

## Why Yelp Matters for Online Reputation



Businesses can't afford to ignore or neglect Yelp. This review website has become the ultimate destination for online opinions, and without it, your business could suffer, missing out on potential customers and losing the opportunity to build trust online.

According to [recent research from the University of Maryland's Smith School of Business](#), software can now use the language of Yelp reviews to predict with 70 percent accuracy whether a restaurant will close. Further, [research conducted on software buyers](#) indicates that 75 percent of buyers consult online reviews before making a purchasing decision.

It's clear that Yelp matters for the online reputation (and ongoing health) of your business. We've asked several business owners, marketing experts, and search engine experts to weigh in on why they think Yelp is important. They told us that it has a lot to do with how well Yelp ranks in search engines, its status as the trusted, defacto online destination for reviews, and the excellent community that the website has built.

Perhaps the single most important reason Yelp continues to be so important to online reputation is its consistently high ranking on search engine results. Search for a business name, and Yelp is among the first few results to pop up on Google. Even searching for a particular category, like coffee shops in Seattle, will have Yelp near the top.

As Malika Sharma with [McCready Bale Media](#) explains, Yelp has a number of factors that make it rank well in Google Results.

"Yelp turned 10 last year, which means that it has been around for a while now and gained authority over this period of time," says Sharma. "Search engines like Google really prefer websites with good domain age," such as Yelp's.

Sharma further explains that Yelp is frequently updated as users leave reviews, another factor that drives top Google rankings.

Yelp also does very well in mobile local searches. Not only does Yelp show up as a resource in Apple Maps searches, Yelp's own mobile local search is one of the best tools available for finding local businesses.

"Yelp provides users with the two most important factors to consumers in relevant search results based on proximity and also offers a credibility and trust measurement in the form of reviews," says Tanner Rankin, CEO of [Source Approach](#). "With local search being taken over by mobile and Yelp having been established for such a long time in this space, consumers are conditioned to using it as an authority for service based businesses. In short, Yelp offers the most relevant service based on location, along with a way to measure its worth in reviews."

Yelp's performance on Google and as a mobile search resource translates to great news for businesses with listings on the website. As Yelp has gained so much authority over the past few years, says Sharma, Yelp business listings can in turn rank well for geo targeted keywords. In other words, having a Yelp page for your business means you'll do better in local search results.

And according to Brett Bastello with [Inseev Interactive](#), the better your Yelp reviews, the better your business listing will rank within search engine results.

"Google is able to factor positive reviews into their local ranking algorithms, and if the company is looking to use Yelp as a platform to generate leads, then it is essential that they work on acquiring positive reviews," says Bastello. That's a great motivation to not only create a Yelp profile for your business, but attract great reviews for it as well.

## Yelp is the Definitive Source for Reviews

Aside from the Google love, Yelp is simply the most popular destination for reviews. According to a [2014 Nielsen survey](#), Yelp is the most influential, trustworthy source for reviews. They outrank other influential sites including TripAdvisor, Angie's List, and other local directories. Simply put, more people choose Yelp. And that's why the stakes are so high on Yelp.

"If you can't Google it, does it exist?," asks Eden Gillott Bowe, president of [Gillott Communications](#). "Yelp has amassed a similar effect for certain types of businesses."

Mark Prosser, cofounder of [Fit Small Business](#) agrees: "At this point, Yelp's dominance has a lot to do with critical mass," he says. "Users want to leave reviews where those reviews can be seen by people, and restaurants want to encourage reviews on the biggest platform. That means Yelp. On both sides, Yelp's existing user base ensures that it will keep growing."

Thanks to Yelp's extensive community, most users will find that Yelp reviews are the most helpful. They tend to have the longest history of reviews, detailed information, photos, and even menus available, offering a superior source of information.

"The base of high quality, user-generated content added to Yelp over the years means you get a detailed glimpse into a company's products or services and customer experience," says [Straight North](#) general manager Scott Hepburn. "With other review sites, it's hit or miss. You might get a few decent photos and a handful of reviews, but not enough to have confidence in what to expect. Users gravitate to Yelp's deep, rich user reviews, which only serves to expand the user base and the content you'll find there."

