

# The Bumper Guide to TripAdvisor

Proud TripAdvisor Platinum  
Review Collection Partner





# Introduction

That TripAdvisor is a giant in the online review collection space is undeniable. With an average of **490 million travellers** visiting the site per month, it is the world's largest travel platform, and while travellers are its focus, it also offers properties, restaurants, activities and more a wonderful opportunity to learn from the guest experiences that are posted for the world to see.

From understanding why you need TripAdvisor, to helping you get more reviews and increasing your ranking, to addressing concerns about fake reviews, and everything in between, this guide to TripAdvisor has been designed to tell you everything you need to get your property, restaurant or activity where it needs to be on the monumental travel platform. Let's jump right in!

Making the most of your TripAdvisor listing may not be as simple as signing up as a provider and letting it run its course, but we're here to help with advice that covers every stage of your TripAdvisor journey:

- > Why listing on TripAdvisor is important
- > Getting to grips with (and improving) your rating and ranking
- > Understanding who is writing reviews, and how to get more
- > What to do with reviews once you have them
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# Why listing on TripAdvisor is important

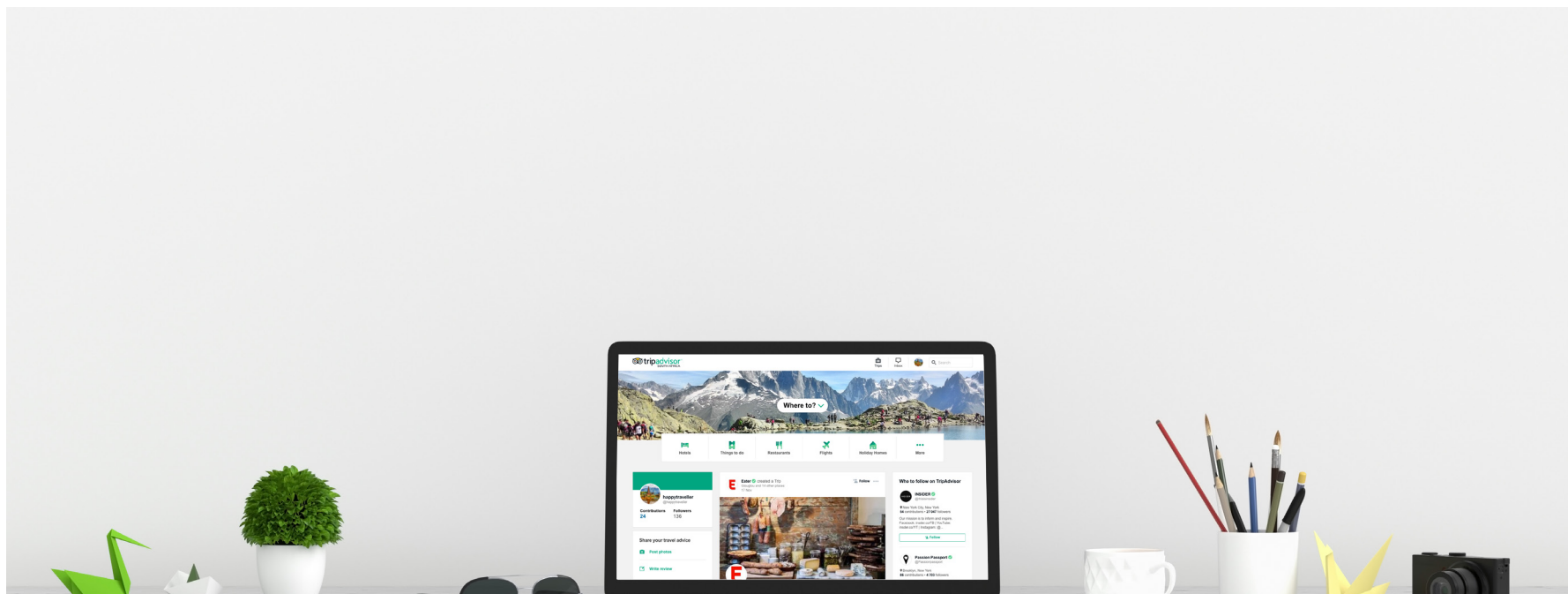
TripAdvisor may be the platform of choice for travellers, but many businesses are wary of the review giant, for reasons that range from concerns about preferential treatment being given to Premium users, to vindictive reviews from

competitors or guests who never really stayed, to frustration at the company's review removal policies. Whether you love it or hate it, managing your listing on TripAdvisor, is essential for any hospitality business.

## What you'll learn more about in this section:

- > Why online reputation management matters
- > How TripAdvisor started, and why a meritocracy like TripAdvisor is important
- > How TripAdvisor's travel feed affects hospitality businesses
- > Details of TripAdvisor's premium features for properties and restaurants





# Back to basics: What is online reputation management and why does it matter

Online reputation management is not a new concept – one of the first major online review sites, Epinions, [went live back in 1999](#). Epinions provided a platform for anyone to post any opinion about a product or service for anyone and everyone in the world to see. Seventeen years later, there are now literally hundreds of sites that do what Epinions did, and many of them have been created specifically for the hospitality industry, making online reputation management more important than ever.

## What is online reputation management?

Online reputation management

(ORM) is firstly, managing your business' online brand in relation to reviews, ratings or even just mentions (both positive and negative) in the online space. Secondly, once you have a view of how your brand is portrayed, you can then see how this impacts your business and develop strategies to optimise or maintain it.

Whether it's something you actively manage or not, you'll be hard-pressed to find a brand without a reputation online. The rise of shared user generated content means that you can just about find an opinion, rating or review on anything.

## Why does ORM matter in the hospitality industry?



According to [TripAdvisor](#), “More than 90% of business representatives rated online traveler reviews, repeat business and increased direct bookings as the three most important factors to the future of their business.”

It is no surprise that the internet is hugely influential in people’s travel decisions – travellers can’t amble down the high street and compare various hotels or travel activities as they would mobile phones or shoes, and not everyone knows someone personally who has travelled to wherever they plan to vacation. The internet is the most convenient way to explore the globe from home, and weigh up the opinions of other travellers.

- [65% of leisure travellers](#) turn to the internet to research their holidays, even before they know where they will be travelling
- When travellers start actually planning their trips, [74% of them use the internet](#)
- Almost [38% of people booking hotels](#) say that positive online reviews are an incentive to stay at an independent hotel
- [59% of British holidaymakers](#) say that review websites and online forums are the most

influential resource when they make travel plans

[Research by Cornell University](#) puts a concrete transactional number on the influence of online reviews in a research paper that states: “If a hotel increases its review scores by 1 point on a 5-point scale (e.g., from 3.3 to 4.3), the hotel can increase its price by 11.2 percent and still maintain the same occupancy or market share.”

## What can a hospitality professional hope to achieve with an effective ORM strategy in place?

### Improved marketing strategies and materials

For hospitality businesses, a satisfied visitor’s review becomes a valuable marketing commodity. Reviews are a form of “social proof”, which heavily influences people’s behaviour and decision-making.

Successful ORM not only allows hospitality professionals to track these positive reviews, but it also means disseminating and sharing positive feedback as widely as possible. Positive feedback should be shared across multiple social



networks, and displayed on an establishment's own website.

## More informed operations planning

While ORM is, by its very nature, performed in a virtual space, remember that the only sure-fire way to get more positive reviews is to improve your offerings and delight guests. Monitoring online feedback and using it to understand your guests' experiences can provide valuable insights that can be used to inform your operational decisions.

As Tarek Aboudib, general manager of Sandy Beach Hotel & Resort in the UAE states: "Guests experience your hotel in ways that you, as a manager, may not be able to experience it and therefore you can be blindsided on certain things."

Online guest feedback can help managers of hospitality businesses to get inside the minds of their visitors, and discover what the most critical issues are in their operations

from the guest's point of view.

## Useful competitive intelligence

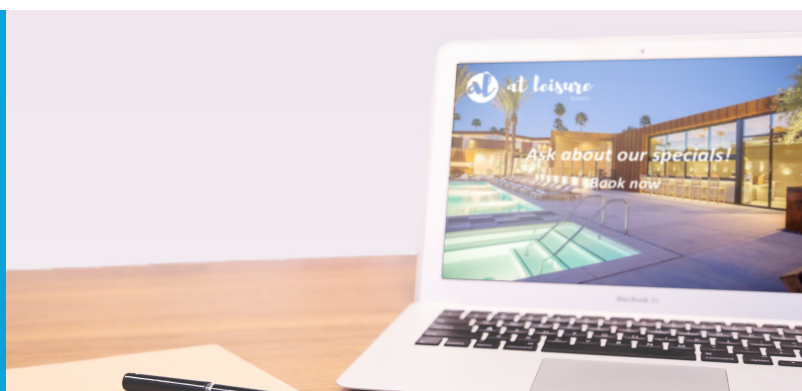
Your competitors are probably monitoring their online reputations, and yours as well, and using the insights they uncover to improve their operations and market their businesses more successfully. In order to stay competitive in the hospitality industry, you need to keep up with, and preferably surpass, your competition.

Monitoring online reviews of your own establishment and those of your competitors will enable you to find out where you have a competitive advantage, and what you should be promoting in your marketing materials. Online reviews of your competitors will also expose their strengths and weaknesses, and by comparing your own scores to theirs, you can discover where your business needs to improve in order to get more bookings, more satisfied visitors, more good reviews, and therefore even more bookings.



How To Spy On Your Competitors  
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The factors that hoteliers consider as important for the future of their business



TripAdvisorTripBarometer Travel Trends 2016 [http://www.ipsos.fr/sites/default/files/doc\\_associe/tripbarometer\\_ipsos\\_tripadvisor\\_dec2015.pdf](http://www.ipsos.fr/sites/default/files/doc_associe/tripbarometer_ipsos_tripadvisor_dec2015.pdf)

## How can hoteliers use technology to help with ORM?

The pace at which information online is updated is astounding. For instance, TripAdvisor has stated that they receive 230 new reviews of businesses every minute, and TripAdvisor is just one of the many sites where customers can post reviews.

Luckily, this communication doesn't have to be one-way, and managers are often afforded the opportunity to respond to guest comments online – and doing so should be an integral part of your ORM strategy. In 2015, **more than**

**60% of TripAdvisor users** said that they would be more likely to stay at a hotel that has posted polite and professional management responses to reviews instead of at a similar hotel that doesn't respond to reviews. Communication is key in relationships, and your relationship with your guests is no exception.

Because responding to reviews has become so vital in online reputation management, technology providers for the hospitality industry have developed software that crawls the internet and notifies users of reviews posted on review sites and online travel agency (OTA) listings. This allows hospitality professionals to respond promptly to positive and negative reviews.



Sentiment analysis software can also automatically work out whether a review mostly positive or negative, allowing busy managers to prioritise which reviews they respond to.

Software that collects and aggregates review scores from multiple online sources is also useful for hospitality professionals who take their online reputations seriously. This software can

help management to track their average online review scores, as well as scores in specific areas (such as service, cleanliness, food and beverage, etc.) and make adjustments to their operations where necessary. The same software can also gather information about your competitors' online reputations and help you to surpass them.



## The importance of a meritocracy like TripAdvisor in hospitality [interview]

Some businesses think of TripAdvisor as their best friend, others their worst enemy. But when it comes to online reviews, it is the one place that every hospitality professional turns to. There can be no denying the impact that

the review giant has had on the hospitality industry, and Sally Davey knows this all too well.

From competing with TripAdvisor with her own start-up, Tripbod.com, to becoming a valued member



of the review giant's international team, Sally has seen the industry shift over the years, and has seen the role that TripAdvisor, and guest reviews, have played in this evolution. She speaks to us about the importance of online reviews in levelling the hospitality marketing playing field, the value of management responses, and so much more.

## **Tell us a bit about who you are, and what your position is.**

I head up Industry Relations at TripAdvisor and am responsible for the company's non-commercial relationship with industry. My team focuses on listening to feedback from the industry and identifying opportunities to improve operations and partnerships, as well as ideas for thought leadership projects. This often leverages TripAdvisor's unique data asset to help provide the industry with leading indicators of forthcoming market changes.

## **What was your first job, and how did you come to work for the largest travel review platform?**

My first job was in a local pub in the Lake District, UK as a kitchen helper and then waitress. I continued

working in hospitality throughout university before starting my own travel company. This grew into a business called Tripbod.com which TripAdvisor acquired in 2014.

## **How did you first come across TripAdvisor — was it as a potential employee, as a competitor, or as a reviewer — and what were your first thoughts about the company?**

Being an entrepreneur in the space I couldn't not be aware of TripAdvisor. Lots of my local partners, when I was building Tripbod, were great fans of TripAdvisor, but as a start-up I wanted to disrupt it! At the time I felt TripAdvisor was doing a great job being the world's largest platform for reviews and opinions, but that smaller businesses like mine could do a better job of personalising the experience. The challenge, of course, was getting to market.

When I was introduced to the Head of Product at TripAdvisor at the time, I was keen to see if there was a business development opportunity. What I didn't expect was to be so deeply impressed by the people I met that day and the company culture that came across.



It turned out they were investing heavily in personalising the user experience and making some great strides, so it was an awesome opportunity to have impact from within — which I think they now call ‘intrapreneurship’!

## Do you think that the founders of TripAdvisor ever imagined how far the company would grow?

I think you always go into business with ambition and dreams, and Steve (TripAdvisor’s co-founder, and still our CEO) certainly does not lack vision! But there is also an element of organic growth to success, and having your users define your direction. As a company, we listen to our users — both industry and consumers — all the time so we can ensure their input is central to our decision making.

I think some things have changed significantly since TripAdvisor’s inception, and others not at all. The company still has the same ambition as it did on day one — to help real travellers share their real insights into real destinations, which goes far beyond the sales pitch of a glossy marketing brochure.

How we do that, and indeed how the industry engages in that with

their own opinions, has evolved enormously. And thankfully our user experience has changed dramatically. Nowadays we don’t bombard you with pop-up windows like everyone did in the ‘good old days’!

## Has the role of feedback changed since it has become freely viewable (and freely voiced) online through platforms like TripAdvisor?

I think the role is still the same — to share feedback with a service provider that either gives well-deserved praise or gives suggestions for improvement. The difference now is that more opinions are shared and that is a really good thing.

Some people just don’t feel comfortable giving feedback there and then in person, even if it is a glowing report, so it’s important for people to have their say in the way they feel comfortable sharing. This then benefits others considering booking with that same business, and can really help raise the profile of businesses that otherwise would struggle to achieve the same brand reach as competitors who have bigger budgets but possibly not as great service.



TripAdvisor is a meritocracy that creates a level playing field based on quality, and that has made a meaningful impact on a lot of businesses in lots of parts of the world.

## **What would you say the role of guest feedback is in the hospitality industry?**

Every industry cares what its consumers think, especially if they want those consumers to come back. In hospitality, this is all the more important because travel is such a high-spend and high-emotion purchase.

We have seen over the years that reviews help improve standards and reduce costs for businesses in paying for market research — they have what they need right there in the reviews for free! We also have third-party data to show that improvements in service quality and therefore review score leads to increased demand and revenues, so guest feedback really can be the start of a highly virtuous circle.

## **How would you say that TripAdvisor has changed the landscape for feedback?**

You only have to walk around a destination and count the

TripAdvisor stickers in windows to know the impact has been significant. Businesses want to collect reviews, for all the reasons above, and because it gives them further opportunity to stand out from the crowd.

As travel consumers, we are all individuals with different tastes and needs, and those differ depending on the type of trip we are on, so it's critical that we connect the right consumer with the right property, based on their needs at that time. TripAdvisor is working hard on doing that better than ever and that means it's a fantastic opportunity for all businesses on our platform to access the market.

## **What would you say to properties who view TripAdvisor reviews as damaging to their brand?**

The vast, vast majority of TripAdvisor reviews are highly positive and we know that most people want to praise the brilliant service they have experienced. It's also important to share critical feedback when appropriate, because it raises standards across our industry and ensures transparency. We hope that businesses see that as an opportunity to shine, and that one poor review within a large number



of positive ones does not negatively impact their business.

What's more, with the manager response tool, the last word goes to the business owner which really is a huge benefit. So I would always suggest businesses view critical feedback as an opportunity to thank the reviewer for their feedback, use it as an opportunity to improve and also to actually attract more business – we know, for example, that thoughtful management responses can actually increase future bookings, so there's really nothing to lose!

### **If you could give one piece of advice to hospitality professionals looking to improve their listings, what would it be?**

Make sure you engage, frequently and thoughtfully. As mentioned, management responses are invaluable, but so too is current content. Make sure your listing content is up-to-date and consider seasonal adjustments to ensure you are really appealing to travellers who are thinking about booking right now. Photos are extremely important, especially of the inside of your property so it's worthwhile investing in some great shots.

### **Is there a review or response that sticks out in your mind as portraying the value that this kind of platform holds for hotels?**

I was in Cape Town a few years ago and met a wonderful entrepreneur called Siviwe who had grown up in the Langa township. He wanted to start a tour company to show visitors to the city a different side of local life, from the perspective of his own community. One day someone told him about TripAdvisor and so he started asking customers for reviews and his business really grew as a result. Using his business success for good, Siviwe founded an incredible youth charity in that same township, which has been a major success and contributed to hundreds of children's education in his community.

For me, that reflects the power of a great entrepreneur and also of how TripAdvisor can really be an opportunity to grow great businesses – making sure the voices of the most brilliant and passionate business owners are heard by the visitors who are looking for the best experiences in a destination, regardless of where they are from or what marketing budget they have.



## What is the best hotel that you have ever stayed in, and why?

I have been very lucky to stay in some remarkable places. I've experienced the high end of the market, such as incredible ethical safari lodges in South Africa, as well as very small, low-key properties like amazing pubs in the Lake District that wow you with their service and personal flair. Each

experience is so different that I couldn't possibly choose just one!

What I will say is that, for me, the link that connects all the best places I have stayed are those that take their responsibility seriously — to their local community and environment. I consistently find that those businesses also deliver the best service and experience, so that's what I look for when I travel.

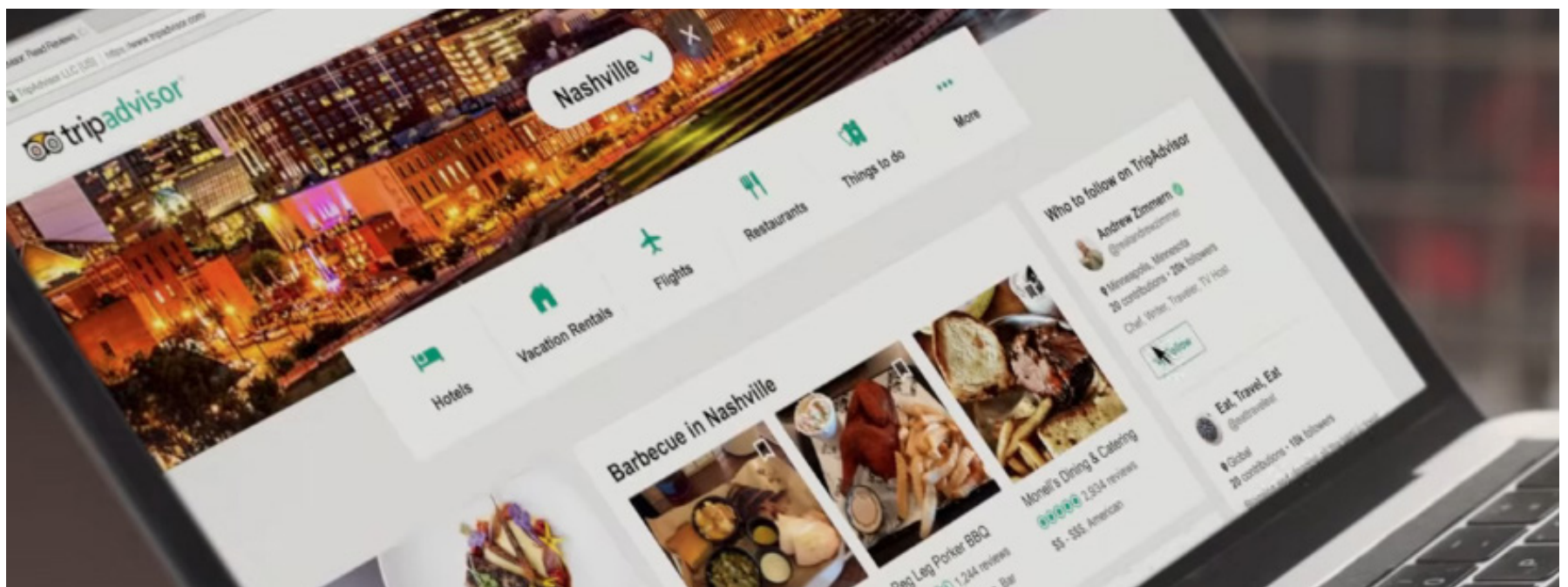


Image © TripAdvisor

## Keeping up with TripAdvisor's travel feed

In November 2018, TripAdvisor rolled out an ambitious change to the platform in the form of a travel feed for users to keep track

of their friends' experiences and recommendations, while also being inspired by companies that they choose to follow, like National

Geographic, GoPro and more.

