more likely to leave positive reviews instead of negative ones, and have a higher level of interaction that can set your business apart from the competition.

"The absolute best way to perform well on Yelp reviews is by doing good business," says [Yiveo](#) SEO-PPC manager Jonathan Poston. "This especially means getting your customer service right."

Other experts agree with him: "Be a great business that provides high quality products or services, great customer attention, and all at a value that makes people wonder how it's possible," says [911 Restoration](#) public relations director Alexander Ruggie. "Do this, and the positive Yelp reviews will pour in, along with the customers."

Diana Lamon, co owner and head of sales, marketing, and operations for [Peaches' Smokehouse & Southern Kitchen](#) recommends using good service as a proactive approach for positive reviews on Yelp. "If you provide a good product with excellent service, you're starting off in a good place," says Lamon. "It's easier to prevent bad reviews before they're posted than have to do damage control on bad reviews that are already online."

## **Build a Complete Profile**

Of course, in order to get positive reviews for your great service, you'll need to be on Yelp first. While customers can create a page for you that you can later claim, they often don't -- and it's best to start off with a full profile that's under your control from the very beginning. This can attract customers to leave a positive review and grow your business profile on Yelp, as both users and algorithms that determine which businesses are shown first prefer listings that are complete. The biggest factor here is that you share as much as you can, from operating hours to an address and photos of your business.

"For starters, it's important that their Yelp profiles are completed in full," says Brett Bastello, SEO manager with [Inseev Interactive](#). "Sometimes a robust looking profile page is enough to sway a customer from browsing to leaving a positive review for the business."

You should really be completing your Yelp page in full, filling out every available field to build a great resource customers can use -- and encourage customer engagement at the same time. According to [Marcel Digital](#) digital marketing strategist Patrick Delehanty, this is easy because Yelp offers many tools and resources to help businesses complete their profiles to their full potential. These resources include metrics, business owner blogs, and ads. He encourages businesses to take advantage of user incentives and special Yelp deals for visiting businesses as well.

"Having a completed and up to date profile with correct business and contact information is imperative," says Delehanty. "If you give out of date information and the customer calls

a wrong number, or worse, drives to a location you are no longer at, you just missed a major opportunity on something that was so simple to avoid with a little time."

"Utilizing these tools can help you better understand your audience, what they want, and how you can better get them what they need," he says. "Take advantage of asking your audience to leave reviews, whether on your site, emails, receipts, brochures, or phone calls. You can never have enough feedback!"

The basics of a complete profile are: clear company information with a website address, detailed photos, and a correct address and phone number and hours of operation, says Neil Bondre, founder of [The Interview Professional](#).

Priyanka Prakash, finance specialist at [FitBiz Loans](#), encourages businesses to ensure that all of their demographic info is correct, including business name, address, menu, and hours. "This is the most basic but overlooked way to perform well on Yelp," says Prakash. "Sometimes, customers go to Yelp to get information, not to see other people's reviews."

Prakash recommends that restaurants take it a step further, posting a copy of their menu on Yelp, which can offer customers what she says is one stop shopping. "In one page, your customers can see when you're open, figure out what they want to order from your menu, and see what other customers liked," she says.

[Malika Sharma](#) says photos are essential. "Photos always act as a great addition," she says. "They are a 'visual' feed that pulls in the users."

Eden Gillott Bowe, president of [Gillott Communications](#), agrees that photos shouldn't be missed. "Potential customers like to picture themselves using your service," says Bowe. "Make it easy for them by having a completed business page with photos. If you make it hard for them to get the information they're looking for, they will go somewhere else."

Sharma also encourages businesses to pay attention to keyword optimization: "When putting in description about your business, it's important to put keywords that describe your services and products," she says. "When search engine crawlers or the algorithm of Yelp has to decide what business to show on top, one of the factors they look into is the text, including descriptions, title, and reviews."