## Why Yelp is So Trusted

Much of Yelp's success has to do with how much trust consumers place on the system Yelp has built. They rely on Yelp as a source of honest reviews that reflect the opinions of real people, not spammers or other types of impersonators. Thanks to Yelp's strict standards and algorithms designed to catch fraud and abuse, businesses and consumers know that they're likely getting the real deal when they read Yelp reviews.

Yelp's community is trusted as a consumer direct source of information, says [Future Insights](#) marketing manager Michelle Burke. "Yelp reviews are important because they come directly from the consumer," says Burke. "It's a platform for consumers to openly share experiences with a brand, good or bad."

And much of the reason why consumers trust Yelp so much is because they've seen firsthand the bad reviews that pop up. They are typically not concerned about the validity of reviews that are accepted or filtered out because they trust Yelp to display only genuine reviews on the website.

"Yelp has worked very hard at tweaking its algorithm to catch spammers trying to game the system," explains [SEO Direct](#) founder Ryan Bartlett. "They've done it better than anyone and that is why they are the leading source for reviews. People trust them."

Alexander Ruggie, PR director for [911 Restoration](#), agrees: "The reason that Yelp is the source for this type of information is because they are consistent and reliable," he says. "It's easy to pick out the fakes from the legitimate submissions, which makes making a purchase or opting for one company or another much more simple with a group think or herd mentality approach."

"There's a high degree of authenticity to Yelp reviews," says Hepburn. "Reviews come from real people, and Yelp makes it easy for business owners and users to report reviews that don't appear to come from actual customers. The company enforces that authenticity in ways other review sites don't."

In addition to the trust built by Yelp's algorithm are its strict rules for businesses. They are not able to alter or delete reviews, and only one response is allowed per review. These limitations tell consumers that their voices are the most important on the review site, and lets them truly stand out.

"Yelp listings are top ranked on Internet searches for local businesses," says Jonathan Poston, SEO-PPC manager for [Yiveo](#). "Facebook reviews come up as well, but are more easily managed by businesses, whereas Yelp reviews are less accessible to business owners who are limited to simply responding to customer concerns."

## **Yelp's Excellent Community Support**

Unlike other websites like Amazon where you can simply leave your opinion and go, rarely exchanging in discussion, Yelp encourages its users to be a part of the community. Community events, discussion boards, even profile photos make Yelp blur the lines between social media and simple reviews.

"Yelp does a fantastic job building community among its reviewers," says Hepburn. "With Yelp sponsored events, badges, and a social network, Yelp users feel like they're contributing to something bigger than a simple business review."

Yelp users aren't just sitting behind a computer leaving opinions. They're meeting in person, networking, and relying on each other for local resources not just online, but offline as well.

"What makes the Yelp platform so strong is their ability to build community in cities all over the world, both online through social networking and offline through events planned by area community managers," says [@pizza](#) communications manager Sam Blum. "Yelpers really rely on each other as local tastemakers and influencers. That trust results in high quality feedback that we continuously use to improve our experience for our guests, and our reviews have brought a significant amount of additional revenue our way."

Yelp's excellent community contributes to its authenticity, and in turn, its trust. With profiles, badges, and other social media signifiers, Yelp reviewers seem more like real people than they do on many other review sites.

"Yelp has become the leading source for reviews because it has a very highly regarded community," says [Black N Bianco Kids Clothing](#) owner Lisa Chu. "The reviewers are looked upon as being very reputable and regular people you could be friends with. There is no hidden agenda by the reviewers and anyone can leave a review."

## **Why Yelp is Highly Valuable for Business Owners**

There's no question on the value that Yelp can deliver for business owners. With great reviews, you stand to attract new customers, build trust with your current customers, and on top of that, gain another resource for interaction online. Ranking well on Yelp is particularly helpful, as Yelp acts as its own local search engine for businesses.

One of the biggest reasons why Yelp is so great for business owners is its status as word of mouth marketing. This offers businesses a great opportunity to let potential and current customers see that they're successful and trusted among others.

"From a psychology standpoint, reviews go towards word-of-mouth marketing, which is one of the strongest types of marketing," says Ratko Ivanovic with [EnCoCreative](#).

"Reviews carry a really big influence on the users reading them and lead to high conversion rates for website visits coming from Yelp."

Diana Lamon, co-owner and head of sales, marketing, and operations for [Peaches' Smokehouse & Southern Kitchen](#) can confirm how much businesses stand to benefit from a great presence on Yelp. "We see firsthand how much business is referred to us by Yelp, not just the amount of web traffic referred to our site from Yelp.com, but the large number

of customers who tell us they found us on Yelp," she says. "The quality of our reviews helps drive them to our restaurant and food truck."