Following the announcement, there was a good deal of talk about what TripAdvisor hoped to achieve with the change — whether they're trying to become the new Facebook and whether their plans for social interaction will see any success. But, rather than just looking at how the change will affect travellers on the platform, we want to take a look at what inspired the change, and the impact a travel feed will have on businesses on TripAdvisor.

“It remains to be seen how successful TripAdvisor would be in convincing its global users that there's a need for them to create yet another social media profile on top of their Facebook, Instagram and other social media accounts.”

— [Forbes](#)

## Why does TripAdvisor need a 'travel feed'?

Travel is becoming ever more personal, with a one-size-fits-all approach to recommendations for where to go and what to see in a destination no longer being the best solution. TripAdvisor's co-founder, Stephen Kaufer, experienced this for himself when planning a trip to Kyoto with his son. He checked TripAdvisor, of course, for

recommendations of places to stay and things to see, but also found himself wandering the halls of his office building with a notebook in hand, taking suggestions from friends and colleagues who had visited the city of what they thought he would enjoy in particular, and thinking to himself, “this is still a rather archaic way to plan a trip”.

[Kaufer explains](#) that, on asking visitors to the TripAdvisor website what the most important content was to them when they were planning for a trip, 66% said that reviews from other travellers were their top priority, closely followed by 62% who said that recommendations from friends and family topped their list. The importance of opinions from those who we know and trust is nothing new — it's the foundation of word-of-mouth, after all, which we know has long been one of the most popular forms of advertising. But it was this reliance on not just reviews from strangers, but advice from those who are close to us that led TripAdvisor to investigate how they could improve their offering. “How could we gather all that advice, put it in one place, so that TripAdvisor is the perfect place to plan that perfect trip,” Kaufer asked.

Their solution — a travel feed, seemingly much like a Facebook



feed, which shows users recommendations from their connections and pages that they follow. Feeds will be filled with videos and photographs, raves, rants and reviews, about places that travellers are planning to go to, or have been to before. Search for a location and instead of simply seeing lists of accommodation providers, restaurants and activities, you'll see posts from people who have been there, done that, taken the pictures (and the videos).

“When searching a particular destination, the feed automatically narrows the scope of the information displayed to that particular geographic location. For example, members planning a trip to Paris may see a food critic's article on the best restaurant in the city, an influencer's travel guide of “must-do's,” and a friend's review of a new hotel near the Eiffel Tower.” — [TripAdvisor](#)

## Making reviews even more important

While the change is largely focussed on travellers rather than providers, it's easy to see how accommodation, restaurant and activity providers who list themselves on the platform will be affected by the addition of feeds.

A good deal of the content that is going to be shared is, after all, reviews — reviews of the places that connections stayed at, dined at, partied at, and either loved or hated will take up the majority of feed space.

Just as importantly, those reviews will come up in a feed when a traveller searches for a particular location, making it more vital than ever to ensure that you are getting consistent reviews from your guests. And the more recent your reviews, the more likely you are to appear in the feed and be noticed by travellers considering travelling to your area.

“The new TripAdvisor is the one travel site that brings together social-assistive tools, amazing content and our existing booking capabilities to merge the joy of planning and discovery together into a single experience. We are assisting our members at each step of their journey as we become a more personalized, inspirational and useful TripAdvisor.” — Stephen Kaufer

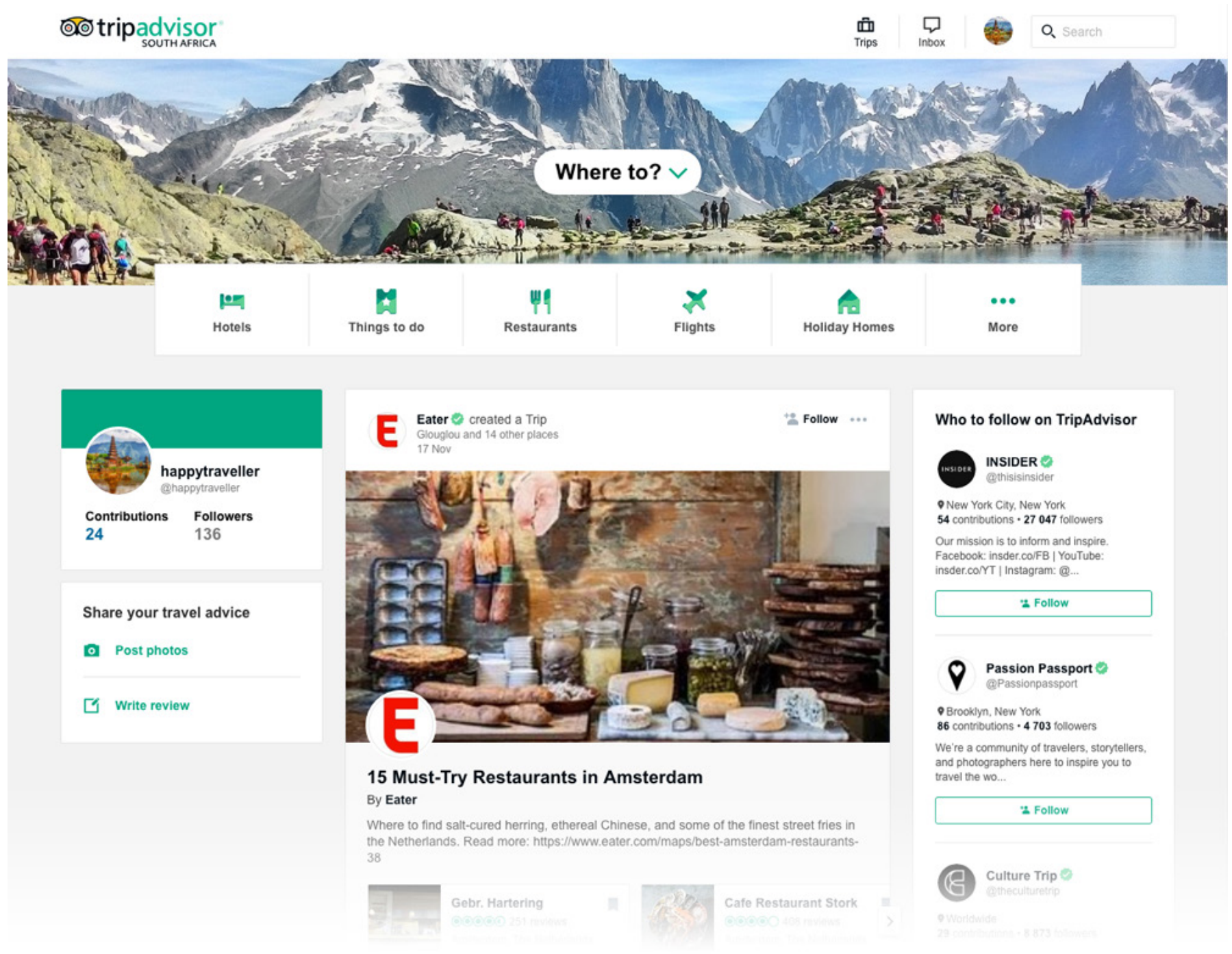
Travel feeds may further a cause that Sally Davey, Senior Global Director of Industry Relations at TripAdvisor, discussed in the above interview — that of levelling



the playing field for hospitality businesses. “It’s important for people to have their say in the way they feel comfortable sharing,” Davey explains. “This then benefits others considering booking with that same business, and can really help raise the profile of businesses that otherwise would struggle to achieve the same brand reach as competitors who have bigger budgets but possibly not as great service.”

## Is this yet another platform that you should be actively updating?

We could talk all day about the importance of keeping your TripAdvisor listing up to date (in fact, we’ve even put together a checklist that does exactly that) but does the addition of a travel feed mean that you should be writing posts, counting likes and accumulating comments a la Facebook and Twitter?





Well, yes and no. The travel feed does provide you with a new opportunity to do just that — to post specials and discounts to attract travellers in your area. As TripAdvisor's VP of product, Elliot Cohen, [explained to Forbes](#), “businesses can now take advantage of the platform and use the travel feed to reach new customers and reach people in real time.”

This being said, however, TripAdvisor has made it clear that properties will still not be able to post reviews about their own properties, and the power of social proof in the form of the reviews that your guests and customers post will do much of the reaching out to new customer bases, without your necessarily needing to toot your own horn,

so to speak. Social proof, or the tendency to trust what others say about a business rather than what the business says about itself, is a phenomenon that may be proved even further with the addition of a travel feed, ensuring that travellers are hearing all about you, but not necessarily from you.

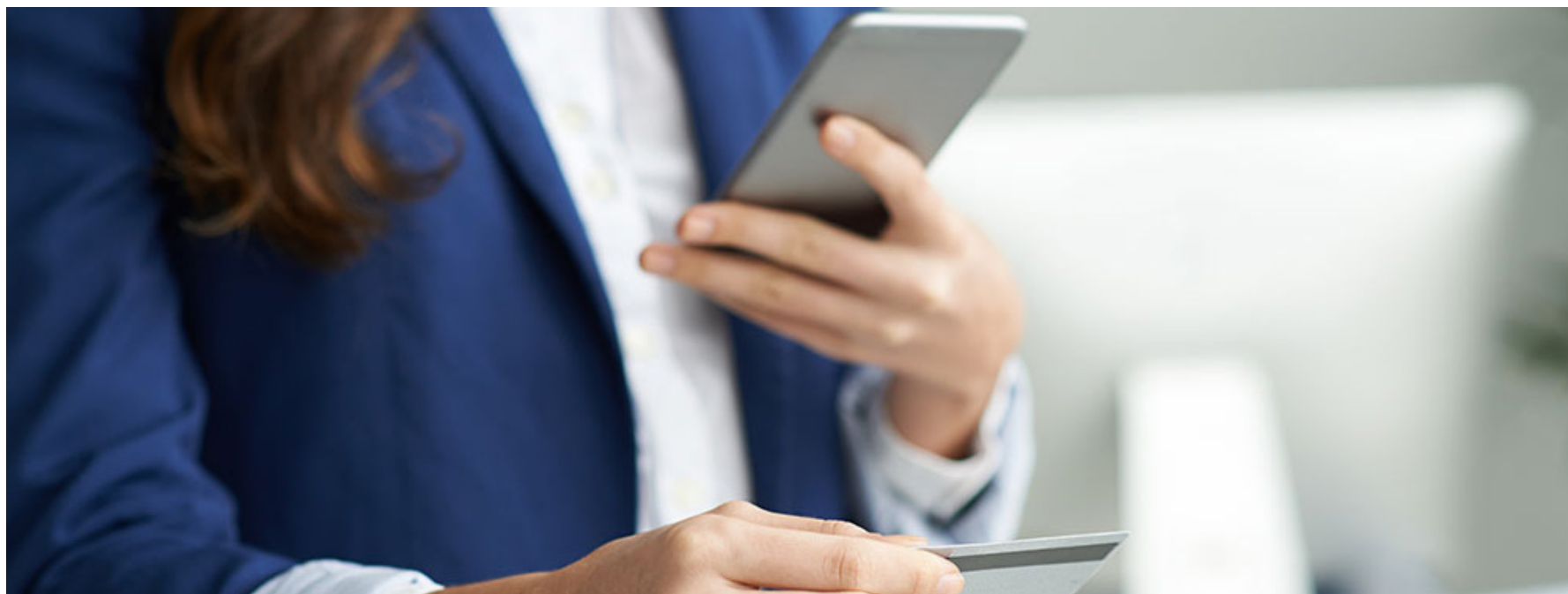
Whether TripAdvisor is becoming more Facebook-like, and whether that is a model that will work well for them or not, at the end of the day means little to the properties, restaurants and activity providers who make use of the platform. What should matter to them is that the addition of a travel feed is one that can only improve listings, rather than detracting from them, and empower businesses who are being reviewed on a regular basis.



Infographic Pack

Get More Bookings Using Social Proof

[Click here to download](#)



## A quick guide to TripAdvisor's premium products

**B**udgets in hospitality are always tight, and hoteliers, restaurateurs and other hospitality professionals constantly find themselves asking, “do I need to pay for this, or will the free version work just fine?”. No one likes paying for things they can get for free, but we also all know there's no such thing as a free lunch. So, we have put together a quick guide to TripAdvisor's premium (paid-for) services, and why you may (or may not) benefit from using them.

### **Business Advantage – for Hotels**

Do first impressions count? The [Business Advantage](#) package serves to give hoteliers more control over the first impression a user or guest receives when they land on their hotel's listing page. Perks include:

- The ability to choose a favourite review to feature near the top of your listing
- The option to choose which “cover photos” and “favourite photos” users see first and to put together a slideshow of handpicked images to showcase your property's best aspects
- An area on your listing where you can share contact details with guests, including your phone number (with a click-to-call function on mobile), email address and, crucially, a link to your property's own website (great if you have a ‘book direct’ strategy in place)
- The ability to promote special offers and make announcements – for



example, if you have improved an aspect of your property that was attracting criticism, you can announce that you have rectified the issue

- > Access to more advanced analytics capabilities where you can see competitor and user engagement data, such as data on how visitors interact with the information, offers and images on your listing that can help you make it even better. It also gives you the ability to measure your TripAdvisor reputation against your competitors and gauge your market position against market trends.

## **Instant Booking – for Hotels**

TripAdvisor's foray into the realm of the OTA allows travellers to book a hotel directly through TripAdvisor with [Instant Booking](#). In return for exposure to their vast audience, TripAdvisor charges hotels a commission fee. The amount charged (12% or 15%) depends on how many "traveller views" the hotelier would like access to. Some points to know:

- > No upfront payment or subscription, so you only pay for bookings you actually get

- > "Live rates" mean that you can change your rates in accordance with your own revenue management strategies

However, like all non-direct or OTA channels, there are some serious drawbacks to getting bookings this way, such as loss of brand identity, and possibly a reduced capacity to communicate directly with guests before and after their stays.

## **TripAdvisor Premium – for Restaurants**

A relatively new addition to the TripAdvisor suite, [Premium](#) is for restaurants what Business Advantage is for hotels. The main focus of the product is on allowing restaurateurs to customise the first impression that visitors get when they land on the listing. This is particularly important on mobile and for restaurants, where decisions are made more quickly than they usually are for hotels. Premium allows managers:

- > To choose a favourite review to feature near the top of your listing, including a favourite review for each available language
- > Access to priority phone support

- > The ability to put together a “storyboard” which turns your favourite images and reviews into a nifty visual presentation
- > To create a video slideshow featuring your best images
- > Access to more advanced analytics

## TheFork – for Restaurants

Although not on the TripAdvisor website itself, [TheFork](#) is owned and operated by TripAdvisor, and proudly proclaims it is “a TripAdvisor company”. Similar to instant booking, TheFork is a booking channel for restaurants, although it is only operational in a few cities, mainly in Europe, so far. Even within TheFork itself, there are paid and free options available to restaurateurs. The pro package, however, with all the perks, goes for 89 euros per month. Some features of TheFork include:

- > A built-in reservations management system
- > A customer relations management system that creates profiles of diners so that you can communicate with them in the future
- > A booking widget that can be used on the restaurant’s own

website, and a booking button on Facebook and TripAdvisor (bookings that don’t come via TheFork or Tripadvisor are not charged commission)

- > A free template-based but customisable website for the restaurant

## What you can’t get

TripAdvisor makes it very clear that while their range of products is there to allow hoteliers greater control over their listing’s appearance, they will in no way allow you to manipulate the feedback from your customers, or present a false image to their users.

You won’t be able to remove reviews just because you don’t agree with them – the rules are the same for everyone – and you will have to follow the same procedure as free clients if you feel your establishment is being blackmailed or treated unfairly by a reviewer.

In short, TripAdvisor’s paid options allow you the opportunity to make a good first impression – an opportunity that only comes once – at a price tailored to your establishment’s size, region and traffic.



# Understanding (and improving) your ranking

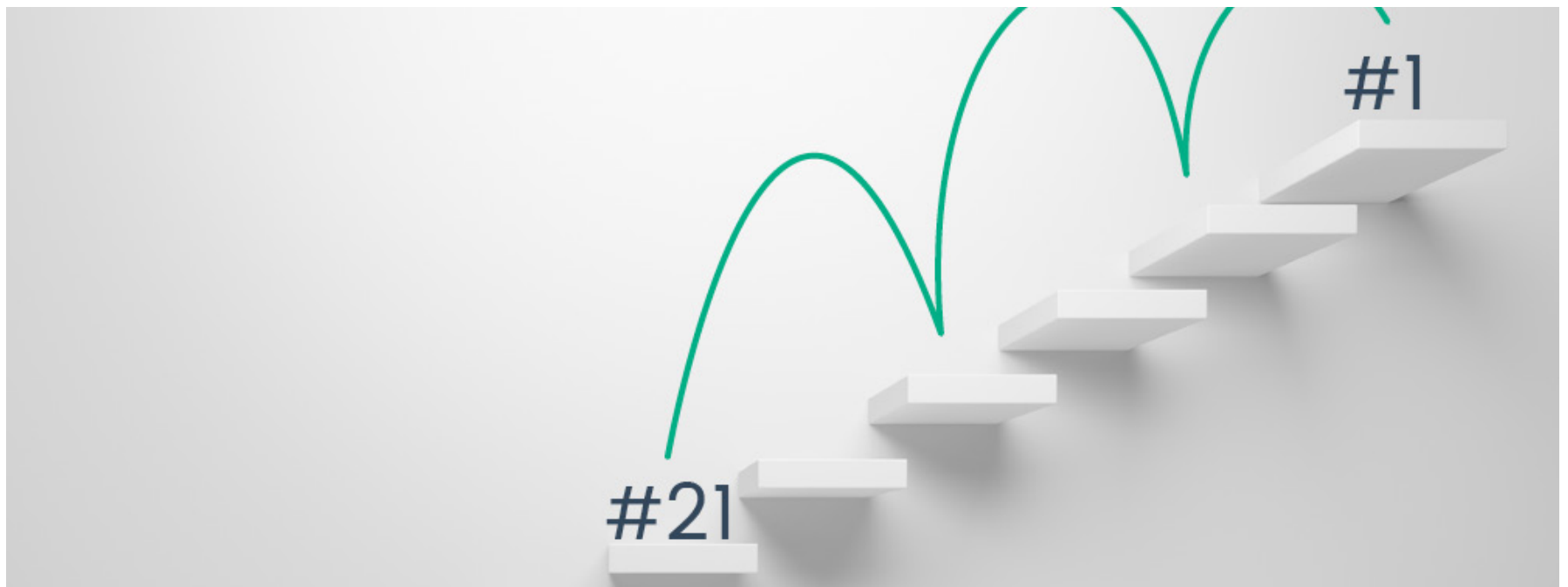
With over 8-million businesses currently listed on TripAdvisor, finding a way to accurately compare and rank hotels, restaurants, activities and more is no easy task. This is why TripAdvisor's algorithms are constantly being adjusted to ensure that the three most important metrics — quality, quantity and recency — are correctly weighted and result in the businesses that offer the

best experiences being top-ranked.

Despite the constant flux in the algorithm, focussing on improving the three main metrics that TripAdvisor takes into consideration will see your rank climbing consistently. That's why, in this section, we're going to help you understand how your TripAdvisor ranking works, and how it can be improved.

## What you'll learn more about in this section:

- How your TripAdvisor ranking is calculated
- Recent changes to the ranking algorithm
- How awards and widgets affect your listing
- Ways that you can improve your listing and increase your ranking



# How your TripAdvisor ranking is calculated (and how to improve it)

**W**e won't get too technical here, but some understanding of how TripAdvisor works, and the terms used, will go a long way in making sure you reach a top ranking position.

