

Online Reviews:
**Your Reputation
Is On The Line.**





Online Reviews:

Word-of-mouth just went viral.

Background:

You finish a big job. The customer's thrilled. Next thing you know, the client's neighbor wants you to price out some work. Isn't word-of-mouth a wonderful thing?

Now imagine that same happy customer didn't just talk to his neighbor — he went out and told the whole state how much he liked your work. Talk about a job well done. Welcome to the wonderful world of online customer reviews — one of the most powerful small business development tools available today. The numbers prove it:

- 90% of customers claimed that positive online reviews influenced their buying decision —Zendesk survey.¹
- Almost 9 out of 10 consumers have looked at online reviews in the last 12 months to help them make a decision on a local business. What's more, 39% read such reviews on a regular basis — BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2014.²
- 88% of consumers say they trust online reviews as much as personal recommendations, with 7 out of 10 consumers taking positive action to contact the business after they read reviews — BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2014.²

Clearly, most customers begin their buying journey with a web search. But how do you ensure your small business shows up at the top of any results?

Time to start spreading the news.

For many small businesses operating within a traditional economic model (no ecommerce), the idea of creating a comprehensive web presence can be quite overwhelming. In fact, according to a recent Yodle online survey³ targeted at small business owners nationwide, more than half (52%) reported not having a website at all. That same Yodle survey also



165 MILLION

BBB Business Reviews Viewed
in 2014



BBB.org on average receives

88 MILLION

Unique users per year



reported that only about 1 in 10 small businesses have figured out how to begin using social media or online advertising to market their products or services.

When you have neither the time nor the marketing budget to reach customers actively looking to buy products or services, it makes sense to partner with a highly respected review destination like Better Business Bureau, with a built in audience in the millions.

Start with Trust: Reviews say your business is trustworthy.

Fact is, BBB is the preferred choice for customers researching contractors or shopping online, with bbb.org enjoying over 7 million unique visitors a month. Over 13.7 million BBB Business Reviews are read by potential customers in that same time frame. When asked, “*Which service below would you trust the most for customer reviews about a business?*” 41% of respondents said they trusted BBB — ahead of Google Places, Angie’s List, and Yelp.* Small wonder, over 390,000 businesses count on BBB Accreditation to promote their business’ good standing.

For many small businesses, BBB represents the optimum location for getting their online reviews read. Plus, the site demographics for BBB customers are broad enough to meet the needs of even the most diverse small businesses.



BBB Accredited Businesses also get marketing and communications support from the BBB team as part of their Accreditation program. It’s a win-win.

13.7 million

BBB Business Reviews are read each month by potential customers.

* Survey of U.S. consumers conducted 10/19/2012.



Online Reviews:

For Dmitriy Peregudov, Chief Gift Officer, Gift Baskets Overseas, becoming a BBB Accredited Business was a great way to stretch their marketing budget. As Peregudov puts it: *“Every time someone searches for our business — giftbasketsoverseas.com on Google, Yahoo, or Bing, our BBB Accreditation and our positive review rating come up. I don’t have to pay for that SEO — BBB has a relationship with the top search sites.”*



“We encourage all our customer service reps to solicit feedback after every transaction. We’ve found good reviews are the best way to drive new business...and, of course, satisfied customers always come back!”

Judy Leary, President of IdentityForce,
BBB Accredited Business since 11/30/2007.

Getting great reviews 101.

Here’s a few tips that will help you get the right kind of feedback:

- **Ask:** Let customers know you want to hear from them and be responsive and open to their feedback. Tell them that your business is on bbb.org and ask them to write you an online review. You can also solicit reviews after a job is done via an email or even a post card. Be sure to include a URL that directly links them to your BBB Accreditation page. Or, if your customers are under 30, engage them on Facebook or Twitter with an account for your business.
- **Save:** Emails and letters with nice customer comments make great testimonials, so keep every one you get. Do ask for permission before you publish them, and remember to include the Better Business Bureau Accreditation Seal on everything to remind customers of your commitment to service.