The tools offered for business owners on Yelp are very useful as well, says Lamon. "If you have a business owner's account on Yelp (it's free), you can actually see how many people have clicked on your page each month," she says. "These are thousands of potential customers who are making a decision about whether to patronize your business based on what they read on your Yelp page. You can capitalize on all those potential customers through check-in offers, providing a great product and service, but also following up with reviewers, making your page more attractive, etc."

"A lot of business owners gripe about Yelp and it certainly has its challenges for business owners, but if you see the value in it, it can be a tremendous business tool," adds Lamon.

## **Ranking Well on Yelp Can Really Pay Off**

Simply being on Yelp can help you do well on Google searches, but ranking well on Yelp itself can really pay off. Customers searching directly on Yelp will be drawn to businesses that are presented first.

"Yelp is synonymous with customer reviews and real feedback, so customers treat Yelp similar to Google searches," says Neil Bondre, founder of [The Interview Professional](#).

"Only the first page on Yelp is generally considered and only businesses with a number of reviews are looked at. If you are on the 2nd page in a highly competitive market, you will lose a lot of customers."

Bondre insists that you'll need to focus on getting good reviews if you want to rank well on Yelp and get the most benefit from the review site. "If you have a few bad reviews but numerous good reviews, you will still get good business," he says. "However, if you have many poor reviews, your business will be severely hurt. When searching for restaurants or services, Yelp is the new Google, so you need to have a strong online presence."

## **Yelp Offers a High Level of Interaction**

Another value that businesses can pull from Yelp is the ability to interact with customers in a new way. Connecting on Yelp is different than connecting in person, or even on social media. On Yelp, you can actively demonstrate how much you care about your customers - - and others will notice.

Yelp reviews are important not only because they validate your existence as a company from the consumer standpoint, but they also show the level of engagement and

accessibility you as a company create for your customers," says Patrick Delehanty, digital marketing strategist with [Marcel Digital](#). "Yelp allows you to respond directly to customer reviews whether good, bad, or in between. The beauty here is that it allows you to thank customers or right the wrong you create in their minds enough for a negative review."

This is important because customers often place a high value on the customer service they expect to receive, and they turn to Yelp to make sure that businesses will be able to deliver on that service.

"Customers aren't buying a product or service, they are buying an experience," explains Delehanty. "That experience happens with the information gathering to come to you, the actual purchase, and then the followup if there are any issues. They want to know they are being heard, and when a company responds directly to their feedback, it creates a new place in their mind for the brand of 'Even though I had a bad experience and aired my grievances, this company cares and responded.'"

Delehanty points to [Domino's](#) as an excellent example of turning a bad situation good by interacting with customers and listening to them. He says that listening to reviews helps to rebuild your brand in the minds of customers, helping your PR, your bottom line, and identifying your brand as caring, accessible, and genuine, which is priceless.

## **Yelp Reviews as a Factor in Lending**

Beyond online marketing and customer interaction, Yelp has value as a source of creditworthiness for your business. Yes, really. Some lenders are now turning to websites including Yelp to assess the strength of a business, and may even use the information they find on Yelp to make loan decisions.

"Yelp reviews are also being used now in lending, says [FitBiz Loans](#) finance specialist Priyanka Prakash. "Alternative business lenders such as OnDeck and Kabbage will evaluate a company's Yelp reviews and its other social media profiles before loaning it money. While a couple bad Yelp reviews won't get a business rejected for a loan, a very negative presence or having inaccurate information on Yelp could delay the loan process or even prevent a business from getting a loan.

The bottom line: Yelp is the leader in online reviews with a robust community, a high level of trust, and a high potential value for businesses who take advantage of what the website has to offer. Businesses that neglect to use Yelp or are unable to attract positive reviews will ultimately suffer as their competitors shine brighter on the review site -- and customers move on to businesses that they know they can trust.

But this is just part one. Now that we've illustrated just how important it is to use and be active on Yelp as a business, we'll explain how you can make the most of it. Check back next week to find part two of this post, where we'll explain -- with expert input -- how businesses can succeed on Yelp by creating a great business listing, connecting with customers, and responding to reviews.