## The two scores

You may have noticed that sometimes a business is ranked number 20 in its area, but its reviews all say how wonderful it is, and that the company that came first in that area has several bad ones.

This can happen because, even though they are related, your rating is different from your ranking.

**TRIPADVISOR RATING:** This is based on the bubble rating attached to

each written review a guest leaves once they have stayed with you. Based on these reviews you will be given a rating, with 5 being the highest.

**TRIPADVISOR RANKING:** Much like Google, TripAdvisor uses algorithms to rank properties against one another on their popularity index based on a few different points.

## Points of the popularity index

The popularity index determines how you rank against other properties in your geographic area. This is worked out in a few ways, but the three main points that affect your ranking are the quality, quantity and age of your reviews.





Review **freshness**



Review **score**



Review **volume**

So, to improve your ranking you need to attend to each one:

1. **QUALITY OF THE REVIEWS** –

Nothing digital is going to help you with this, it's down to good old fashioned customer service and guest experience. Make use of online surveys to find out exactly where you're not meeting the mark. Use negative reviews to pinpoint any areas you may need to work on to make sure you are delivering on your offer, and positive reviews to help you exceed expectations.

2. **QUANTITY OF REVIEWS** – Make sure every guest who passes through your lobby or visitor who passes through your door leaves a review. There are a few ways you can encourage this, the most obvious is by asking, however there are tools available online which simplify the process of leaving a comprehensive review for guests.

3. **AGE OF YOUR REVIEWS** – The older the review, the less weight it carries. Make sure you have new reviews coming in all the time to score full-marks on this point.

NB: It's worth noting here that

TripAdvisor does moderate reviews and if they suspect that an establishment is paying for reviews or soliciting untrue feedback (like from family members or staff, who are far from objective), then there is a penalty.

## Your ranking isn't all that matters

You might be ranked first in your area or you might be ranked hundredth, but remember that people not numbers engage with your business. You have to be a person as well, someone who is part of the conversation, you have to respond to your reviews.

This does not mean only responding to those reviews which sing your praises, although a 'Thank-you' and 'Hope to see you again' obviously go a long way in showing appreciation. The real test will come in managing your negative reviews – and manage you must because should you hide or ignore them, you're going to miss out on the [85% of TripAdvisor users](#) who say that a properly managed response to a negative review actually improves their impression of the establishment.

# 2016 Update to the TripAdvisor Popularity Index algorithm Q&A

**F**ollowing extensive testing and piloting, TripAdvisor announced at the beginning of May 2016 that it had implemented an updated algorithm for ranking accommodation properties on its Popularity Index across all listings and areas.

TripAdvisor began rolling out the changes to the algorithm in December 2015, when it started to apply the new algorithm to restaurant and attraction listings. Throughout the first quarter of 2016, TripAdvisor then began to apply the new algorithm to accommodation listings.

## What is the Popularity Index?

The TripAdvisor Popularity Index is what determines which properties are listed first when a user searches for accommodation, dining or activities in a particular area. The purpose of the Popularity Index is to present travellers with the best options first, ensuring that their experience of the TripAdvisor website is useful and positive.

## Why was the Popularity Index changed?

An imperfection in the previous iteration of the ranking algorithm meant that some new businesses (which TripAdvisor dubbed “fast risers”) with very few, but very recent, good reviews could quickly outrank more established competitors with more reviews reflecting a wider range of guest experiences posted over a longer period of time before settling into a more representative position on the Popularity Index.

## How has Popularity Index changed?

The Popularity Index ranking of a property has always been influenced by three factors: the quality of the reviews, the recency of the reviews and the number of reviews. The 2016 update to the Popularity Index algorithm still based results on these three factors, but had been refined to present new and established hotels side-by-side more fairly.



TripAdvisor stated that it had “designed the enhanced Popularity Ranking algorithm to value the quantity and consistency of reviews more significantly”.

## What can I do to maintain and improve my TripAdvisor ranking?

As always, the quality of the experience that you provide is the most important factor in maintaining a good reputation in the hospitality industry. However, TripAdvisor’s algorithmic changes mean that it is more important than ever to ensure that as many of your visitors are writing reviews as often as possible.

Because TripAdvisor has increased the weight of recency, number and consistency of reviews in determining ranking, even a mediocre review may boost your hotel’s ranking if it has been posted recently, making a larger number of average reviews potentially more beneficial to your listing than one or two outstanding reviews.

The difficulty that this presents for hospitality professionals is getting these satisfied, but not overwhelmed, customers to leave reviews. Often online

reviews tend to skew towards the extremes when compared to direct feedback. People post reviews about experiences that they found exceptional, whether that be exceptionally good or exceptionally bad.

In order to maintain and improve your ranking on TripAdvisor, it is important to encourage each and every visitor to leave a review. There are a number of ways you can do this, such as:

- > Leaving cards in guests rooms, on tables or at reception desks inviting them to leave a review on TripAdvisor
- > Giving your visitors the code to your free Wi-Fi on a card, with a reminder to leave a review on TripAdvisor
- > Putting a QR (quick recognition) code that directs guests straight to your TripAdvisor listing on any printed material you provide
- > Sending guests an email after their visit inviting them to review your business on TripAdvisor

When asking guests for reviews of their experiences, hospitality professionals should also bear in

mind that there are a number of benefits to collecting both direct and indirect guest feedback, and emailing guests after their visit, thanking them for their custom and asking for feedback is simply good practice.

Consider providing visitors with an online questionnaire to fill out which includes a link to your TripAdvisor review page to make the process much easier. The easier it is for customers to give you feedback and leave reviews online the more

likely they are to do so.

You should, however, bear in mind that offering any kind of bribe or incentive for customers and guests to leave a review (good, bad or otherwise) is against TripAdvisor's rules, and can result in severe penalties. The most fool-proof way to ensure you maintain a good reputation is to provide a good experience, then simply ask people to write about it and make it easy for them to do so.

## TripAdvisor makes further changes to its algorithm in 2018

**T**ripAdvisor is continually fine-tuning the way that its algorithm ranks accommodation, activities and restaurants in order to show travellers the most popular options in their chosen areas. These algorithmic changes are usually small and seldom have easily noticeable effects. However, updates to the algorithm have seen some properties' rankings shifting substantially.

Following 2016's update to the algorithm, which sought to prevent newer establishments unfairly rocketing to the top of the rankings

on the basis of just a few very recent reviews, the aim behind the early 2018 updates is quite similar, with TripAdvisor stating in a mail sent to listing managers that it has made changes to "better measure the consistency of each business's performance over time".

In addition to the ranking update, TripAdvisor has taken user feedback into account and created a new format to present the accommodation options available in chosen destinations, combining Hotels, B&Bs & Inns and Speciality Lodgings, for example, into a single



“Places to Stay” view.

“In this recent update,” a TripAdvisor spokesperson explains, “the aim was to do a better job of measuring consistency, so that all types of properties – large or small, independent or centrally managed – have the same opportunities to succeed on TripAdvisor. This means that business owners will see shifts in the positions of their hotels – some moving up, some moving down in the rankings, depending on how the businesses around them are shifting.”

With this update, properties and attractions of all sizes that consistently receive good review ratings will be rewarded with a higher ranking than those that have highs and lows. This higher weighting of consistency means that the algorithmically calculated ranking (and the reviews) are more likely to be indicative of the experience that future travellers will actually have at a hotel, restaurant or attraction.

If the business has provided good service and received reviews with high ratings for the past ten years, they will be considered more reliable, and therefore ranked more highly, than one which has been getting rave reviews for the past

two months, but wasn't doing quite as well before that. If that streak of rave reviews continue though, the latter business will rise through the ranks once more.

“The decision to make changes to the Popularity Ranking algorithm was not taken lightly,” the TripAdvisor spokesperson continued. “We do know how it feels when something outside your control changes and impacts your business as a result – this happens to us at TripAdvisor too. When search engines like Google change their algorithms, it impacts us as well. And no matter how much information we have about the change, it takes time to adjust and to adapt.”

Adjusting and adapting in this instance does not necessarily mean making changes to the way that reviews are being collected – quality, quantity and recency continue to be taken into account when determining where a business falls in the ranking. Providing a great experience, and encouraging customers to leave reviews is just as important as ever to ensure that your business consistently gets good and great reviews, helping you to climb the rankings again.



# TripAdvisor Awards: what are they, and how can you earn them?

**B**y earning and nurturing the various accolades that TripAdvisor awards for excellence in hospitality, you'll be able to bolster a cycle of trust between your establishment, existing customers, and potential travellers from around the world.

With millions of travellers placing enormous trust in how others rate a particular hotel, restaurant, activity or tourist attraction, these awards have the potential to net your business significantly higher profits.

“So huge is the ‘TripAdvisor Effect’ that it can impact entire countries,” [writes](#) Outside Online’s Tom Vanderbilt. “TripAdvisor – on a rising tide of 200 million user reviews and counting – is a travel-industry Goliath, able to turn obscure hotels into sold-out hot spots, carry new

flocks of visitors on digital word of mouth to quiet destinations, even rewrite the hospitality standards of entire nations.”

We take a look at the three biggest TripAdvisor certifications and how you can achieve them to enhance your business.

## Travellers’ Choice

The Travellers’ Choice award was established in 2002, and is the highest honour TripAdvisor can bestow.

Based on millions of reviews and opinions from travellers from around the world, this annual award recognises the very best tourism establishments in terms of service, quality, customer satisfaction and more, across a range of categories.



These categories are broken up per region and include destinations on the rise, beaches, landmarks, attractions, hotels, restaurants and much more, which means your chance of grabbing a spot on the list is more achievable than you may think.

If you're unable to achieve top spot in a particular category, as a savvy hospitality professional you'll still be able to capitalise indirectly from existing recipients. Maybe you're only 700m from one of TripAdvisor's top beaches, or just down the road from one of the top attractions in your city? Make sure your visitors know this. If they're having a good time, there's a very good chance their reviews of your business will reflect that.

## How is the TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice awarded?

As the name suggests, the Travellers' Choice award is determined by travellers themselves and the reviews they write. While this may seem largely out of your control, it goes without saying that you need to ensure that your business is operating like a well-oiled machine in order to generate consistently happy customer reviews.

Also take the time to respond to any exceptionally positive or negative reviews written about your offerings.

It's important to maintain a sense of decorum in these replies – don't get defensive and angry, but rather reassure travellers that you strive for excellence and will see that their concerns are tended to.

"Saying sorry is important," says head of TripAdvisor's global product division, Adam Medros. "But it's not enough to say sorry you didn't like the carpet." Instead, the reply should be: 'Here's our plan for fixing that.'"

Maintain the very best levels of service and overall quality, and think of clever ways to give visitors something they can't get anywhere else. You'll be on your way to a Travellers' Choice award in no time.

## Certificate of Excellence

This prestigious TripAdvisor award honours select tourism establishments that "consistently demonstrate a commitment to hospitality excellence".

A "proprietary algorithm" is used to determine worthy candidates, taking into account the quality, quantity and recency of reviews submitted by travellers over an

annual period. Your business' tenure and ranking on the [TripAdvisor Popularity Index](#) is also taken into consideration.

## How do I receive the TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence award?

There are three main factors that impact qualification for the Certificate of Excellence:

- You must maintain an overall bubble rating of at least four out of five
- Have a minimum number of reviews (the exact amount is part of the algorithm used)
- Your establishment must have been listed on TripAdvisor for at least 12 months

This reward is activated automatically, and will appear on your listing page should you qualify. You can also visit the widget section of the website to download a badge to display on your website and other marketing material.

According to TripAdvisor, about 75% of travellers are more likely to visit a business that carries a TripAdvisor endorsement.

[Follow this link](#) for more information. To find out which countries are eligible for the GreenLeaders program, [click here](#).

## The GreenLeaders Certification

Data collected by TripAdvisor's TripBarometer (the world's largest accommodation and traveller survey) revealed that 79% of travellers place importance on tourism establishments taking an eco-friendly approach to their operations.

## How do I apply for the TripAdvisor GreenLeaders certification?

[According to TripAdvisor](#), any hotel or B&B interested in becoming a GreenLeader "must [apply](#) to the TripAdvisor GreenLeaders program. If accepted, GreenLeaders achieve one of four statuses: Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum. The higher the status, the greater the impact of a property's green practices."

Once your hotel qualifies for the certification, your listing page will carry the GreenLeaders badge and show off to the world that you care about the environment, and strive to leave as small an eco-footprint as possible.



# TripAdvisor review widgets

TripAdvisor offers a number of different widgets to hotels with TripAdvisor listings that automatically pull fresh reviews or updated ratings from your listing directly onto your own webpage. Some are simply buttons and badges, and others show ratings and reviews.

## The “review snippets” widget

This widget pulls through the titles of a few of your most recent reviews, your TripAdvisor ranking and your TripAdvisor traveller rating. If your reviews are mostly positive, this is the way to go. If you have a lot of mixed feedback, but a few excellents, try the bravo widget instead.

## The “bravo” widget

Hotels have to qualify to be allowed to display this widget. If you qualify, it is a great way to make the most of your excellent reviews without having to show people the negative ones; this widget only displays how many “excellent” reviews you have received. To find out if you qualify, check the widget centre.

## The “rave reviews” widget

The rave reviews widget shows a rotating carousel of the title of your most recent five out of five review, along with a link to see more. This one is a good option if you want

to display a good review but have limited space on your page.

## The “thumbs up” badge

This little widget also isn’t available for all properties, so check your widget centre. It is a small box that tells people what percentage of TripAdvisor reviewers would recommend your hotel.

## The “your rating” widget

This widget simply displays your traveller rating. It is a great way to go if you have a high rating but a relatively low rank – perhaps if you are in a large city with many hotels to compete with, or only a few reviews. Remember, your ranking is affected by more than just your rating.

## Accolades badges

TripAdvisor also offers badges to hotels who have achieved certain criteria or won TripAdvisor accolades. Check your widget centre to see if your hotel qualifies for any of these.

# Understanding who is writing reviews, why, and how to get more

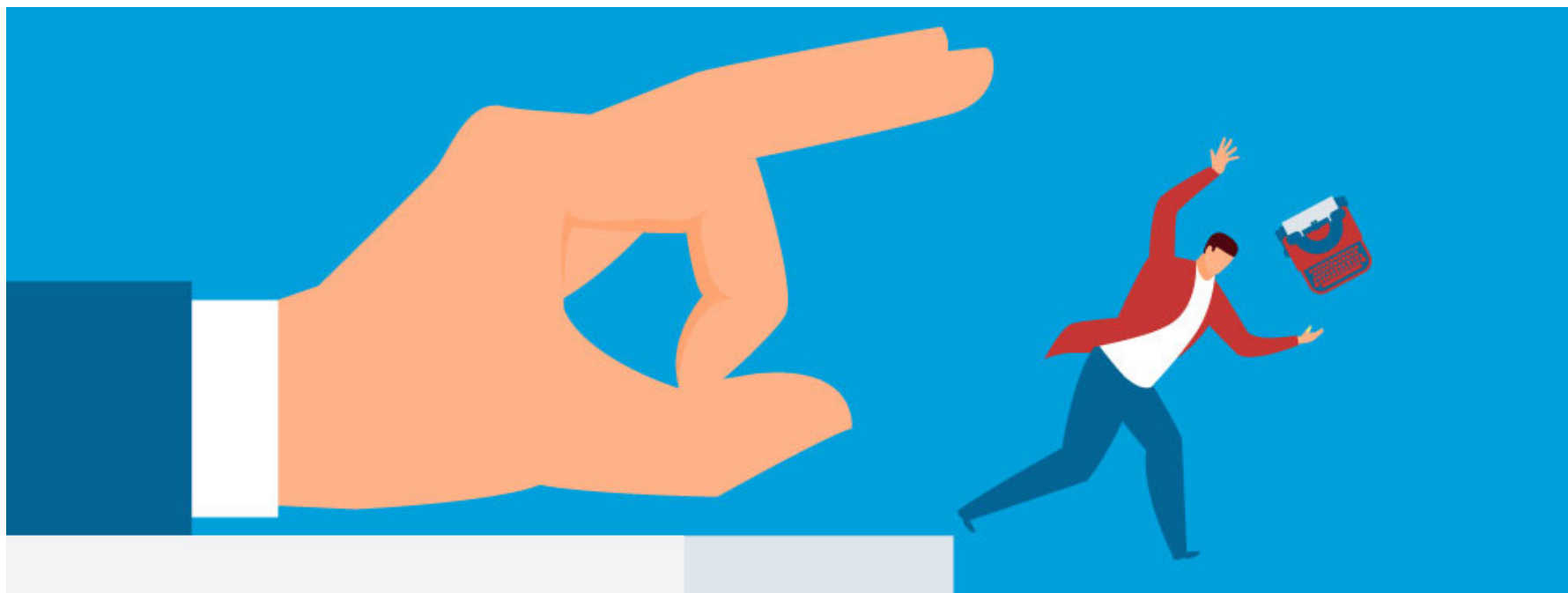
It can be easy to think that the people leaving reviews on TripAdvisor have their own interests at heart, particularly when the feedback that they give is less than stellar. But the reasons that guests leave reviews are often not quite as simple as wanting a platform to vent, or looking for a quick freebie.

Understanding who is leaving you reviews and why is vital — it can help you to pre-empt negative reviews before they appear online, encourage positive reviews from visitors who had great experiences, and see you getting more reviews, and higher rankings, overall.

## What you'll learn more about in this section:

- > How everyone has become a critic
- > Why guests leave reviews
- > Why quantity is often better than quality when it comes to TripAdvisor reviews
- > How a review collection partner can see you getting more reviews with higher ratings
- > How your team can help you to get more reviews
- > Why your reviews may not be appearing online





# The end of the professional critic (and why you need to get over it)

**R**emember the days of the professional critic? You'd have the perfect room or table picked out — the pride of your establishment — and it would be flawlessly cleaned and prepped, mint on the pillow, cutlery polished, bar fully stocked. Your staff would be on their best behaviour, waiting on the pseudo-celebrity hand and foot, all to make sure that you got the best review that you possibly could. We're sorry

to tell you this, but the professional critic is dead.

## Everyone's a critic

No longer does one person's opinion act as a placeholder for all. The advent of the internet means that every patron is a potential critic, all of their opinions holding equal weight when it comes to reviewing your business. It's no longer enough



Pic credit: [Paperfury](#)/Pixar

to have one room prepared once a year for the grading inspector. Instead, every room needs to be given that treatment. Every visitor expects a great experience when they book with you, and it's up to you to make sure that they get one, or face the wrath of the bad TripAdvisor review.

## **Why professional reviews don't mean as much anymore**

Having an outstanding review published in an internationally recognised magazine used to be the pinnacle, practically the definition, of success. It would see travellers from around the world swarming to your place of business and booking for months and years in advance. Now, a review published in a magazine is nothing more than that — one review. It may still carry weight with some readers, but is unlikely to be the only source of advice that they look to. It will be followed by a trip to TripAdvisor, a browse of Booking.com or a glance at Google, and the reviews found there will tell the reader more than that single article ever could — it will tell them what an average experience with your business is like.

While some hoteliers and chefs

may lament the death of the professional critic, for others, the more egalitarian review system allowed by an internet to which everyone is a contributor has been a decidedly positive development.

Now, establishments that may never have come across the radar of professional critics get their time to shine too. Review sites cover a wide range of accommodations, restaurants and activities, so while your safaris, self-catering cottages or cafe may never get the chance to grace the pages of Cosmopolitan, they are exactly what some visitors to TripAdvisor are looking for, and potential patrons get the chance to read about how others have found their experiences with you.

## **The rise of the publicly accessible opinion**

With the rise of review sites like TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Yelp, Trivago and thousands more, suddenly opinions are public, and you're seeing reviews from people who had good and bad experiences alike. Though it can feel as though all these sites do is provide a podium for disgruntled guests to rant, or unscrupulous visitors to blackmail their way to a better room, they're doing so much



more – they open up the world for hospitality professionals and travellers alike. You're no longer relying on one or two reviews in magazines, newspapers or guidebooks to get your name out to the public, but could have hundreds of reviews for potential patrons to base their decisions on. Not only do they give travellers the power to make better-informed choices, they're giving you the opportunity to learn more about the guest experience that you provide and to respond to any criticism that you might receive.