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Additional tips to help you get the right kind of feedback:

- **Share:** Turn customers into advocates. Encourage clients to share a good experience with your business online on Twitter or Facebook. You can earn powerful fans that way and win new business. Best of all, it's free!
- **Follow-up:** If a job went well, but the customer doesn't leave you a review, contact them again in a few weeks. Politely inquire if they were satisfied with your service. If yes, ask again if they would consider sharing their thoughts online.
- **Respond:** A great review is like money in the bank. But, while it is neither ethical or legal on many sites to pay for reviews — there's no reason you can't respond to a good review by saying thank you publicly. It shows you are listening and people like to be acknowledged. It's also important to actively monitor your online reputation. While BBB will contact you immediately if there's a negative comment or a dispute, get in the habit of searching your business name plus "reviews" to see what comes up.



“For us, joining the Better Business Bureau serving Eastern Massachusetts, Maine, Rhode Island and Vermont was a no-brainer — you go where the business is, right? Of course, there are so many contractors out there, we wanted a way to stand out from the crowd. Great reviews do that for us.**”**

Nelson Miller, All Construction & Remodeling,
BBB Accredited Business since 7/1/2004





Online Reviews:

The good. The bad. And the ugly: How to make reviews work for you.

In today's 24/7 world of social engagement, customers are talking about the business and brands they interact with all the time. Managing all the outlets that broadcast reviews can be challenging, so here are some strategies for focusing your efforts:

- **Encourage ongoing customer feedback:**

Maintain an active dialogue with your customers and you'll know faster than anyone how they're feeling about your service. Plus, happy clients can be encouraged to leave good reviews where the world can read them. And issues can be resolved before they become bad reviews. When you actively respond to feedback about your small business, potential customers can see you're engaged and that you care about their needs.

There are a variety of ways to get meaningful customer feedback:

Ask directly — Face to face or by phone. Remember, listen to the customer first, take notes so you don't miss important points, keep your responses polite (even if you disagree), offer meaningful solutions to any problems, and always resist the urge to argue.

Send a personal email — Since this channel is private (unlike social media) you can have an honest two-way dialog with customers. Just keep things businesslike and reread everything before hitting "send."

Use an online survey⁴ — This allows customers to respond anonymously and it's a good way to get candid feedback from more self-conscious clients.

Create a contact form — This vehicle is a little more passive because the customer has to seek out the form on your web site. Respond to these form requests quickly, and use the same guidelines as a personal email.

Usability testing — This route requires more planning on your part, but it will provide valuable insights into things your customers don't even know they are struggling with. Ultimately, you'll get a deeper understanding of how to make your business better.

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9 in 10 consumers read online reviews to determine the quality of a local



business. 39% of consumers do so on a regular basis.
2014 BrightLocal survey



Online Reviews:

- **Respond to all your reviews — not just the bad ones:** Customers love to know you're listening to them. Responding to a review can be as simple as saying "Thank you for the business." But if there's a problem, don't overreact. First, try to contact the customer directly to resolve the issue. Some reviewers will take-back/take-down their review if the issue gets resolved to their satisfaction. If you believe a discount or even a refund will resolve the issue, do it. One refund is nothing compared to the potential cost of a negative review.
- **Happy customers don't leave bad reviews:** Prevention is the best cure. That's true with bad reviews, too. You see, customers who feel their concerns aren't being addressed will often turn to public forums (like reviews) to make themselves be heard. So make customer service a top priority and encourage customers to share their experiences of doing business with you — both good and bad. Now you have the opportunity to address concerns as they come up and address them quickly. Make a meaningful effort to resolve customer issues early and you'll head off most negative reviews before they happen.
- **Safety in numbers:** Many customers who frequently read reviews know there's just no pleasing some people. So, if you have lots of positive reviews and only one or two bad reviews, they'll know it's the law of averages at work, especially if it's obvious from your reply that you sincerely tried to resolve the customer's concerns.
- **Ask an expert:** If you have questions or concerns about customer feedback, contact BBB. There's a whole team of experts ready to advise you on all kinds of customer service questions. You can also find more tips for managing online reviews in the *BBB Business News and Opinion Blog* online. Or search the BBB Accredited Business Directory for a reputation management business. You'll find the best and brightest right where you list your business — on bbb.org. After all — for better or worse — the world of online reviews are here to stay.

**Assured
Confident
Protected
Reassured
Safe
Satisfied
Secure**

How does
BBB make
you feel?