She cautions that it is possible to overdo it, though, as over optimization can result in a negative impact as Yelp filters through spam. Keep your text natural and avoid keyword stuffing, but do be sure to drop targeted keywords in where they are appropriate. And of course, don't neglect to fill out any titles and other fields that might yield a keyword

opportunity.

For [Source Approach](#) CEO Tanner Rankin, a good Yelp profile starts with a name, and as the most important part of your Yelp profile, your name is a great place to put keywords. As with any advertisement, you want your business to stand out. And that might mean slightly modifying your business name for Yelp to better help customers understand what you're about.

Rankin recommends a targeted business name, while still within the realm of your actual business name, targeted towards your niche. For example, if you are a contractor that specializes in retaining walls, a business name like "Smith & Smith Contractors" won't get you as many retaining wall job leads as "Smith & Smith Retaining Wall Contractors."

Of course, Rankin says you shouldn't stop there. You should be adding photos, targeted categories, and filling out the "From the Business" section.

"Adding a face, personality, and any trust building components to your business presence on Yelp is key," says Rankin on why you should post business photos. "An appropriate, high resolution logo, along with head shots or profile images and images that showcase your work help in not only grabbing a potential customers attention, but building credibility with them as well."

He offers an example of the power of photos on Yelp: "If you are an upscale sushi restaurant, your profile photo for Yelp may be your best plate of your most elaborate and delectable rolls. Quantity here is important as well."

Take advantage of targeted categories, says Rankin. "The categories that appear under your business name give both Yelp and the customer the clearest picture of what you do. Make sure you are not generalizing your categories, rather being specific."

Another essential profile resource that shouldn't be ignored: From the Business. "Don't treat this as a throw away blurb listing your services and specialties," says Rankin.

"Imagine this area as you standing in front of your businesses front door, greeting the potential customer for the first time. This should be highly optimized copy that offers a clear, genuine, and inviting 360 of your business geared precisely towards the type of client you want to attract -- not generalized."

## **Consistently Earn Great Reviews**

With a solid business worthy of reviews and a completed profile to draw in both current and potential customers, the next important task for succeeding on Yelp is to get the

reviews to start pouring in -- and then keep pouring in for months and years. It is one of the most essential tasks for Yelp success -- and also one of the most difficult. But experts say there's just no getting around earning great reviews if you want to do good on Yelp.

Rankin lists the quantity of reviews as one of the biggest conversion influences on Yelp -- and points to them as incredibly important, as they are essentially votes of confidence and social proof.

Marc Prosser, cofounder of [Fit Small Business](#) further explains why a good collection of consistently positive reviews is essential for Yelp success: "Building up positive reviews is important for two reasons. For one, it shows how many customers had great experiences with your business. Just as importantly, it makes you far less vulnerable to negative reviews."

Prosser astutely points out that if you only have five reviews online, one bad review is enough to discourage many customers from doing business with you. But if you have dozens of great reviews, potential customers are going to view one or two bad experiences as the exception, not the rule.

You can further protect your business with a good collection of reviews that have been left not just within the past few weeks or months, but positive reviews that span years.

"Have a number of 4 and 5 star reviews which are very detailed over a period of time," encourages Bondre. "This shows consistency that the business has not changed." According to Bondre, effective reviews should highlight excellent customer service, great products, a unique decor and ambiance, possible people that they dealt with, and unique situations that customers encountered with your business.

Still, attracting these valuable positive reviews is far easier said than done. But it is possible to encourage positive reviews and make them part of your customer service process.

"Increasing your number of quality reviews can be done by adding reminders/requests for reviews on Yelp to your email signature, graphics on physical handouts and receipts, and mentioning it strategically in touch points with your customers such as after a service call or hostesses in your restaurant," says Rankin. "I also recommend leveraging your CRM and email list during your newsletter email blasts and client follow ups, just to name a few."