## **People having opinions about their stays with you is nothing new**

The fact is, none of this is really new. Your guests have always been critics – they simply haven't had the public platforms before. Word of mouth is hardly a novel concept – think of all those great experiences that saw your customers suggesting you to their friends and family. But the other side of the coin wasn't quite as noticeable – the awful visits that saw your unhappy guests telling their real-world social network to avoid you at all costs. You didn't notice those instances, because you didn't know about them. You simply never saw the

bookings or custom. You couldn't stop the negative word of mouth from spreading or add context to it, because you didn't know where it was coming from, or who it was reaching.

## **You can add your voice to the discussion online**

Now, the negative reviews and naysayers may be reaching more people than they were before, but, while you should obviously be trying to ensure all patrons have positive experiences, bad reviews aren't necessarily something you should be scheming to circumvent. Now, you also have the opportunity to address negative reviews, and make sure that more than one side of the story is being heard. Where before, you couldn't know who was talking about your business, now you can be a part of the conversation.

Perhaps your visitors are raising points that you haven't considered before – you have the opportunity to improve what you offer, and raise your standards. Better yet, you can make sure that your unhappy patron, and all those who may read their review later, know that their opinion matters, and that you take their suggestions to heart. Showing that you care about your reviews

“7 out of 10 consumers will leave a review for a business if they’re asked to”

– BrightLocal



and your customers’ experiences enough to change will encourage others to consider your business, and maybe even have that unhappy visitor considering giving you a second chance. [Research by TripAdvisor](#) suggests that a professional response to a bad review may even improve readers’ impressions of your hotel, and make them more likely to book.

## Creating a balanced picture and getting a better rating require more reviews, not fewer

When it comes down to it, you should really be encouraging every single one of your patrons to post reviews on travel sites! The more reviews you have, the more balanced a picture you can give, not only of the services that you provide, but of the atmosphere and attitude that you inspire. And, while it might be tempting to just have

the ten best reviews that you’ve ever received displayed on every site where a potential customer might see them, the algorithms that sites like TripAdvisor use take into account not only the score of reviews, but the number of reviews and their recency as well. Therefore, the more reviews you have (even if they could be described as average at best), the better you’re likely to rank, and the more uncharacteristic those few negative ones will seem to readers.

## Use reviews to your advantage offline

Not only are the number of reviews and the opportunity to engage with reviewers fantastic for your business, but the content of the reviews that you get will be more helpful than information that professional critics provide. People who are paid to write reviews are reviewing you for their readership, not for your benefit, and whether



they're packed full of praise or niggling negativity, it can be difficult to find information that you can actually use to improve what you've got to offer.

When it comes to online reviews, on the other hand, there are no holds barred, and you have the opportunity to learn exactly where you are getting things right, and where work is needed. Whether they act as the basis for making operational decisions, or creating marketing campaigns that highlight what sets you apart, your reviews can be used online and off to improve your offerings and bring the right kinds of customers to your establishment.

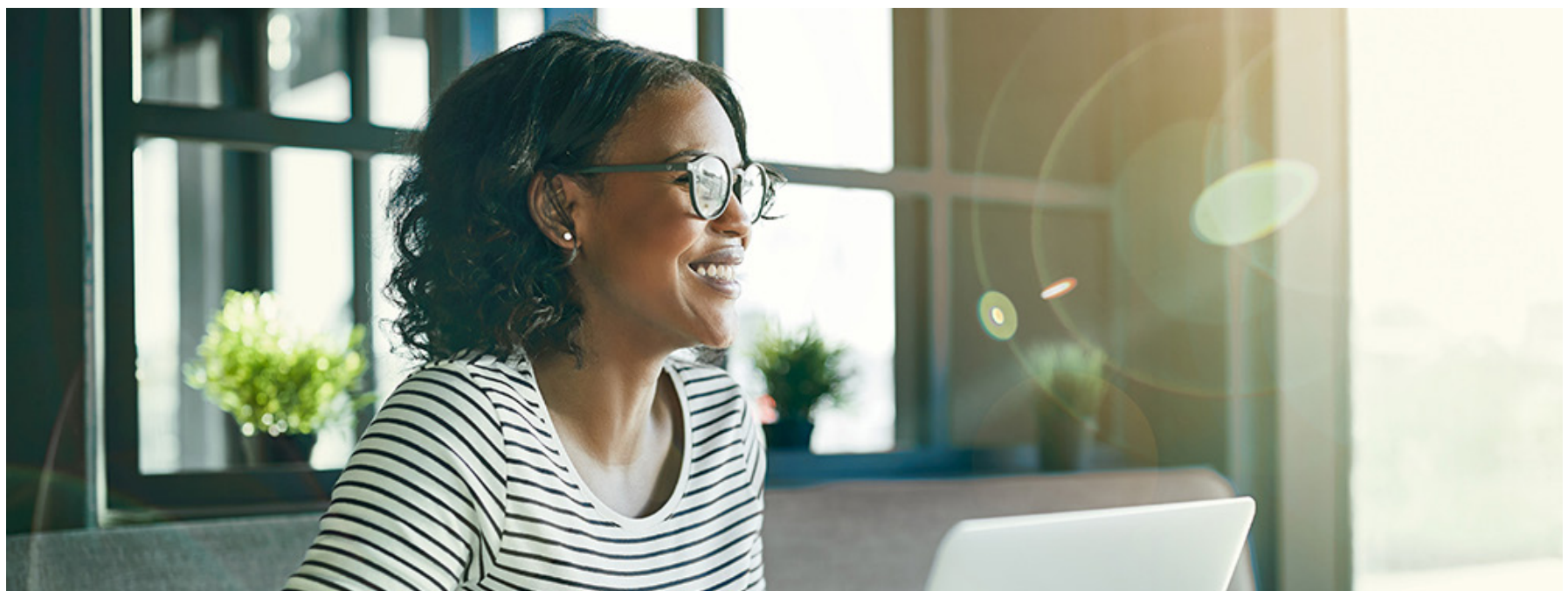
“Any hotel operator needs to know what their guests are thinking about their experience; whether that's good, bad, or indifferent. Otherwise you cannot improve your business. If you do not listen to your guests, you would go out of business very quickly because there is plenty of choice out there in the marketplace.” – David Campbell, Operations Director, The Coaching Inn Group

## You can get help to handle the rush of reviews

Whether they're good or bad, the end of the professional critic is going to see you handling a lot more reviews than you were before, and you need to make sure that you're prepared. Finding a great ORM partner, like GuestRevu, will help you to keep track of reviews across different platforms, so that you don't need to navigate to twenty-seven different sites just to find the twelve reviews that were posted this week. They'll all be kept in one dashboard, making them easier to find, and simpler to respond to..

For better or worse, professional critics are part of the past, along with floppy disks and VCRs. Every one of your patrons has an opinion to wield and air, and it's a wonderful development that you should embrace! After all, it's not going to be changing any time soon.





## Why guests leave reviews (and how to get better ones)

**W**ith the growth of online spaces populated by user-generated content, word of mouth is increasingly becoming digitised, and reviews that are shared with online communities often even overshadow the recommendations that are passed on in person.

But while it's easy to understand your patrons voicing their opinions to friends and family, understanding why visitors choose to post reviews online for the world to see isn't quite as simple. Why do individuals involve themselves in the decision making processes of others, for example? Are reviewers posting to help their communities, or for their own gain?

### Why is it important to

### know what inspires guests to leave reviews?

In the hospitality industry, it's vital to know as much about your customers as you can, whether you use this knowledge to provide a personalised experience at your property, to help you market to potential future guests, or simply to enhance your experience in general. But understanding why customers leave reviews is valuable in other ways as well.

By garnering insights into your patrons' frames of mind when they are leaving reviews, you can ensure that they are in the right frame of mind when they leave your premises, encouraging them to review you. Better still, if you can



understand why it is that customers leave negative reviews, you have an opportunity to sense a negative review before it comes. This way you can either resolve it in a positive way to ensure that the patron doesn't leave dissatisfied, or provide alternative methods for them to voice their displeasure that don't wind up on the world wide web.

## Who can you expect to see reviews from?

One place to start when determining what might be motivating your customers to leave reviews is to figure out which of your customers would be most likely to leave them. You may feel, for example, that as a business that caters to luxury clientele, your patrons are less likely to revert to online methods to sing your praises or point out small grievances, or that since your visitors are older, they won't be leaving you online

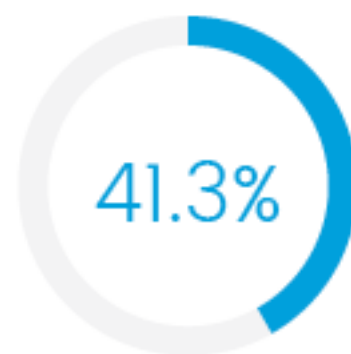
reviews. But you may be surprised.

There is a misconception that it's only the younger generations that leave reviews online, possibly because they are associated with the internet revolution. But, while [Statista](#) confirms that 52% of internet users aged 25-34 have posted reviews online, research by Kyung Hyan Yoo and Ulrike Gretzel of [Texas A&M University](#) found that, of over 1000 TripAdvisor users, 41.3% of those who contributed reviews were between 50 and 64 years of age, making up the largest demographic of the study.

This goes to show that it is hardly only millennials and younger generations that are sharing their thoughts about their travels online. Younger generations may have been more savvy than their elders at the outset, but writing an online review is not a technical challenge, and with the advances of smart



Internet users aged 25-34 that have posted reviews online



Percentage of TripAdvisor users aged 50 to 64 who left reviews

phones, connectivity and apps, it's not just youngsters who are using the internet to book, and review, their travels.

When it comes to negative reviews in particular, [Our Social Times](#) point out that most online complaints actually come from older men, rather than millennials and, as [Zendesk](#) noted in a 2013 report, it may be that businesses catering to higher income guests are actually at slightly more of a risk of being scrutinised online.

Their research, which looked at consumers in general, rather than focussing on the hospitality industry alone, found that customers who had a household income of over \$150,000 had the longest memory when it came to bad customer service experiences, and “among [participants] earning more than \$150,000 a year, a remarkable 100% had shared their bad customer experiences with others.” While this is not directed at the hospitality industry specifically, it shows that those who are prepared to spend a larger sum on an experience are also those who will be least magnanimous should that experience not meet their expectations.

## Why do your customers

## write online reviews?

Now that we've looked at which patrons are likely to be writing reviews, it's time to look at what motivates them.

Many companies are under the impression that most people write reviews because they want something for themselves. As Rebecca Haden of [Haden Interactive](#) points out, the majority of surveys that she has come across, when asking users why they write reviews, list four options:

- > To be helpful for others who would later consider investing in a product or experience
- > For prestige, such as being a top reviewer or recognised source on a platform
- > As content for their own audience on a blog or social media platform
- > For goodies, discounts or other benefits from the company

Out of these four options, only one of them is altruistic, with the other three being self-serving. However, as Rebecca also notes, these four options don't really reflect the broader emotional motivations for leaving reviews that many users experience. And Maarten Rensink



agrees. In his [2013 study](#), he looked at 7 motivating factors that resulted in people leaving reviews, being:

- > Venting
- > Helping others
- > Warning others
- > Self enhancement
- > Social benefit
- > Helping the company
- > Seeking advice

These can be broken down into motivations that inspire positive reviews and motivations that inspire negative ones — wanting to help others and help the company will often result in positive reviews, while wanting to vent or warn others will almost always result in negative reviews. They can also be broken down into motivations that are self-serving, and those which are altruistic in nature — venting, self

enhancement and social benefit are all self-serving motivations, as they have the reviewer's wellbeing or standing in a community as their focus; while helping others, warning others, and helping the company are all focused on benefiting others that aren't the reviewer themselves.

This provides a far more rounded look at what may inspire customers to leave reviews, and particularly goes to show that they are often written not for the benefit of the patrons themselves, but for the benefit of both their communities, and the businesses themselves — so that companies can improve upon minor inconveniences, and so that reviewers can help others who are trying to make informed decisions about their next stay.

What this research does not show, however, is one of the most powerful motivators for customers to leave reviews — being asked.



<https://www.brightlocal.com/learn/local-consumer-review-survey/>

As [BrightLocal](#) found in their latest annual Local Consumer Review Survey, “70% of consumers that have been asked to leave reviews went on to do so.”

Another factor to be considered when looking at the motivation behind reviews is that the vast majority of those who write them have had either an exceptionally positive, or an exceptionally negative experience. As [Trustpilot](#) explain:

“Our research shows that consumers are more inclined to write reviews when the experience they’ve had strikes an emotional chord, whether positive or negative. If a consumer has had a very poor experience, they’ll write a review in order to vent frustration and anger, especially if they feel personally mistreated or wronged. In the same manner, if a consumer has had an exceptionally good experience, they’re likely to applaud the company with a good review to help the company succeed.” — TrustPilot

Trustpilot are hardly the only company to have realised this correlation. In a study done by [Cornell University](#), it was found that most reviews on TripAdvisor are either overwhelmingly positive, or

overwhelmingly negative, with few guests venturing to write reviews when their stay was simply pleasant or satisfactory.

However, the same Cornell University study, which examined 1.28 million reviews on TripAdvisor found that the vast majority of reviews, more than 70%, were positive, with ratings of 4 or 5, while only 15% had ratings of 1 or 2. This goes to show that while it is extraordinary experiences, both positive and negative, that generally result in reviews, positive experiences are far more likely to be shared online.

## What does this mean for you?

You know which of your customers might be leaving you reviews, and can understand the motivations behind them, so what is the next step? What can you do to ensure that visitors are both more motivated to write you reviews, and at the same time don’t feel the need to post negative reviews online?

The first step is to make sure that it’s easy for your patrons to give you feedback, both during their visits and after they leave. While they’re with you, the human touch



can work wonders in helping your customers to feel comfortable, and if your friendly staff ask for feedback, guests will often be happy to provide it in person. But, at the same time, many customers feel uncomfortable giving feedback directly, particularly if there are small inconveniences that they experienced, or they are worried that they might cause offence.

In these cases, providing patrons with an opportunity to give their feedback in a digital, non-confrontational manner, with a feedback survey for example, will often make them feel that their views are valued, and their concerns heard. If they'd planned to leave a less-than-glowing online review, it can make them less likely to mention those inconveniences on a public forum, having already had the opportunity to address it with management directly. If they'd planned to leave a positive review, it can serve as a reminder of their favourite parts of their experience. And when visitors do post reviews online, you can make it easy for them to do so by having presences across social media and OTA platforms, ensuring that you get all the feedback you need.

With a single, consolidated dashboard that shows you the

latest reviews for your business from online guest surveys as well as TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, Booking.com, Expedia, Facebook, and so many other platforms, you can keep up to date with all of your reviews in one place. Better still, be notified as soon as reviews come in, or choose to get a daily, weekly or monthly summary of your latest reviews straight to your inbox.

This being said, you want to make getting feedback easy for yourself as well, and there can be no denying that capturing the feedback that patrons give your staff in person is no easy task, or that checking every social media and review platform can easily become a full-time job. This is where a company like GuestRevu comes in, by helping you to ask for, and collate, direct guest feedback, while also helping you to manage your online reputation to save you time and keep track of reviews across your platforms.

But even making it easy for visitors to leave their reviews online isn't always enough – remember that customers tend to only leave reviews for exceptional stays, after all. This is why the art of asking is so important – those patrons who are satisfied with their stays, even if they're not overwhelmingly thrilled

with them, are often happy to leave a review when asked.

**GuestRevu** makes asking for reviews a cinch. You can send customisable customer surveys in various languages, and covering different areas of your business thanks to multiple questionnaires, after your visitors have left, or even before they've arrived. GuestRevu also integrates with a number of hospitality technology solutions and property management systems, automating the process so that your surveys go out after patrons leave your premises without you needing to lift a finger.

And finally, it has never been more important to be responding to online reviews. As Our Social Times notes, 70% of users who write negative reviews are looking for a response, but only 38% of them get one. By writing a great response to a negative review, you are turning a public proclamation of dissatisfaction into a conversation, and are showing both the customer who left the review, and anyone else who may come across it in future, that you care about customer service, and that you take comments to heart. It may not

change the patron's mind about the experience that they had (though stranger things have happened), but it may convince a reader that your business is the one that they want to book. Plus, as Rebecca Haden explains, "consumers are less likely to desire vengeance if they feel that you have listened to them and done what you can to make things right."

As **GuestRevu** pulls online reviews from multiple platforms into a single dashboard, it simplifies the process of responding to reviews as well, since you're able to navigate to particular reviews with the click of a button, straight from your dashboard.

Online reviews have never been more important to hospitality businesses, and convincing guests to leave the quantity and quality of reviews that you want is no easy feat. But, by understanding who is leaving reviews and why, and with the help of direct guest feedback and reputation management tools like GuestRevu, you can certainly encourage your customers and leave them feeling motivated to share their experiences online.







## You need more, not better reviews

It's a well-known adage that quality should be valued over quantity, and while that may be true when it comes to many aspects of life, online reviews are the exception to the rule.

Every property, restaurant, attraction, activity and, frankly, person wants to get glowing reviews about the services that they provide. But not every review is going to be five stars — your offering is not going to be to every visitor's tastes after all — and those less-than-stellar reviews still have their place in boosting your online reputation and ranking. Let's have a look at why that's the case.

### 1. Quantity is a big part of TripAdvisor's algorithm...

While the quality of reviews is certainly taken into consideration when determining where you fit into the TripAdvisor ranks — after all, if you're looking at two pages with 100 listings apiece, you would expect the property with the better reviews to come out on top! — it's only one part of a detailed algorithm which values how many reviews you get, as well as how frequently you get reviews, and what those reviews say.

And it's not just on TripAdvisor that the quantity of your reviews counts — while you might expect 15 five-star reviews on any platform to count for more than 25 three-star ones, the fact is that more reviews shows a more consistent experience, giving travellers a better idea of the experience that they'll receive when booking with you.

That's why, according to research done in 2015, [79% of TripAdvisor users](#) prefer to read 8 – 12 reviews before they choose a hotel.

## 2. ... As is recency

Another important factor taken into consideration by TripAdvisor when determining your ranking is how long ago those reviews were received. While glowing recommendations from ten years ago are fantastic for reminiscing over the wonderful experience that you provided even back in the day, they won't count for much without more recent reviews to confirm that those wonderful experiences are still what travellers can expect from you.

## 3. More platforms give more scope

TripAdvisor may be considered a giant when it comes to online review collection, but it's only one platform, and the more platforms you are being reviewed on, the wider your audience. Getting reviews across your OTAs and social media pages can help potential visitors to find out more about you on their preferred platform. If a traveller finds a photograph of your fantastic food on Facebook, they won't necessarily want to hop onto TripAdvisor to learn more about

your meals and what other diners thought of them — they'll want to find those details on Facebook directly, and these reviews should be ready to help them on that journey.

## 4. More information means realistic expectations

Being average may sound awful, but getting average reviews is actually awesome. Five-star raves about your restaurant and irrationally critical rants about your rooms do not portray an entirely accurate image of the experiences that you've provided, and are not necessarily what review-readers are after.

Because it's not always possible for you to be at the top of your game, potential visitors want to know what your average experiences are like, not the best or worst that you have to offer. This is what makes it vital to be getting reviews not only from customers who had excellent experiences, but from that usually silent, middle-of-the-bell-curve majority as well. The more details travellers can get about what a stay, meal or visit with you is like, the quicker they'll find out whether you've got what they want, and the



more likely they'll be to book. It also contributes to a more trustworthy brand-image, but more on this later.

## 5. You learn something new with every review

Reviews don't only provide valuable information to potential visitors to your premises, but also provide you with the opportunity to improve. The more reviews you get, the more detail you see about the experience that you provide, and from the most important perspective of your business — that of your guests themselves.

As owners, managers and staff, it's always difficult to see what you offer objectively — try as you might to have an experience as a guest at your own premises, barring an Undercover-Boss-style makeover, you will always be treated differently by those who you work with on a daily basis, and will never get to see what your average visitor experiences. Reviews can offer you insight into that experience, pinpointing what you're getting right and what could be better, and, as The Coaching Inn Group found, offering insights that can help you to make improved operational decisions.