BBB customer feedback survey,
9/14.



Online Reviews:

Local or national. Big or small. Online or offline. Reviews are key to every kind of business.

Clearly, countless potential customers are reading reviews and they're doing it for almost everything they buy — not just big-ticket items, like cars or vacations.

According to a report released by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, 83% of U.S. customers go online to research electronics, computers, books, music and movies before buying those items in brick-and-mortar stores. The report, “*Understanding How U.S. Online Shoppers are Reshaping the Retail Experience*,” also finds that 73% of U.S. customers go online in search of information about clothes, shoes, toys and health and beauty products before buying those items in stores. Reviews represent a key part of that research. They even count on reviews before selecting vendors from the services sector, including accountants, doctors, dentists, plumbers, etc.

Consider the following:

- 57% of consumers have searched online for a local business more than 6 times / year.
- 39% of consumers have searched online for a local businesses at least once a month.
- 15% of consumers have searched online for a local business almost every day.²
- 88% of consumers who search for a type of local business on a mobile device call or go to that business within 24 hours.⁵
- Nearly 9 in 10 consumers have read online reviews to determine the quality of a local business, and 39% do so on a regular basis.²
- One customer on social media will tell 42 other people about an experience they have had with a business.⁶

“When new customers read our positive reviews on bbb.org, they feel confident about giving us their business. Plus, the Better Business Bureau Accreditation Seal right on our site says we’re the right business for the job. Sadly, not every online retailer can make that claim.”

Dmitriy Peregudov, Chief Gift Officer, GiftBasketsOverseas.com,
BBB Accredited Business since 1/26/2009.





Online Reviews:

The fact is, when your business earns BBB Accreditation, you're joining one of the most well-known and well-respected organizations in the country. BBB is one of the most visited websites in the US. Nelson Miller from All Construction & Remodeling is part of a growing number of brick-and-mortar businesses that understand they need an online presence with bbb.org. *"When your business has achieved Accreditation and you display the Better Business Bureau Accreditation Seal, customers just know you have a higher level of commitment to their satisfaction."* says Nelson.

The tools of BBB Accreditation also allow IdentityForce to drive a robust customer acquisition program. *"We use the positive BBB feedback as the foundation for a successful customer acquisition strategy. That's because personal referrals are the strongest sales tools going."*

When you partner with BBB, it says you are committed to an enhanced level of credibility and that you take customer feedback seriously. Customers know and recognize Better Business Bureau Accreditation Seal as a seal of excellence. It says you take customer satisfaction very seriously in every aspect of your interactions — not just when you work with customers online. So, join the over 390,000 local Accredited businesses and apply for [BBB Accreditation](#) today.



Additional free small business resources:

6 Steps To Managing Your Online Reputation – Forbes:

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2013/03/14/6-steps-to-managing-your-online-reputation/>

Google My Business:

https://www.google.com/business/?gmbsrc=us-en-et-gs-z-gmb-s-z-l-ser-home_cta-u&ppsrc=GMBEG

Manage your online reputation - Accounts Help - Google Help:

<https://support.google.com/accounts/answer/1228138?hl=en>

U.S. Small Business Administration: Customer Service online training:

<https://www.sba.gov/tools/sba-learning-center/training/customer-service>



Online Reviews:

Links to articles discussed in this paper:

1. Zendesk survey:
<https://www.zendesk.com/resources/customer-service-and-lifetime-customer-value>
2. BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2014:
<http://www.brightlocal.com/2014/07/01/local-consumer-review-survey-2014/>
3. Yodle commissioned an online survey in June 2013 through a third party research firm to measure the true sentiment of small business owners. For more findings from the survey: <http://www.yodle.net/files/smb-sentiment-report.pdf>.
4. Sites for sending out customer feedback surveys include: SurveyMonkey <https://www.surveymonkey.com>, Zoho, <http://www.zoho.com>, and Free Online Surveys <http://freeonlinesurveys.com/>
5. Digital Sherpa online review study:
<http://www.digitalsherpa.com/blog/use-online-reviews-build-credibility-brand/>
6. American Express® Global Customer Service Barometer: <http://about.americanexpress.com/news/pr/2012/gcsb.aspx>