## **Use Yelp's Interactive Features**

If you've been able to get positive reviews on Yelp, chances are that you want those particular reviews to really stand out. Experts encourage businesses to use Yelp's interactive features, including following users and commenting on reviews, to help highlight positive communications and provide better customer service and interaction.

"Yelp uses an algorithm to choose which reviews to publish and which reviews to keep filtered," explains Bastello. "It's important that business owners keep an eye on this queue as they can take several measures to bring these hidden, positive reviews to their front page. By following the user whose review is filtered and commenting back appreciating their feedback, this is sometimes enough to trip the algorithm into passing the review through the filter and onto the front page."

Bastello recommends being strategic about interacting with reviews: "If it's a positive review, thanking the customer can go a long way," he says. "Conversely, if it's a negative review, it's important not to come off as defensive, but rather show empathy and be apologetic to the situation."

Your interaction can also underscore reviews that are real -- as opposed to fake ones from spammers, scammers, or even your competition. And even responding to bad reviews in a way that might push them through the filter to the front page is helpful, as it makes your more positive reviews more credible.

"Companies can stand out on Yelp by embracing authentic reviews, as [77% of consumers](#) say a mix of positive and negative reviews would make them more likely to use a service, or visit an establishment," explains Mark DiGiammarino, [Software Advice](#) media relations specialist. "Many businesses believe they should only have 5 star ratings, but that can be seen as a red flag for many consumers."

Bondre agrees that a response is useful as long as the review is real: "Managers should respond to each and every Yelp review whether it is good or bad and thank people for their business," he says. "It goes a long way to show commitment."

Why is responding to customers so important? "Properly responding to customer reviews shows you are listening and that you taking the time to appreciate the feedback the customer is giving you," explains Delehanty. "It's also your opportunity to get a customer back or maintain a customer for life. It's not just customer engagement, it's relationship building. Customers want to feel like they are the most important customer in the world. Communicating with them gives them this feeling."

Need recommendations for getting the conversation going? DiGiammarino recommends

creating a dialogue with reviewers by answering their questions, or directly addressing their concerns.

"It may not resolve the issue completely, but many customers appreciate just being heard," says DiGiammarino. "I will say, it would behoove businesses to listen to their reviewers, and then take action on the advice given. In some cases, this may result in a customer updating their review to a higher score after patronizing an establishment again, and seeing their recommendations were taken to heart by a company."

One big way to interact on Yelp is to simply say thanks. "Be gracious and grateful," suggests [Straight North](#) general manager Scott Hepburn. "A customer who writes a review of your business — whether positive or negative — has given you a gift."

"Think of how many customers you serve who don't take the time to share their feedback," considers Hepburn. "Thank reviewers for their feedback. Let them know you appreciate praise (if they've praised you) and you value their suggestions for improvement. Even a negative review is an opportunity for your company to show you genuinely care about the customer experience."

Lamon agrees: "Thank the customers who write you a positive review. It's a nice thing to do, and they'll remember that you responded. It might also encourage them to write another great review the next time they come in."

## **Respond to Negative Reviews**

As part of your interaction, it's especially important to pay attention to any negative reviews you see. They can often be more valuable than positive ones, as they point out (sometimes painfully) what's wrong and provide a blueprint to improvement. And from a Yelp marketing perspective, they shouldn't be left to fester, as failing to respond to negative reviews could indicate to customers that you just don't care what they think -- not an impression you want to leave for potential customers. Even if it's difficult to respond professionally, it's important that you do so.

"Respond to negative reviews," says Prakash. "The initial instinct may be to not call attention to a negative review by replying to it. However, by engaging with the customer who left the negative review, you actually show other reviewers and visitors to your page that you take customer service seriously."

"Sometimes, mistakes happen, but it's how a business deals with mistakes that matters most, explains Prakash. "You can respond publicly to all visitors or privately to a specific

reviewer. Unless it's a special case, I recommend a public response so other visitors can see that you dealt with the problem in a positive way."