"If you have an intelligence platform that's telling you that 65-70% of your guests are saying that you need to spend money, you need that information so that you can make that informed decision." — David Campbell, Coaching Inn Group

## 6. One person's rant may be another's rave

No two people are alike, and what may be one guest's gripe, may be another person's cup of tea. Your proximity to the hippest craft beer pub in London may be a drawing card to one person, while the noise that the pub creates could lead to more than one complaint. This means that the more reviews you have, even ones that are average or less-than, the more opportunities you're giving yourself to appeal to the right review-readers and help your target audience to find you.

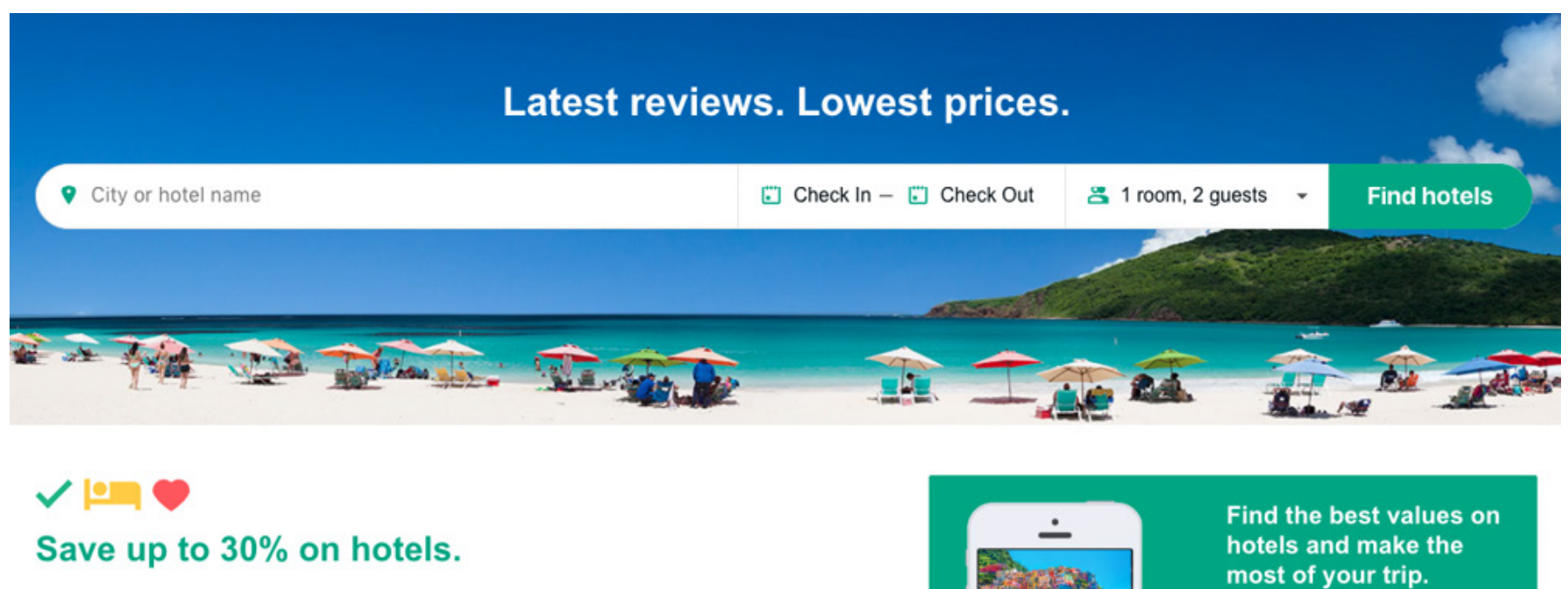
## 7. People don't trust only positive reviews

It may seem counter-intuitive, but you don't actually want to only have positive reviews on your platforms. While it may seem as though an abundance of great reviews can only boost your reputation amongst readers, **68% of people trust reviews more** when they see both good

and bad appraisals, and, if they only see positives, 95% of people suspect censorship or faked reviews and distrust the establishment. The more reviews you have, and the wider the range of those reviews, the more trustworthy you will come across to those considering visiting your establishment.

Quality absolutely has its place in hospitality — in the services

that you offer and the experience that you provide — but when it comes to online reviews, quality has taken on a different meaning. Any accommodation or experience provider can have stellar owned-media, but that just doesn't cut it any more. Review readers want authenticity and transparency, they want to know what to expect before they book. And getting more reviews is a way to provide just that.



## Review collection with TripAdvisor's partners

**T**ripAdvisor is the world's largest travel site, and, as such, cannot be ignored by serious hospitality professionals. Having an active TripAdvisor listing has become almost compulsory for your business' image, and this is achieved by ensuring that as many

of your patrons as possible write reviews as frequently as possible.

As Director of Review Services at TripAdvisor, Minesh Shah, [explains](#), "Reviews influence a property's reputation, as well as its popularity on TripAdvisor. And that popularity



influences the attention and direct bookings a property receives from travellers.”

Fortunately, TripAdvisor has partnered with companies worldwide to make review collection easier. Hospitality professionals seldom have the time to personally ask each and every visitor for a review, so TripAdvisor’s review collection partners automate this process.

Here are a few frequently asked questions about the review collection process and review collection partners:

## Why would you want more reviews?

Quite simply, [TripAdvisor states](#), “More reviews mean more ways to engage with potential customers — and encourage bookings”.

We know that TripAdvisor rankings are based not only on your review ratings, but on the freshness and volume of reviews as well. That’s why it’s so important to collect as many reviews as possible – more reviews will lead to a higher ranking.

In addition, the findings of a [2014 Cornell University study](#) suggest that more reviews may

also result in better ratings as well. The study found that early reviews tend to skew towards the negative, and that, as hotels get more reviews, the percentage of positive reviews tends to increase and the percentage of negative reviews decreases. This may be due to the fact that the first few reviewers visited the business with very little information available to them beforehand, so they have unreasonable expectations.

The negative trend in early reviews may also actually lead to more positive reviews later by helping business owners to improve their offerings, in turn decreasing the number of bad experiences that guests have, and therefore negative reviews that are written.

## What about bad reviews?

Business owners shouldn’t be afraid of asking customers to leave their comments on TripAdvisor. The Cornell study found that, overall, positive reviews are more common on TripAdvisor than negative ones. Out of the 1.28 million reviews on TripAdvisor that the study examined, more than 70% had a rating of 4 or 5 (very good or excellent), while only 15% had a rating of 1 or 2.

Additionally, good management responses to negative reviews actually improve your company's image on TripAdvisor. In 2015, 85% of TripAdvisor users said that an appropriate management response to a negative review improved their impression of the business.

## Why use a TripAdvisor review collection partner?

Using a review collection partner to encourage your customers to post their reviews on TripAdvisor allows you to be highly engaged with your TripAdvisor presence without having to go through the time-consuming process of asking visitors to leave reviews manually.

In fact, [TripAdvisor says](#), "a recent study concluded that highly engaged hotels using Review Collections services saw a 30-80% increase in reviews and 40% more TripAdvisor page views, than those not using these services."

## What is a Platinum Review Collection Partner?

In January 2016, TripAdvisor launched its [Review Collection](#)

[Partners programme](#), and as of June 2019, there were only eight guest survey providers worldwide to have been granted Platinum review collection partner status.

TripAdvisor states: "Platinum status is granted to the top tier of review collection partners, who demonstrate excellent technical integrations and consistent review conversion performance."

The criteria for the designation include:

- > Having a partnership and being in good standing with TripAdvisor
- > Meeting a number of technological requirements including full technological integration
- > Meeting certain email and marketing requirements
- > Having high conversion rates

Ensuring that your business's TripAdvisor listing is up-to-date, active and engaging can be a mammoth task. However, taking advantage of the tools available to you can help to boost your TripAdvisor rank, and therefore your reputation, with minimal investment of time and effort.





# How to harness the power of your team to get great reviews

**H**aving a happy, unified workforce provides a solid foundation on which to build a successful company. It creates a positive synergy with customers, establishes the reputation of your business, and ultimately leads to positive guest reviews.

In the age of the Internet, where almost everyone is a blogger or critic with instant access to thousands (if not millions) of people through social media channels and online review sites like TripAdvisor, building this foundation becomes paramount.

So what can business owners do in order to harness the power of their staff?

## Refine Recruitment

A hotel or restaurant might boast grand architecture and a superb location, but without a solid team, it's going nowhere fast. Recruitment is the first step towards building a successful business, and should be taken up with as much vigour as your marketing efforts.

Begin by ensuring you have a strong employer brand. Ask yourself honestly if yours would be a great business to work for, and address areas where you think you fall short. The talent you're looking for will overlook you if your employer brand is unappealing.

Social media is also your friend when it comes to recruiting. If

you think you've found a good candidate, check out their social media profiles to find out what they'd potentially bring to the table. Does their Twitter timeline exude sarcasm and negativity? Probably not a good match...

Recruiting the right people for the right positions will ensure that everything runs smoothly and visitors will be well looked after. Having a friendly and helpful staff makes a good impression on patrons, and a quick read through any hotel's TripAdvisor listing will show you that good reviews frequently mention individual staff members.

## Encourage Improvisation

In a 2016 study conducted by the Centre for Hospitality Research entitled '[The Role of Service Improvisation in Improving Hotel Customer Satisfaction](#)', research concluded that hotel managers should encourage their employees to improvise service processes as necessary, with a goal of improving guest satisfaction.

It pointed out that guests were appreciative when employees took initiative and broke away from their traditional roles within the hotel, doing everything they could to fulfil

a request then and there. But this certainly isn't a new insight, and is hardly limited to hotels.

Isadore Sharp, founder of world-renowned hotel brand Four Seasons understood this better than most when he started building his empire.

Despite knowing next to nothing about the hospitality industry when he began building hotels in 1961, Sharp had a keen instinct for what guests wanted, and his hiring policy ensured that the right people were brought in to achieve the high standards of customer satisfaction with which Four Seasons has become synonymous.

He encouraged personalised service by giving all staff the authority to act instantly if guests made a request, regardless of position.

"If we're seen showing greater concern for power, prestige and costs than for the customer and the values we profess, then we forfeit belief and trust along with our goal of trying to be the best," [he said](#).

Today, Four Seasons generates around \$4-billion in annual revenue and is an industry leader in terms of cultivating positive guest relations.



## Enhance Employee Satisfaction

If you take care of your employees, they will take care of your customers in turn, and those customers will ultimately pass on the word, online and offline, and attract new business. Imagine trying to summon a smile to greet a visitor when you're working your fingers to the bone for a poor salary, no benefits and a surly boss. Why should your team bother if you don't?

# 23%

of guests in a recent study\* focused on staff and service in their online reviews

“

Travellers were always clear to mention that the staff make or break a property.

\*The Top 6 Things Guests Write in Online Reviews, <https://www.cloudbeds.com/articles/the-top-5-things-guests-write-in-online-reviews/>

Recognise your team for doing a good job and give accolades when someone earns a positive comment, or when you reach a certain TripAdvisor ranking. This will go a long way towards developing a strong team.

It's also important to ensure there's a strong culture of leadership within

your business. That hands-on attitude filters from the top brass down to the front desk.

“We are in the service industry. This means that despite the cost of labor and benefits, we need to provide good service to our employees as well as our guests,” says President of hospitality consulting firm R. A. Rauch & Associates, Robert Rauch.

“Employees who are satisfied at work, show up with a positive attitude, receive strong guidance, have clear expectations and are recognised for their efforts convey these attributes to our guests and provide a substantially better service experience.”

## Nurture A Culture of Reviews

Make sure that employees know that they are instrumental in the success or failure of the business, and that reviews are one of the cornerstones of success. Each team member should understand that all of their actions, behind the scenes as well as in face-to-face interactions with customers, will influence the business's online reputation, and that it is in their best interests for the business to thrive.



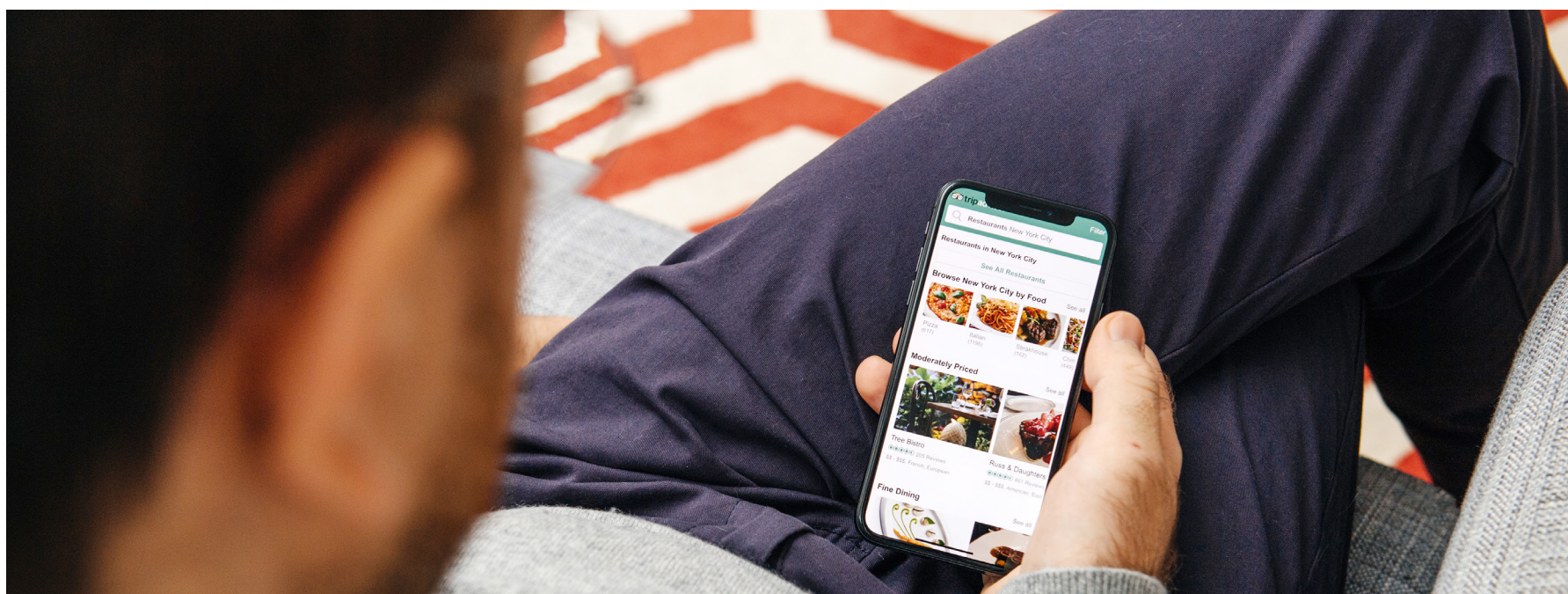
Cultivate a culture of reviews by encouraging your team to ask visitors to leave reviews, and rewarding individual members of staff when they are mentioned by name in reviews.

You need a team that offers such exemplary service that visitors feel compelled to mention individuals in an online review. Recognising and rewarding staff members who are achieving this goal will encourage the rest of the team to do the same.

If you have people in your team who care about customer satisfaction and hospitality,

give them the freedom to make decisions that will enrich a customer's experience, make sure that they are satisfied in their jobs and want to do their best, and that they are aware that their performance impacts the business's online reputation, you should have a team that inspires guests to write positive reviews for your business.

If your staff is enthusiastic and eager to please, that positive energy is transferred to the patrons, and their pleasant experience ends up online for the world to see. It's that simple.



## Why didn't my customer's review get published on TripAdvisor?

**F**or hospitality professionals, a positive review on TripAdvisor

is golden. But because the travel giant has a number of stringent



rules in place that guide customer feedback, sometimes these positive reviews never see the light of day.

Some restrictions are obvious, like using profanity or giving out personal information, while others are more obscure and could see a potentially wonderful review being deleted – leaving the reviewer confused and the business owner frustrated.

Whether you're using an application like GuestRevu's questionnaire form (which allows visitors to conveniently post reviews straight to TripAdvisor after their stay), or have your own in-house feedback process, it's useful to outline what an acceptable review constitutes.

While there is little that you can do as the business owner once a review is submitted to TripAdvisor – it's up to the reviewer to query it – we've collected and summarised all of TripAdvisor's review guidelines below to give you a better idea of what they filter for:

## The obvious

### Don't write fraudulent reviews

TripAdvisor dedicates a lot of time and resources towards ensuring that good reviews are not written by anyone affiliated with the

business, or writers paid to dish out favourable feedback.

### Keep it family-friendly

TripAdvisor does not accept any profanity, personal attacks, hate speech, threats or anything similar. The same goes for reviews that seek to solicit illegal activity or contain graphic descriptions of death and injury. Only first-hand reports of death and criminal activity will be considered on an individual basis after assessing the facts.

### Reviews must be relevant to travellers

It goes without saying that others read TripAdvisor reviews to gain a better understanding of a particular establishment, so content must be relevant to travellers. It's not a platform to air opinions on the latest Donald Trump debate, or ask for a nice chicken ala king recipe. Questions posed directly to business owners will also be removed. TripAdvisor has specific forums for that.

The same goes for photographs – these must remain relevant to the review of the company, and duplicate photos are not permitted.

### Respect private information

Don't include email addresses, passwords, personal telephone numbers, financial information or anything similar. Names are accepted, but TripAdvisor will remove surnames upon request.

## **Reviews must be non-commercial**

Any commercial or promotional content, no matter how sneakily placed within the review, will be deleted. Again, TripAdvisor is a forum that provides advice to fellow travellers, it is not meant to be used to advertise a service or business. Reviews with links to external websites are also banned.

## **Keep content original**

Plagiarism is not accepted, nor is using extensive quotes from external sources. TripAdvisor wants only individual traveller's best, genuine advice.

## **The not-so-obvious**

### **Reviews must be recent**

To keep content fresh and accurate, reviews must be written within a year of visiting a particular establishment, and TripAdvisor also stipulates that only one review may be written per experience. Additional reviews per experience can only be submitted three

months after the last review was published.

## **Don't use slang or HTML**

Reviews that use unnecessary abbreviations, an unrecognised alphabet or are hard to read in general are deleted. The same goes for slang words, HTML tags and excessive use of ALL CAPS. Reviews must be helpful and a pleasure to read.

## **Reviews must offer first-hand accounts**

No second-hand information or rumours are permitted. Even if you have a friend who had an incredible time at a particular hotel or restaurant and you want to recommend it to others with the best intentions, people still want to hear it from the horse's mouth, so to speak. Only first-hand reviews are accepted.

## **Correct listing on TripAdvisor**

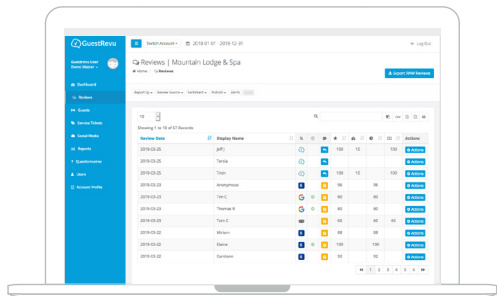
The review must correlate directly with the exact business it refers to. If a guest writes about one particular company and accidentally tags another within the review process, it won't be published. The same applies if he or she wanted to write about a hotel's restaurant and tags the hotel itself.



# The review never appeared – what now?

Keep in mind that it's up to the guest to query why a review hasn't been published, even if you know there's nothing wrong with

it. You can still help them ensure they've written about the correct establishment if your company has more than one, and that they received the 'thank-you' confirmation email.



All your reviews, in one place  
[Schedule a demo](#)

# What to do with reviews once you have them

Once the TripAdvisor reviews start pouring in, travellers will be able to find them when looking for places to stay, eat, or visit, and for things to do in your area. From the outset this can help to boost your online reputation and increase the potential for direct bookings from prospective visitors who go from TripAdvisor to your website. And, while a

boost in bookings will feel like a win in and of itself, there is so much more that you could be doing with reviews! From using reviews for social proof, to reading between the lines and finding areas for improvement, and even validating operational decisions, the uses for reviews are plentiful.

## What you'll learn more about in this section:

- > How to analyse reviews
- > The perks of social proof
- > Using reviews as fuel for marketing
- > How reviews can inform operational decisions
- > Using reviews to motivate staff members
- > The value of management responses
- > How to handle negative reviews





## Ratings or reviews – learning to read between the lines

Have you ever noticed that there is often some disconnect between a rating you received from a customer in an online review and the comment they wrote with it? This happens more often than you think – and even galvanised a team from Cornell University to do [a study](#) into this precise phenomenon using text analytics and sentiment analysis. Their key piece of advice? If you really want to know what your customers are thinking, you need to look beyond their rating.

The team from Cornell analysed thousands of online reviews of Moscow hotels to try to determine patterns and correlations that could help hoteliers in determining what guests were really saying with their ratings and where to focus their attention. They compared various

factors of the reviews, such as length, tone, star rating, number of topics covered and what kinds of topics the reviewers spoke about to create a foundation for the study. In the study, semantic trends were found in both good and bad reviews. Examining these trends and what they mean can provide hoteliers, and hospitality professionals in general, with insights that will help them to achieve consistently higher ratings in their online reviews.

The Cornell team's analysis of Moscow hotel reviews showed that the quality of the guest's experience, especially in comparison with their expectations, is what will influence the overall review rating of a property one way or another. We set out to see if reviews of London



hotels followed the same trends.

We looked at TripAdvisor reviews of six London hotels (two of the top rated, two from among the worst rated, and two medium rated), and found that the reviews of these hotels did indeed follow the same patterns.\*

## The characteristics of bad reviews

- > The Cornell team found that long reviews that spoke in-depth about just a few topics almost always accompanied low ratings, and our own findings support this. The combined word count of our collection of negative reviews was nearly twice that of the positive reviews we collected.
- > Generally, unhappy guests in the Cornell study mentioned issues of “value” and “transactions” and in our small sample of London hotels, 73% of the negative reviews made some reference to cost.
- > Negative sentiments tended to have a stronger impact

on a guest’s overall rating of the hotel than did positive sentiments.

## The characteristics of good reviews

- > Happy guests focus more on things like “experience” and “location”, and less on value and transactions. Although around 30% of the positive reviews in our sample from London hotels mentioned something about price, they were almost always favourable mentions, in the tone of the stay being “worth the price”.
- > Shorter reviews that mentioned many aspects of a person’s stay were associated with higher ratings.

## What does this mean for hospitality professionals?

Business owners should be focussing on ensuring that the experiential qualities of a customer’s experience at their establishment



“experience”



“amenities”  
“location”



“value”  
“transactions”



outshine the transactional aspects.

The fact that guests who have had negative experiences tend to mention price more often, and that when guests who have enjoyed their stays mention price it is in the context of it being “worth it” shows that customers are not so much sensitive to price as to perceived value.

A business that provides good perceived value for money by giving customers good experiences can charge more than a company with apparently similar features and amenities that does not provide a pleasant experience, and still be perceived as being better value for money.

The results of [another Cornell study](#) support these findings, stating that if a hotel can increase its rating by one point on a five-point rating scale such as TripAdvisor's, it can increase its price by more than 10 percent without losing any occupancy or market share.

While looking at overall ratings is helpful, they do not always tell the full story, and hospitality professionals need to actually read the content of reviews in order to learn from their valuable insights.

The Cornell team found that negative sentiments tended to have a stronger impact on a guest's overall rating of the hotel than did positive sentiments, and we also noticed some disconnect between review content and review score. One reviewer gave a hotel only one star, while still stating “This hotel is very clean, lovely comfy pillows & beds” but focussing on the noisy nearby road as being the reason for her poor rating.

“Information from the text can potentially yield insights not indicated in the ratings for how hotels can improve their operations and better meet customer expectations” – Cornell University

The fact that negative experiences have more of an influence on customers' ratings than do positive ones also suggests that business owners should put more effort into ensuring that customers have a consistently acceptable experience, rather than one that is exceptional in many ways, but falls short of the customer's desires in one or two key ways.

**Hospitality professionals can use the length of reviews to quickly scan for negative or positive sentiments.**

To find out what you (or your competition) are doing wrong, pay close attention to longer reviews, as these are likely to give you insights into where a business is falling short, and are likely to be more detailed and provide more specific information. If you want to know what you are getting right, scan through the shorter reviews.

**When analysing your reviews, and those of your competitors, bear in mind what kind of experience you are trying to provide, and focus on the aspects that matter most to your business.**

The Cornell study found that guests at different tiers of hotels generally tend to care about different things:

- Higher tier hotel guests most often spoke about their experience
- Middle tier hotel guests focussed on amenities and location
- Lower tier hotel guests focussed on value and transactions

However, unhappy customers tend to focus on the same

things, regardless of the type of establishment.

**Expectations may matter more than actual experience. One of the London hotels we looked at received a 1-bubble TripAdvisor review, even though the reviewer could find little fault with the staff, service or rooms, simply because he was expecting a bigger hotel.**

In our collection of reviews of London hotels, many of the negative reviews mentioned the reviewer being “disappointed”, while the positive reviews, of budget and luxury hotels alike, often mentioned the hotel exceeding expectations.

Hospitality professionals should put effort into ensuring that customers’ expectations are, at the very least, met, and should strive to exceed them. This is not only a case of ensuring that patrons have a positive experience of your business, but also making sure that their expectations are reasonable to start out with.

\*We excluded reviews written by people who visited the hotel, but weren’t planning on staying at the hotel (visiting for lunch or tea, for example), and reviews written in difficult-to-understand English.





# How to use your reviews: the perks of social proof

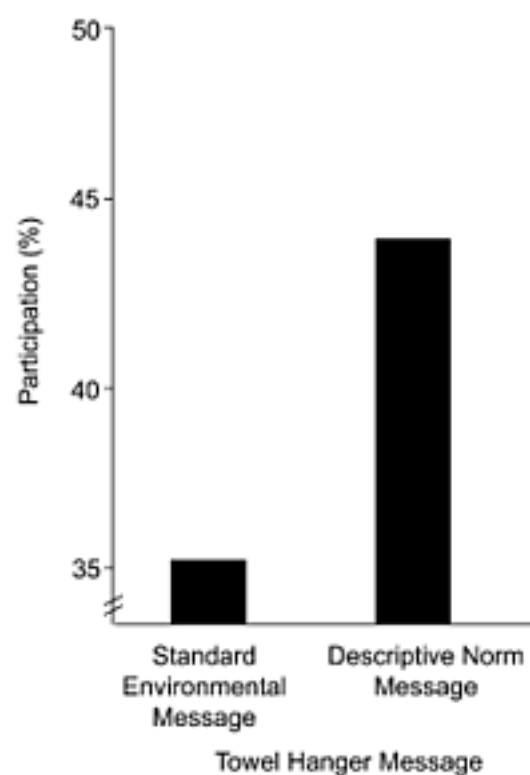
Customer feedback can be helpful for hospitality professionals in a number of ways. For example, it can inform your operational decisions, inspire your marketing materials, and help you to improve your staff training procedures. Perhaps most importantly, in today's world, when used as a form of social proof, feedback from past patrons is crucial in encouraging new customers to visit your business.

## What is social proof?

Human beings tend to look to their peers for guidance when deciding upon their actions. Consider how, when someone begins clapping, everyone else starts clapping with them, or when one person stands behind another at a counter, others

begin to form a queue behind them. "Social proof" is the name given to this phenomenon – people believe something is the right thing to do or they approve of it simply because others are doing it or approve of it.

**FIGURE 2**  
TOWEL REUSE RATES AS A FUNCTION OF SIGN IN ROOM  
(EXPERIMENT 1)



pic credit: JCR

Scholars have done numerous studies on social proof (also called informational social influence), and one of the most notable studies happens to have been done in a hotel. In 2008, Goldstein, Cialdini, and Griskevicius performed an experiment on towel reuse in hotel rooms. Using different ways of phrasing the question, the researchers left notes in guests' rooms asking the guests if they would like to reuse their towels.

One of the notes told guests that they would be helping the environment by reusing their towels (using less water, energy, washing powder etc.), one simply told guests what to do with their towels if they wanted to reuse them, and other notes told guests that other people had reused their towels and asked guests if they would like to do the same. Which message variation resulted in the most towel re-use? The one that told guests that other people had reused their towels.

In another study, people were told that by using fans instead of air conditioning they would save money, or that their neighbours were using fans instead of air conditioning or that they would help the environment. Despite what people might claim about being independent thinkers and

wanting to save the environment, or how thrifty they think they are, the people who switched to using fans the most were those who were told their neighbours were using fans.

Other studies have found that people are more likely to laugh when they hear others laughing, and television producers take advantage of the impact of social proof by including laugh tracks in their sit-coms. Another study observed an increase of sales of certain dishes in restaurants when they are labelled "our most popular items".

## **Paid, owned and earned media**

Paid, owned and earned media are the three forms of media exposure available to your business. Each has inherent pros and cons, and consumers do not trust them all equally.

Paid media is any exposure that you have directly paid for. Billboards, adverts in magazines, TV adverts, sponsored social media posts, pay-per-click online advertising and so forth.

Owned media is publicity that you have not directly paid for, but which



you control, such as your social media accounts, your business' own website, and your OTA listings.

Earned media is media that you neither pay for nor have control over, such as the reviews that people write on your OTA listings, independent articles about your establishment in magazines or online, and comments on your own content. Consumers naturally trust earned media more than paid or owned media, and this is where social proof becomes truly valuable.

Sharing your customers' reviews as social proof allows you to bridge the gap between earned media and paid and owned media. Essentially, customer feedback is earned media that you can promote on your owned or paid media platforms.

## How to make the most of your social proof

Thanks to the near-ubiquitous reach of the Internet, and especially social networking sites, the power of social proof has never been as easy to harness as it is today, but there are a couple of ways to make your social proof even more effective:

### Include photos

Social proof is persuasive, but for the positive comments of your previous visitors to have any impact at all, people first have to read them. People are drawn more to images than text. On average, tweets with images get **35% more retweets** and Facebook posts with images get **39% more engagement** than their text-only counterparts.

Additionally, **research** has found that people believe statements more when they are accompanied by an image, even when that image has little to do with the actual statement.

When you share your customer comments and reviews, include a picture of your establishment, or, if possible, a picture of the customer who gave you the positive comment at your establishment, along with a text version of the comment.

You can also try turning your positive comments into graphics by superimposing them over a beautiful image of your establishment. The free online tool **Canva** is a fantastic resource for non-designers who would like to make a pretty little graphic.

### Make it relatable

Whose parenting advice do you

trust more – your childless friend, or the colleague with three children? Even though your relationship with your friend is stronger, you are probably more likely to trust the person who has been there and done that and raised children.

In the towel reuse study, the highest compliance was achieved when the social group described as having reused the towels before was similar to the guest him- or herself. Specifically, the highest towel reuse happened when the social group was described as being in a similar situation – that is, when the note stated that “guests who stayed in this room” had reused their towels rather than just “other hotel guests”.

Make the most of this tendency by including a detail or two about the person whose feedback you are quoting. You may have noticed that

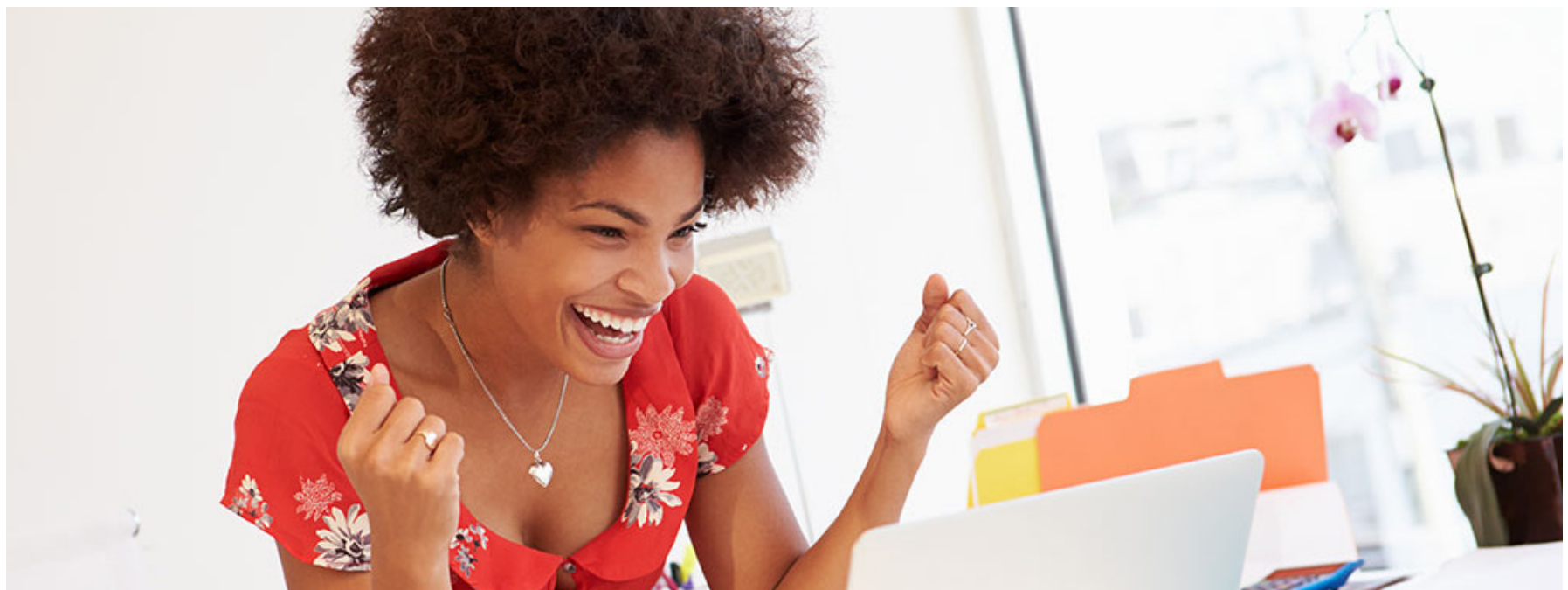
TripAdvisor asks people to say what kind of trip they were on; business travel, couples holiday, family holiday etc. and what nationality they are. If you can include a few details like this, your social proof may resonate more strongly with other people also planning a similar trip.

## **Include links**

Once you have used your reviews to prove to a traveller that your business is the best option for them, you want to make it as easy as possible for them to act on their newfound confidence in your establishment. If you are sharing your reviews somewhere other than on your own site, such as your social media platforms, make sure you include links back to your site, your phone number or email address.







## How smart hospitality marketers get the most out of customer feedback and online reviews

Everyone and their aunt can do marketing. All you need is a Facebook account, right? Maybe throw a tweet or two in there as well, and you're good to go! What sets smart marketers apart from the crowd of want-to-bes is how they use all the resources available, including customer reviews.

Whether it's online reviews or direct feedback through surveys, with great feedback can come great insight. We look at some ways that smart hospitality marketers use feedback and reviews to manage customer expectations, discover differentiating factors, analyse trends and build trust.

### **They find out what guests expect – and do not disappoint**

Whether you provide lavish luxury at rates only slightly cheaper than a black-market kidney, or simple services that even the down-at-the-heel student can afford, it's all about meeting (or even exceeding) your visitors' expectations. Every customer will have expectations based on what they have seen online – whether on your website, your social media, or your listings on OTAs. It is what encourages them to book with you over anyone else. You need to make sure that what you promise matches what your visitors actually get in terms

of accommodation or services in return for their money. This is why smart marketers focus on analysing value for money scores. Here are some things to bear in mind when thinking of value for money:

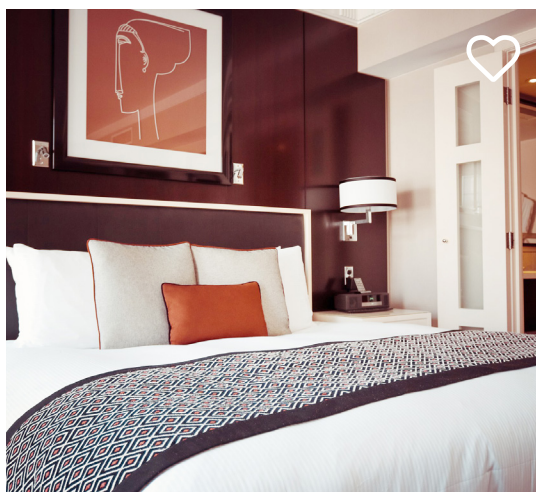
- > It's not about lowering prices or making customers feel like they got a great deal by visiting with you. In fact, despite cost being one of the biggest considerations for travellers, most are willing to stretch their budgets if they believe that the experience that they get at your establishment will be worth it. What it is about is making sure that your cost and the experience that your customers get are in line with one another.
- > You can use your customer feedback to pinpoint exactly where you have fallen short of their expectations. Whether it's about your decor, customer service, or simply the way that

your visitors feel throughout their experience, you'll have a better idea of areas that can be improved upon for future customers.

- > Keeping an eye on your competitors will also help you to understand what it is that patrons expect for the price that they're paying. What do other hotels, restaurants and activity providers offer, and at what price? If travellers can get a far better experience elsewhere, and at a similar cost, it may be an indication that what you offer, or what you charge, could be reconsidered.

## They discover their differentiating factors – and market them better

Keeping an eye on your competitors won't just help in getting your value for money spot on. By reading competitors' reviews in



### Ruby Manor Hotel and Spa

★★★★☆ 258 reviews

#1 Best Value of 105 hotels in Panorama



Free Wifi



Free Parking



Restaurant



tandem with your own, as a smart marketer, you can spot trends and find out exactly what sets you apart and what it is that makes customers want to visit you. Once you know where your business stands out from the rest, it can be easy to use it to your advantage.

Say, for example, you find from going through your feedback that the way you welcome your customers is what sets you apart. Maybe, as a hotel, you have cocktails on arrival, or maybe it's the friendly staff at reception, who make checking in an absolute breeze. Perhaps there is something small in your restaurant that makes your patrons feel at home as soon as they walk in. Whatever it might be, if your feedback is telling you that you are getting your welcomes right, you can use that in your marketing materials and make sure that travellers are aware that if they choose to book with you, they'll feel at ease as soon as they walk through your doors.

What sets you apart might not be your welcome. Maybe it's your exceptional customer service, your fantastic location, or your connection to your community. Whatever it is that makes customers pick you over your competitors will come across in

their reviews, and give you the chance to flaunt it.

## **They analyse trends in customer feedback – and use them to inform operational decisions**

Knowing what makes your offering unique is all well and good, but often your direct feedback won't only be telling you what you're getting right, but where you can improve. Taking note of this is just as important to smart marketers as knowing what they can sell.

“We're constantly comparing the current scores to last month, 3 months ago and 12 months ago. This gives us a constant metric of where we are excelling and where we're falling short. It's allowed us to react quickly when needed.” – Chris Roberts, General Manager, Oceana Beach and Wildlife Reserve

Deciding where budget should be spent is tricky, even for the most seasoned business owners. You can never spend on everything that you'd like to, so where would money make the biggest difference to your customer experience? As David Campbell of The Coaching Inn Group points out, feedback can be invaluable in helping to decide

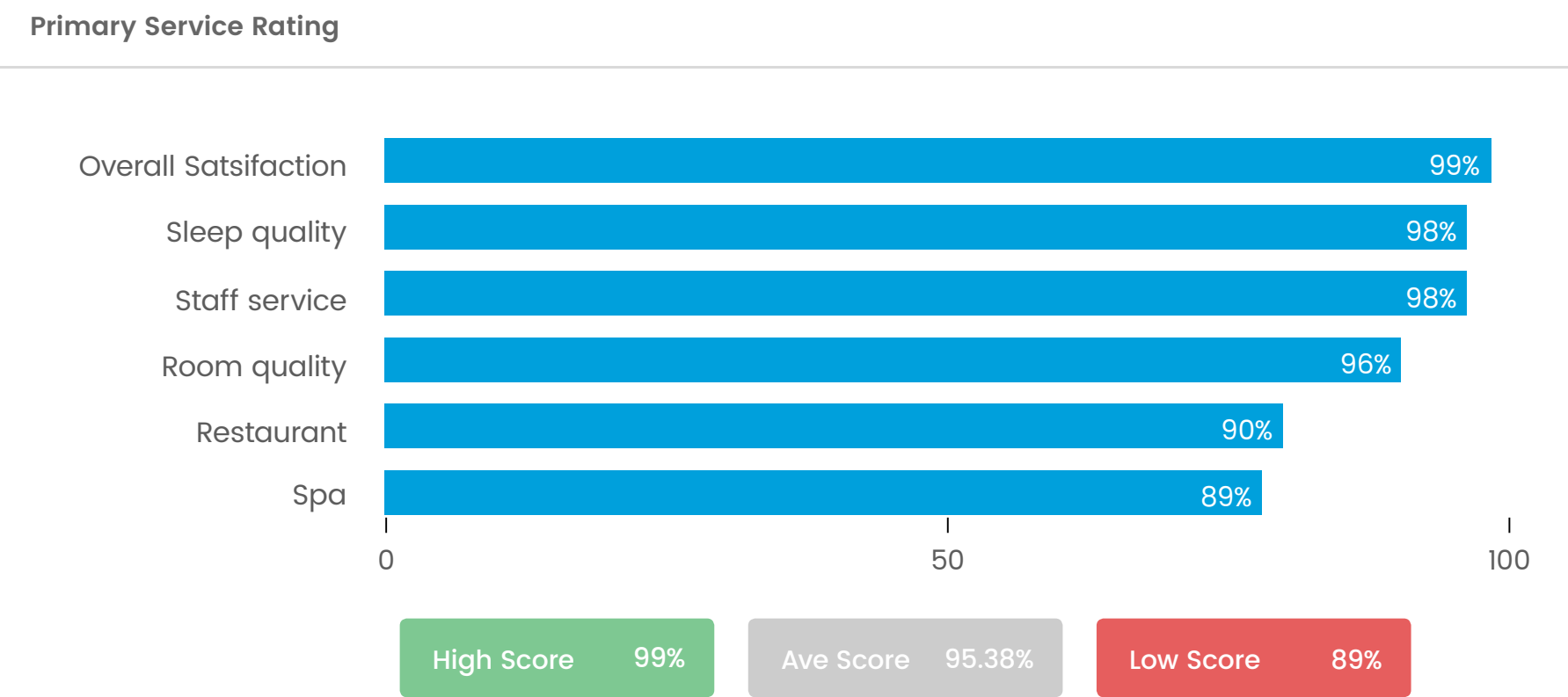
which properties need investment and where it should go.