Responding to a negative review also gives you a chance to make sure your perspective is noted on Yelp. "The best piece of advice I have is to ensure you tell all sides of the story, the good and the bad," says [Future Insights](#) marketing manager Michelle Burke. "If a review is 100% negative, it's likely to be taken out of context in assumption the reviewer is just an angry person wanting to complain."

Even though it's difficult, Lamon encourages businesses to respond and take to heart what negative reviewers have to say: "They're hard to read, but most negative reviews contain valid concerns," she explains. "Message the customer and let them know you are taking their concerns seriously, fix the problem, and invite them to come back to have a better experience next time. Most of the time people complain, it's just that they want to feel heard."

There is an exception to responding to negative reviews, though: "On the rare occasion we get reviews that are unfounded," says Lamon. "We don't engage with those. You can't please everyone."

If a negative review does strike a chord of truth, you should take steps to fix what's wrong.

"Make it right," encourages Hepburn. "If a customer had a bad experience, don't argue with them — fix it! Getting defensive just makes you look bad to other potential customers. On the other hand, apologizing for a less-than-favorable experience and offering to make it shows your commitment to satisfied customers (see a theme here?)."

## **Encourage Customers to Leave Reviews**

Officially, Yelp says that businesses can't ask for reviews outright. But you can encourage customers to leave a positive review by making it easy for them to find you on Yelp. Place Yelp stickers at your place of business, add a Yelp link to your email signature, and post reviews to your social media and website to remind happy customers that they should weigh in on your service. This is important, as you want your best and happiest customers to share their opinion and boost your ratings on Yelp.

Think your customers don't want to bother with leaving reviews? Think again. Prosser points to a [recent study](#) that indicates 9/10 of small business customers that had a good experience would be willing to leave a review. But small business owners ask them only

7% of the time.

"If you want to build up a strong presence on Yelp, the most effective strategy is also the simplest: just ask customers to review your business," says Prosser.

Hepburn agrees. "Ask your most loyal customers for a review," she says. "Business owners have split opinions on whether it's uncouth to ask for a review. I'm in the "Ask away!" camp. First, like most things in life, you're unlikely to get what you don't ask for.

"Inertia is a powerful thing, and your request is the most direct way to spur a customer out of inaction," Hepburn explains. "Second, asking for a review shows you're willing to be transparent, even if the feedback isn't all sunshine and rainbows. Third, your most loyal customers are more receptive to the ask than a new customer. You've built trust and a relationship and it's okay to leverage them. And finally, a loyal customer is the most likely person to give the glowing reviews you're hoping for."

It's not difficult to get out there and ask for reviews, either. Poston recommends promoting positive reviews with in-store incentives, marketing, and email and social media requests to your community.

## The Yelp Success Cheat Sheet

The steps necessary to do well on Yelp may sound like a lot of work, but it really isn't. These are the basics of standing out and succeeding on Yelp:

- **Give great service:** To stand out on Yelp, the bottom line is you'll need positive reviews. And you can't get positive reviews without happy customers. The absolute first step to Yelp success is offering a product or service that makes customers satisfied.
- **Have a completed Yelp profile:** Yelp isn't just a source for reviews, it's a source of business information, and the more you can provide, the better. Encourage visitors and get a better ranking on Yelp with photos, address information, menus, and more.
- **Get great reviews over time:** Customers want to see that you're consistently good, so it's not enough to push for reviews for three months and then forget about it. Maintain your Yelp review campaign for the long term for best results.
- **Interact with customers on Yelp:** Always remember to say thank you and respond to reviews. This is particularly useful for pushing positive reviews through Yelp's filter.
- **Pay attention to negative reviews:** Even negative reviews are valuable, and can

provide good lessons for your business in the future. Thank negative reviewers for their feedback and do what you can to make it right.

- **Don't be afraid to encourage reviews:** Asking for reviews might get you negative feedback -- but it's more likely to get you positive reviews and a better Yelp profile.