“Without information, you’re hamstrung in terms of making intelligent decisions around your business,” David explains. “If you have an intelligence platform that’s telling you that 65–70% of your guests are saying that you need to spend money, you need that information so that you can make that informed decision. For example, we knew we had a problem with some of the bedrooms and the cosmetics at one of our hotels, and we spent a six-figure sum refurbishing the bedrooms primarily because our guests were telling us the rooms were very dated and you can see that from their feedback.”

By using your customer feedback as the basis for budget allocations, you’ll find that not only will the reviews themselves improve, but your patrons will feel as though their feedback is taken to heart, and your customer experience should improve overall.

## They encourage visitors to leave reviews online – and use them to build trust

Finally, smart marketers don’t just use reviews to gather information. They know how valuable reviews are for building trust and using social proof to their advantage.



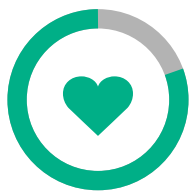
GuestRevu helps you keep an eye on your primary service drivers so you can see where your strengths and weaknesses lie..



## Management responses matter on TripAdvisor



88% of users say reviews **impact their accommodation choices**



80% of users believe a hotel that responds to reviews **cares more about its guests**



69% of users are less likely to book at a hotel that leaves **aggressive/defensive management responses**



60% of users would rather book at a hotel that **responds to reviews**

In the hospitality industry, consumers are at a disadvantage because they don't know for sure what they're going to get. For travellers that haven't visited you before, choosing your company is a leap of faith, so making sure you have a good online reputation will give them the confidence that they need to make their booking.

Showing potential customers how you deal with great and, more importantly, not-so-great feedback gives them a sense of what they can expect when they come to your establishment even more than the reviews themselves might. In fact,

**80% of TripAdvisor users** believe a hotel that responds to reviews cares more about its guests. If you are responding in a friendly, positive way, even to negative situations, it builds a sense of trust in the reviewers themselves and in those that are looking over them later, when considering your company.

Whether feedback is good or bad, smart hospitality marketers know how to look deeper into reviews and find where your establishment is getting things right, where it needs improvement, and how to make the most of your marketing.





## Is it time for an upgrade? Use your reviews to back you up

**W**hile many hotels (and other hospitality businesses) out there are investing in new technologies and design trends, some business owners are hesitant to put large portions of their yearly profits back into the company, a resistance that can have disastrous effects.

As a manager or marketer, conducting an in-depth analysis of feedback questionnaires and online reviews will give you sufficient insight to motivate any upgrades needed to the business' owners, allowing them to make necessary adjustments to the budget.

Remember, you're their eyes and ears on the ground.

### Listen to your patrons

Traveller Nick Mes recently stayed in an Edinburgh hotel that seems to be suffering from neglect. After scanning reviews on TripAdvisor, where the negative far outweighed the positive, it became obvious that the owners would do well to heed the collective voice of their guests.

"Generally the hotel had its perks – most of the staff were friendly and helpful, my bed was comfortable and clean, but there was a sense of overall decay as I walked from the lobby to my room," he told us. "The carpets seemed like they hadn't been washed in ages, paint was peeling off the walls, the restaurant was far too small for the hotel's size, and the bathrooms could really use some work."



“Someone actually wrote ‘What a dump’ in the elevator using permanent marker. The fact that the hotel hasn’t yet bothered to cover it up speaks volumes. I don’t think I’d stay there again.”

Looking at online reviews for the same establishment, all the signs are there. Guests complain of a general lack of upkeep and general maintenance, and apparently those who have complained to management are met with a variation of “We can’t do anything, we just work here”.

Take the time to process customer reviews and surveys to determine which recurring problems must be addressed. Highlight how many times a particular issue comes up within a certain timeframe, compare ratings to those of your competitors, and take note of how many times visitors say a variation of “We’ll never come here again”.

Extract this information and add the details to your report when motivating for upgrades. Essentially, your customers are doing the hard work for you.

## Use a guest feedback platform

There are also numerous feedback

platforms available that will make your job even easier.

Good reputation management tools offer real-time notifications whenever your establishment is mentioned online, often collecting all relevant information and dissecting variables such as negative reviews, strengths and weaknesses, general sentiment and customer experience on one convenient dashboard.

Not only will this help you in your day-to-day operations of the business, but when you report back to an owner, group manager or board member, you have all the evidence you need at the click of a button.

“I thought that the staff uniforms were not as presentable as they should be so I wanted new ones ordered. When I got my guest review report, however, I noticed that I was being rated consistently high on staff! Knowing that staff was currently my strongest asset meant that I could redirect the funds to a lower rated aspect to try improve that area instead.”

– Bianca Grobbelaar, The Royal Guest House, General Manager

Find the best management software to suit your needs. It will

help immensely with your reporting.

## Companies getting it right

Understanding your target market and the demographic of customers who visit your establishment can also factor into your motivation for upgrades. Did you see more business travellers in 2016, or an influx of millennials? Knowing what specific customer types look for in a company is also important if you hope to stay relevant in an increasingly competitive environment.

The New York Times [ran an article](#) in 2015 highlighting how American hotel owners are investing in their properties at record levels, rewiring rooms, buying more smart TVs and overhauling bathrooms in line with guest preferences.

Marriott Hotels, the flagship brand of Marriott International, is on track to offer Netflix at all 300 of its hotels in the US, while Hilton International recognises that most customers are travelling with an average of three electronic devices (including laptop, tablet and smartphone), causing many hotels to greatly improve their high speed WiFi infrastructure.

“As for bathrooms, one of the

more significant changes is the elimination of the bathtub in favour of a walk-in shower,” writes Jane Levere. “Most bathrooms in new hotels are being built without bathtubs, while tubs are being eliminated in many existing hotel bathrooms when they undergo regular refurbishment.

“The shift has taken hold, experts say, because business travellers generally prefer walk-in showers, but it is also easier and cheaper to clean and maintain walk-in showers than tubs.”

When it comes to restaurants, top to tail dining and the use of organic, fresh ingredients daily is becoming ever more popular, and is one of the reasons why a small restaurant in the small seaside village of Paternoster in South Africa earned the title of best restaurant in the world at the World Restaurant Awards in February 2019.

“Chef Kobus van der Merwe, who only learned to cook when he was 30, forages every day for ingredients on the wild Atlantic shore of the Western Cape near his Wolfgat restaurant, where he also makes his own bread and butter.” — [2oceansVibe](#)

When going over reviews, be sure



to look out for the signs of what visitors are looking for that your establishment couldn't offer them?

At the end of the day, it just makes simple business sense for your company to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty by reinvesting in itself. Watching the negative reviews pile up can sometimes have an irreversible effect on the perception of your brand, making it incredibly hard to

put your online reputation right in such a competitive market.

Keep in mind that it can be hard to see this when you're not operating within the day-to-day operations of the business. As a manager, you are, so leverage your reviews to convince your owners that enhancements and upgrades are not just imperative, but urgent if they want to remain competitive.



## How the Coaching Inn Group uses customer feedback tech to motivate excellence in their team

**W**ith high staff turnover in the hospitality industry, and sometimes multiple sites to

manage, staff motivation can be a challenge to even the most experienced managers. UK based

hotel-operator The Coaching Inn Group have come up with a unique approach to motivating excellence in their staff across their properties which is paying dividends in the long run.

According to Adam Charity, Group Operations Manager, and David Campbell, Operations Director, one of the key components of their strategy is their use of GuestRevu, enhanced through an integration with their [Rezlynx property management system](#) from [Guestline](#), and the transparency that it provides.

“We can report weekly and monthly, the GMs are trying harder than ever to impress and going the extra mile, and the individual team members on site also strive to get positive mentions.”

– Adam Charity, Group Operations Manager, Coaching Inn Group

## Competing for great feedback

The guest feedback that The Coaching Inn receives is used in a multitude of ways, from informing budgeting decisions to operations, but, importantly, it serves as a vital tool for motivating staff and property General Managers.

As Adam explains, receiving excellent guest feedback has become a point of pride for each of the hotels, and encourages team members to consistently raise their standards and level of service.

## General managers strive to have the best properties

As a standard part of the group’s management procedures, reports pulled from the guest intelligence dashboard are sent to group management, and to individual property GMs every week. “It keeps them on their toes in terms of ensuring that all the guests that pass through their doors have a positive experience, because we’re managing it weekly,” explains Adam.

“[We send] out a weekly report where all the hotels are ranked in order in all the different categories, such as service, accommodation, etc. The hotel managers definitely do not want to be anywhere near the bottom of those tables, so it’s almost a bit of a pride thing for their hotels that they want to be top of the game. Putting that limelight on the GuestRevu reporting, they’re now trying to raise their game to ensure that every single week – and we send another monthly more in



depth report as well – that they're not flagged on the bottom as doing a bad job."

General Managers have more time to focus on ways to improve their hotel's performance and "raise their game", as Adam says, thanks to the automation of their post-stay emails, made possible by their Rezlynx/GuestRevu integration. This means less time needs to be spent on timely exports and manually sending individual emails, and efforts can be focussed instead on the insights that the feedback provides.

## **Team members go the extra mile to get mentioned by name**

Team members within individual properties are also motivated by having such a transparent system in place to go above and beyond, striving to be singled out by delighted guests when they leave feedback, since feedback becomes rewarding in more ways than one. "We run an incentive called 'Hero of the Month' where our GMs nominate a member of their teams to win a £50 bonus each month," explains Adam. "It could be any member from any department. Then all the 'Heroes' from throughout the

year are called into a group at the Coaching Inn Group awards and the overall 'Hero' of the group will win a trip. For example, the one this year is going to New York for an all-inclusive paid holiday. The GuestRevu comments and the feedback help push the 'Heroes' to the top of that list when the GMs are looking to nominate."

"As an example, there's a particular member of staff that delivers exemplary service day in and day out, and will always get mentioned on GuestRevu, and therefore this particular member of staff has actually been given the 'Hero of the Month' three times this year already. So, it also rewards the staff in terms of giving them something back in return for the service that they're delivering for our guests."

## **Data-driven management procedures**

Within a group, ensuring that all properties uphold a high level of service can be challenging. By integrating GuestRevu with the group's existing property management system, Rezlynx by Guestline, The Coaching Inn Group is able to automatically collect guest feedback data with very little

manual effort. “Effectively, it’s an efficient way of doing it rather than employing a manual resource at Head Office or tying someone up to administer it,” says David Campbell.

Making sure that group management is aware of goings-on at individual properties is certainly vital, but what management does with this information is what makes a group like The Coaching Inn so successful.

## **Ensuring service and guest experience are prioritised**

The group strives to provide uniformly exceptional guest experiences across all their locations, and guest feedback allows group management to be certain that General Managers of individual properties in the group are meeting the high standards set by their peers.

“When we’re doing business reviews with the GMs, [the guest feedback] will give us proof with the guests’ comments to say if there are any issues on the horizon,” says Adam. “Service is a big one, and if we see any of the sites dip on the service it gives us a structured conversation with backup proof to say to the GMs, ‘Look, something has changed

fundamentally. What is it? We need to get this sorted to make sure the feedback is better’.”

Monitoring changes in overall guest ratings over time can also provide valuable information, as David discovered when one property’s GM went on holiday. “We’ve always thought service was really good at [this hotel] but in the last four weeks we’ve noticed a few things drop off in the service experience which has given us really powerful intelligence,” says David. “We’ve had a fantastic conversation with Neil, the General Manager. Neil has been on holiday for a few weeks, so it’s given him an opportunity to ask his team and Deputy Manager what has happened. A little bit of apathy may have crept in there while they were thinking, ‘We’ve been doing a great job, so let’s take a little bit of focus off it’.”

## **Getting a balanced perspective before having tough conversations**

Just as guest feedback allowed the general manager who had been on holiday to have a more informed conversation with his deputy when he returned, group management also uses guest feedback to ensure



they have a full and balanced perspective of any issues, and that all parties are treated fairly when dealing with difficult situations.

“Recently, I received a complaint through our central office regarding one of our GMs and the way that he handled a certain situation at site,” says Adam. “I listened to this complaint and started looking into the problems and I was about to call the GM to find out why he spoke to the guest the way he did. I pulled up the GuestRevu survey and the guest was extremely rude about one of [the GM’s] team and used inappropriate language, so actually it added weight to why the GM was a little bit defensive in what he was saying... In that instance, there would have normally been a bit of a tough conversation with a GM because he had an upset guest, but actually, it just so happened that this guest was really quite rude to one of their team members, and openly so on the GuestRevu survey. It gives a balanced view.”

## Monitoring engagement with guests online

Group management also uses their guest intelligence technology to help them keep an eye on who has and hasn’t been responding to online reviews, so that management

can take action immediately if hoteliers aren’t engaging with reviews online.

“Our GMs won’t sit behind a desk on their computers day in and day out, but at least now we know we have a process in place that within 24 hours they should be responding to those Hot Alerts”

David Campbell, Operations Director, The Coaching Inn Group

“What we try and do is to empower our managers and instruct them that they must respond to all feedback. You have to measure that somehow and GuestRevu allows us to measure that in a central point,” says David. “Recently, we were able to identify four of our hotels that hadn’t replied to their guest feedback in the last few weeks. Beforehand, we would have found that out, but it would have been maybe 2-3 months down the line. Now, I can have these conversations within days or weeks to get our managers into the habit of replying. It’s about tracking our managers to make monitoring and responding to reviews a daily task.”

How you use the technology you employ is often as important, if not more so, than the technology itself. Collecting guest feedback

can point out areas in your hotel for maintenance or renovation, let you know how your team is performing, highlight the strongest aspects of your guest experience, and even tell you if your guests think you are under or over charging, but all these insights are meaningless if they are not used to inform operations and strategies.

Knowing what aspects of staff

training need to be emphasised or revisited, and which members of the team need to be rewarded is vital to ensuring your staff is motivated and equipped to provide excellent experiences for your guests. The Coaching Inn Group has used guest intelligence technology to refine their human resources procedures to ensure they are empowering and encouraging their to provide great service in all of their venues.

(Written quotes have been lightly edited for brevity and clarity)



## Responding to TripAdvisor reviews – the good, the bad, and the ugly

**B**y now it should be no secret – business owners or managers must be quick to the keyboard in responding to customers' reviews on platforms like TripAdvisor.

It shows your establishment really cares about what people have to say, and especially in the case of negative reviews, a well-worded response can buff a silver lining around a potential PR nightmare.



TripAdvisor [found](#) that 65% of their users are more likely to book with a hotel that responds to reviews (versus a similar hotel that doesn't), and 85% of their users say a good management response to a poor review improves their impression of a hotel.

“With the manager response tool, the last word goes to the business owner which really is a huge benefit. So I would always suggest businesses view critical feedback as an opportunity to thank the reviewer for their feedback, use it as an opportunity to improve and also to actually attract more business – we know, for example, that thoughtful management responses can actually increase future bookings, so there's really nothing to lose! — Sally Davey, Senior Global Director, Industry Relations at TripAdvisor

Even though it might seem like a straightforward process, there are some essential guidelines managers should follow in practical application. Keep in mind that a massive [148.3 million bookings](#) are made online each year, and travellers use TripAdvisor to make informed decisions about where to stay and eat, or what to do.

Here we look at some real world examples of managers who have

hit the nail on the head, and others who have missed the mark catastrophically.

## The good review

Responding to good reviews might seem like a pointless task – they already like you so why engage?

But taking the time to respond to even the most glowing review has great benefits. Not only does it encourage loyalty and turn those patrons into brand ambassadors who recommend your business to others, but it also leaves a positive impression on other prospective customers scrolling through your reviews. In fact, TripAdvisor [found](#) that a massive 80% of their users believe a hotel that responds to reviews cares more about its guests.

[A good example](#) comes from Matthew Hiel, front office manager at the Hampton Inn & Suites Madison West.

Hello Shibumi365,

Thank you for sharing your feedback regarding your stay! I am glad that we were able to accommodate a room move for you. Also, thank you for the kind words regarding the breakfast. We

are continually trying to improve the variety and quality of food items that we offer. Thank you for staying at the Hampton Inn and Suites Madison West and we hope that you will consider us for your next business trip!

Sincerely,  
Matthew Hiel  
Front Office Manager  
Hampton Inn & Suites Madison  
West

This hotel manager gets a number of things spot on here, namely:

- Thanking the guest by name\* for taking the time to write a positive review
- Reiterating the compliments that the guest gave in the response, reinforcing why the hotel is a great option for other readers
- Ending off by thanking the guest again and encouraging a return visit

## The mixed review

It's fair to say that the majority of reviews your hotel receives will contain mixed sentiments. An example comes from a review of Novotel Brussels Centre in Belgium, with the guest calling it “a good

hotel, but nothing extraordinary”.

The manager's response reads:

Dear guest,

Thank you for your stay with us and for sharing your experience with other travelers. We were pleased to read you liked the size of the room but were sorry to hear there were some issues with temperature. Please rest assured we have addressed this with the team to ensure we improve on this.

Kind regards,  
Annabelle  
Secretary Guest Relations

The manager does well to first thank the guest for choosing their hotel and writing the review, before reinforcing a positive comment and apologising for an issue the guest had.

Unfortunately she only addresses one positive and one negative in a review that had several of each. By only selectively addressing certain comments, the response can seem insincere or rushed, especially if you don't bother to mention the guest by name either.

She also neglects to end off the response by inviting the guest back to the hotel to see how they have



made an effort to fix the issues.

## The bad review

Responding to negative reviews is undoubtedly vital if you want to redeem your business not only in the eyes of the reviewer, but in the eyes of other potential visitors reading reviews.

When it comes to responding to bad reviews, there's a definite right way and wrong way in how you engage with customers. Let's take a look at some examples:

## The Good Response

[A review of The Landmark London](#) hotel saw a guest complain about the in-room amenities, bed bugs, and an expensive breakfast, among other things, but the response from management was first class.

They write:

We are extremely alarmed by your statement regarding being bitten during your stay with us, we take these situations very seriously indeed. I am assuming that you stayed on our third floor as this is our only smoking floor and the only days that we have been full this month is the 1 and 2 March, I would appreciate it, if you could contact us directly with your room number

so that we can investigate this immediately. We have not had any record of such an event for years, but as always with you can never be too careful.

Regarding your comment on our TV screens, we are halfway through changing all of our sets to 42", HD - LCD screens, all of our rooms will be fully switched over by end of April 2011, so hopefully if you return to us, you will be able to view a more fashionable set.

I am sorry that you found breakfast expensive, we do try to offer a wide selection of choices for our guests from Room Service, individual A La Carte orders to Traditional Full English, Continental as well as Breakfast To Go for our guests in a rush. I am assuming that you and your guest enjoyed breakfast in our Winter Garden Restaurant with the full continental buffet and then chose an A LA Carte order.

I appreciate that we cannot get it right all of the time but would hope that when we make a mistake, we really try to rectify it during the guests stay, to ensure that they leave us feeling happy and relaxed. Please do contact us so that we can make you feel better regarding your stay with us.

Sally Beck  
Director of Marketing

The response is timely, respectful, and thoroughly addresses all of the guest's concerns in a well-worded and heartfelt message. It also encourages the guest to return and see how they've turned things around.

## The Bad Response

Negative reviews of one particular London hotel far outweigh the positive, with one guest going so far as to call it "the worst hotel in the UK, possibly the world".

Scrolling through the venomous feedback, it becomes clear that there's no meaningful attempt to apologise to guests – their concerns are swept under the rug with an excuse that's copied and pasted under every negative review.

### They write:

Dear Guests:

Hotel is now undergoing a full refurbishment and all the issues are being resolved.

Thanks for your understanding

Hotel Management.

It's rushed, impersonal and

insincere, doing the bare minimum to quell the anger of over 200 guests.

Even though it seems renovations over the last few years have improved the hotel's image and offerings, those negative reviews and the way they were handled by management is still there for the world to see.

## The Ugly Response

No one likes a negative review, and it can sometimes be hard to keep your cool when you get a bad review, especially if you feel a reviewer was unfair. However, in 2013, a massive 69% of TripAdvisor users said they were less likely to book a hotel that responded in a defensive or aggressive manner to negative reviews, while, in a [2015 survey](#) 85% of users said that a thoughtful response to a bad review would improve their impression of a hotel.

When you are penning a response to a negative review is when it is most vital to respond in a diplomatic and professional manner, and not like the following hoteliers:

**"What do you expect?"**

A guest who stayed at one hotel in Glasgow wrote a scathing review,



calling the guest house “grotty and dirty”. The review was written in a calm, fair tone, pointing out that while the location was great, the establishment was anything but.

The owner gets it very wrong with this [cringeworthy reply](#):

With only one person to look after the place what do you expect? Think about what you paid.

By immediately going on the defensive and using excuses to try justify bad facilities or terrible service, you immediately alienate yourself from not only the customer, but everyone reading the review. Would you stay there after reading this?

Paying a low booking rate should never justify poor service.

### **“Two stars instead of one!”**

A negative review of a bed and breakfast in Scotland, which has since been removed, led the owner to pen a lengthy and bizarre response. The owner’s attempts at humour backfire, and come across as slightly deranged.

I would like to apologise for the

behavior of my wife... under no circumstances should she have told you about the burglary that we experienced. It was a sensitive and personal issue that was none of your business! It was very thoughtful of you to share it with the 2 million customers of Tripadvisor!

However I am happy that you found my wife friendly... I rarely see that side of her! I will pass on your compliments. Maybe that is why we earned two stars instead of one!

As you can see, developing a well-thought out strategy for responding to online reviews is essential. Make sure you respond in a timely, respectful manner and address all concerns brought up by your customers.

While you consider this strategy, remember that sometimes you need more, not better reviews. This is why it helps to be asking visitors for reviews, and it also helps to have online reputation management software like GuestRevu’s ORM that collects those reviews from across the web and collates them on one easy-to-manage system.

\*While you shouldn’t share personal information about your customer online that they might not want shared, such as their real name, you should address them by their chosen TripAdvisor screen name in your response.

# Managing fake reviews and negative feedback

One of the reasons that businesses give for being wary of TripAdvisor is their concern about false impressions and fake reviews (both from competitors and from customers who never really visited), not to mention the worry of dirty laundry being aired in

public. But between TripAdvisor's staunch policies on falsified reviews, and the impact of management responses, there's little that businesses need to be concerned about if the right channels are followed.

## What you'll learn more about in this section:

- > TripAdvisor's stance on fake reviews (and the few companies that offer them)
- > Why cases of fake businesses like The Shed shouldn't scare you
- > How negative feedback can actually have a positive effect on your business
- > Why having only positive reviews makes travellers suspicious





## Honest guest reviews help your hotel

In 2015, Steve Kaufer (CEO of TripAdvisor), penned a strongly worded letter to owners of TripAdvisor listed businesses that probably gave some people quite a few grey hairs, not least of all those involved in fraudulent “optimisation companies”.

There are companies and individuals that claim that they can manipulate your TripAdvisor score by posting positive reviews and removing negative ones. These are the dishonest, fraudulent and unethical companies of which Kaufer speaks.

Of course, everyone wishes that all their customers only ever have positive experiences, but how can you improve your offerings if you never hear any of the negative feedback from real travellers? After

all, even if you hide the negative reviews online, you’re not going to stop an unhappy customer from telling their friends and family about their experience in person, still damaging your reputation, but leaving you in the dark.

At GuestRevu we believe that hiding negative online reviews does not do anyone any favours — not the review site, not the traveller, not the host, and therefore not GuestRevu. We endeavour to increase the number of businesses’ TripAdvisor reviews, regardless of sentiment. It is because of this that we are recognised as an official TripAdvisor Platinum partner.

We believe that negative feedback is as important as positive feedback, and we do not seek to sway, manipulate or distort any

customer feedback in any way. Our goal is to encourage visitors to provide their hosts with feedback that can help them to improve their offerings.

Not all customers feel comfortable giving their hosts negative feedback in person, and the only other avenue that is usually offered to them is to post their experiences and opinions on review sites, which are primarily aimed at other travellers.

Letting patrons think that you don't care about their experience with you or letting them brood on a negative experience will increase the chances that they will vent their frustrations on review sites like TripAdvisor. Rather, give customers the opportunity to tell you directly what they thought of your establishment and services, either after they have left, or via surveys that can be accessed on kiosks or

through QR codes while they are still with you.

By providing customers with a detailed questionnaire after their time with you, you will receive honest and invaluable feedback, and you also show them that you care about whether they enjoyed themselves or not. The same questionnaire also gives visitors the opportunity to post their honest ratings and reviews straight to TripAdvisor, but they will be posting objectively, not out of frustration.

By receiving, recognising and acting upon negative feedback, you are given the opportunity to rectify problems and improve the quality of future customers' stays with you. In this way you will end up with more positive reviews because your patrons had more positive experiences, not because you're okay with a bit of fraud here and there.







## Putting a stop to fake reviews

**W**ord-of-mouth referrals have always been the best kind of advertising any business can ask for and, in the digital age, online reviews allow for word-of-mouth referrals on a global scale. However, there is also now the potential for false advertising and fraud on a global scale too.

It is up to all of us in the hospitality industry to make sure that the integrity of review sites like TripAdvisor is not compromised, as online reviews allow us all to have access to powerful tools for both advertising and informed purchasing. TripAdvisor has set up avenues for reporting fake reviews or fraudulent “optimisation companies”.

Here are some steps to follow if you believe you have found anything

suspicious:

### Record all the details

If you encounter activity that appears to be fraudulent or find yourself solicited by an “optimisation company” you should keep as much information as possible. Take screenshots and note the urls of any pages that fraudulent activity has appeared on, and save any suspicious emails, attachments, voicemails or any other information or communication that a suspected optimisation company may have sent you.

If you have noticed something suspicious about a specific review, you should also include the date and title of the review when you report it. The more information that you can provide the TripAdvisor

team with, the better their chances are of catching the people responsible.

## I've noticed a suspicious review on my account I think might be fake

If you are a business owner you can report suspicious activity through the TripAdvisor owner center. Under the "Manage your Reviews" tab on your dashboard you will find the option to "Report Organised Boosting". If you believe that a particular review is questionable, you can report individual reviews through the manage your reviews section by saying "Report a review" then "Report a problem with review" and reporting the review as "Suspicious".

## I've noticed a suspicious review on someone else's account I think might be fake

If you aren't an owner, or see a review on another business listing that you think might be false, you can also click "report problem with review" at the bottom of the review itself.

You can also report dubious activity by contacting TripAdvisor via email at [fightfraud@tripadvisor.com](mailto:fightfraud@tripadvisor.com)

### More info:

For more information about what TripAdvisor considers fraud, read [this article](#). For information on review guidelines please visit [this page](#).







## 5 Reasons why The Shed shouldn't scare you

**W**hen freelance writer Oobah Butler decided to [make a fake restaurant](#) for the purposes of proving that “TripAdvisor was a false reality”, he realised that he had a number of hurdles ahead of him. From overcoming [TripAdvisor's fraud checks](#), to convincing friends to write over 100 realistic-looking reviews and relying on the gullibility of the public, running The Shed became a full-time job, and all for a restaurant that never existed, and never had paying customers to satisfy.

Those of you with real patrons may be thinking, “Well what stops anyone from doing this? Why should I trust TripAdvisor? Could my competitors be exploiting the same flaws in the system?” But, The Shed really shouldn't scare you. Fortunately, if a

real hotel or restaurant attempted to pull off a stunt like this, it simply wouldn't be viable – and here are five reasons why:

### 1. TripAdvisor goes to great lengths to check for fraudulent reviews

The technology that the review giant uses to map electronic data and look for patterns in behaviour is based on the techniques that banks use to detect fraud. Not only does TripAdvisor [subject reviews to over 50 filters](#), but it also employs over 300 specialists from fields such as law enforcement, credit card fraud and forensic computing to monitor for abnormal activity. So part of Butler's deception would have involved monitoring how many



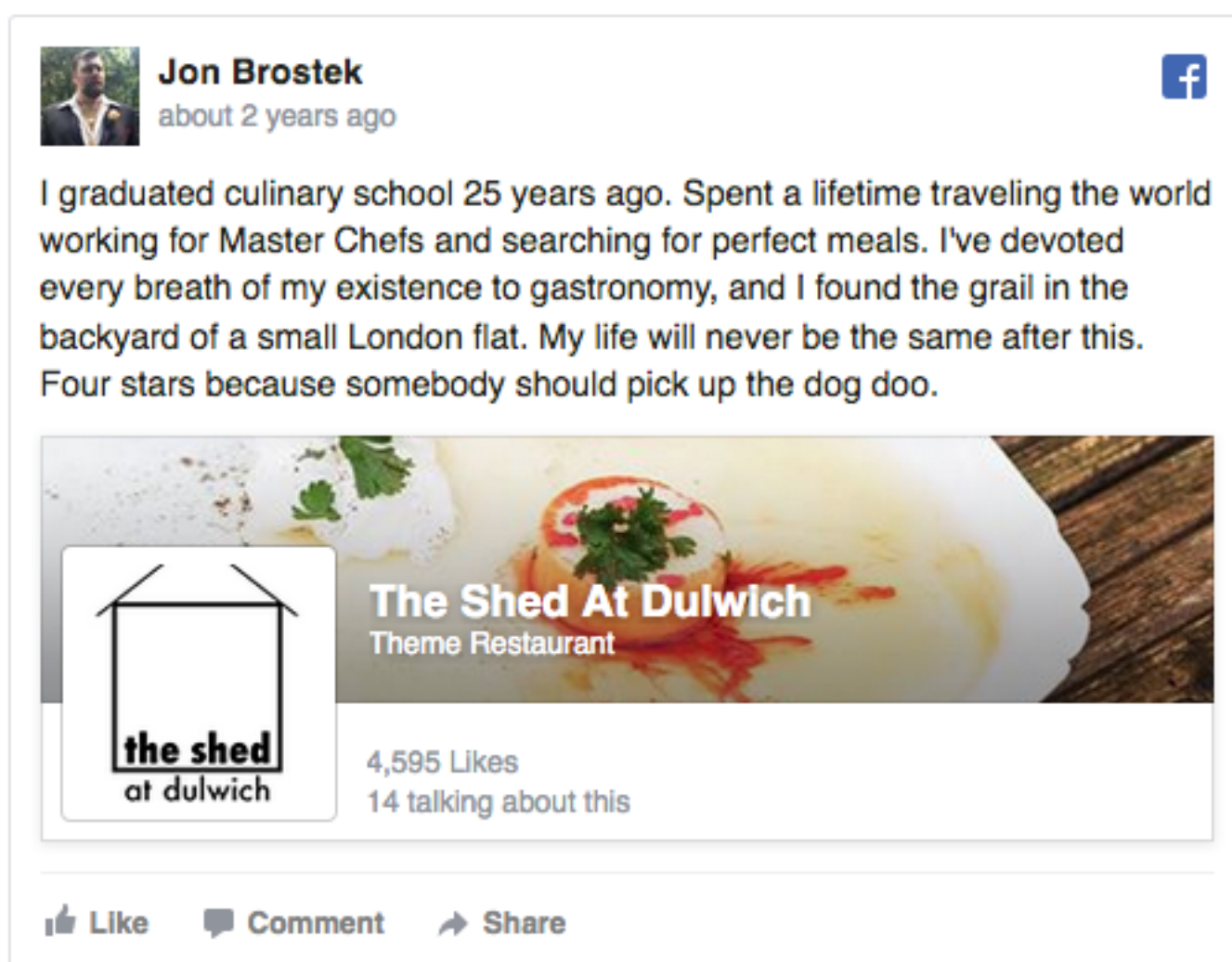
reviews were getting flagged – no doubt a full-time job in itself!

As TripAdvisor's CEO explains, "We are not blind to the challenges a site like ours faces. We have invested heavily in fraud detection technology and personnel to improve the safeguards we have in place. We don't claim to be perfect. But we know that for the vast majority of people using TripAdvisor, the information they are able to gather from our community's reviews is both useful and accurate."

So how did The Shed get past all of these safety measures to obtain over 100 reviews and rise to its #1 rank? The answer is actually quite simple: the entire restaurant was

fake. There were no legitimate reviews to use as a basis for normal behaviour – falsified reviews were the norm in this case, rather than the exception – and there were no actual customers to refute the great experiences or report the reviews, since there was no restaurant to dine at and no experience to be had. The three sections that TripAdvisor sorts fake reviews into – boosting, vandalism and optimisation – didn't really apply to The Shed.

To put it in banking terms, it would be like someone walking into a bank and opening an account under a fake name, not to steal money or commit fraud, but simply to prove that you can do so without





the fraud division catching onto your scheme. There was no scheme to catch on to!

“When reviews are honest and useful, businesses can compete on a level playing field and travellers get the insights they need to enjoy a perfect trip, every trip.” — [Journey of a TripAdvisor review](#)

## 2. People are learning how to spot fake news and reviews


They are a common problem faced not only by TripAdvisor, but by sites [from Yelp, to Facebook, to Google, and beyond](#). It's not only banks that need to monitor for fraudulent activity these days, and just about every website will have measures in place for making sure that its users aren't trying to trick others. With the amount of fake news in circulation, people are also becoming more sceptical – and more aware of how much falsity the internet allows for – and users will often check multiple sources ([or even use](#)

[tools like Fakespot and ReviewMeta](#)) before they believe anything they read.

The fact that The Shed was only looking to scam TripAdvisor means that if you tried to look into the restaurant further, you would find little to sate your curiosity – everything from [their website](#) to their [TripAdvisor](#) and [Facebook](#) pages (the only two that were set up) is filled with scant details, designed specifically to induce curiosity rather than satisfy it. If a real restaurant or hotel were to attempt to follow in The Shed's footsteps and fake their reviews, it wouldn't take long for potential guests or customers to realise that the overly positive sentiments that were expressed were out of sync with the feedback from others who had come before.

## 3. TripAdvisor was onto The Shed before the news broke

By the time that the fake restaurant had decided to come clean to the public, TripAdvisor had already become more than a little suspicious. It may have taken longer than one would have expected due to the entire restaurant, rather than just one or

 Message from TripAdvisor: TripAdvisor has reasonable cause to believe that individuals or entities associated with or having an interest in this property may have interfered with traveler reviews and/or the popularity index for this property. We make our best efforts to identify suspicious content and are always working to improve the processes we use to assess traveler reviews.

two of its reviews, being falsified, but The Shed was on the review giant's radar, according to [the statement that they released](#) after the full story behind the deception was posted online.

"In fact," TripAdvisor's statement explained, "we had already applied a penalty to the property which reduced its position within our Popularity Ranking and removed a number of its reviews, prior to the listing itself being identified as fraudulent and removed from the site. From the moment our system identified a suspicious pattern of reviews, it was only a matter of time before we caught and shut down this listing."

The Shed may have reached the number one spot, but their success was short-lived. Butler also had nothing to lose, unlike a real restaurant, where the risk of penalties and a damaged reputation far outweigh the supposed benefits of fraudulent reviews.

## 4. Fake reviews are a false economy

Considering the penalties that businesses caught faking reviews can be subject to, it stands to reason that only an entirely fake

business would find the risk to be worth the reward, so to speak. Especially since the reward in this instance was nothing more than proving a point and achieving a certain amount of notoriety and a bit more than fifteen minutes of internet fame.

Consider that, for a legitimate restaurant or hotel, falsified reviews can not only lead to [penalties on the site itself](#) (and the accompanying big red notices that outweigh any positive influence the fake review might have), but can also be considered unlawful or [contradict consumer protection policies](#) in a number of countries. And then consider that, unlike The (entirely fake) Shed, the establishment would have customers or guests who are able to flag or contradict suspicious reviews. The risk that a company takes by either writing or soliciting fake reviews becomes entirely unworth any reward that the company could hope to achieve from the small and short-lived boost that they may receive.

## 5. Listings with only positive reviews look suspicious

If you look at the current [#1](#)



restaurant in New York or #1 hotel in London, you may notice that there is one thing that they have in common. While the two both have a large number of overwhelmingly positive reviews, they also have a handful of terrible, poor and average reviews alongside those great ones. And that's to be expected! No hotel is perfect, and no restaurant can satisfy every single customer that walks through their doors. No one expects perfection either, and that is why a listing with only positive reviews comes across as pretty suspicious to most readers. This is part of the reason (aside from possible legal ramifications) why you should never block (or try to prevent people from posting) a bad review — not only can it land you in legal hot water if you did, but by their very existence, negative reviews with great management responses can build

trust with potential guests.

At the end of the day, The Shed was an experiment that may have been successful for its creators, but that is meaningless to real restaurants and hotels, simply because it would never have reached its high status if its goal had been to gain customers or to make money. The lesson that hotels and restaurants can learn from Butler and his falsified results is purely that they would not work in the real-world since, as TripAdvisor put so succinctly, “real businesses, whether they try to game our system or not, have a footfall of genuine customers coming through the door and those customers contribute to the review patterns we would expect to see. Spotting the difference between a business' genuine customer reviews and its fake reviews is one of the ways we catch fraud.”





## What to do when customers blackmail your business with bad reviews

**W**hile the old saying may claim there's no such thing as a free lunch, that doesn't stop some unscrupulous customers from blackmailing freebies out of management.

Over the years, hotel and restaurant owners have reported a rise in patrons threatening to write bad reviews on popular platforms like TripAdvisor unless they receive bill reductions, room upgrades, free meals or have other demands met.

"People threatening restaurants and hotels with bad TripAdvisor reviews to extort free things is a problem which has been growing," [says](#) deputy chief executive of the British Hospitality Association,

Martin Couchman.

"People will either attempt to blackmail during the meal, or sometimes, more worryingly, people who have not even been to the restaurant will post a bad review to try to get a free meal, or a free stay in a hotel's case."

Luckily there are ways to combat blatant blackmail attempts. We take a look at how hospitality professionals can recognise legitimate complaints, deal with hostile customers in-house, and report blackmail threats to review platforms.

### Differentiate between



## blackmail threats and genuine concerns

First and foremost, it's important for you to put complaints into perspective. Which customers have legitimate concerns, and who's just trying their luck? One sure-fire way of doing this is to try to gather and analyse as much customer feedback as you can regarding a particular issue.

For example, did you receive a handful of complaints about the main course during the course of an evening, or did one person threaten to write a bad review during a meal? Did someone complain about noise levels in the hotel? Try to determine if other guests had the same issue.

Having an online customer feedback solution in place can help you to keep tabs on recurring complaints or clusters of issues over a specific time period. Additionally, if you use an online tool to manage feedback and online reviews from all your patrons, you will have evidence on record if you do end up being blackmailed with a bad review.

If there really does seem to be a problem, of course it should be rectified – but avoid doing so on a

public platform. If you are going to offer compensation, it's best not to do it for other potential blackmailers to see. Rather contact the customer privately and make amends.

## Disarm angry patrons with compassion

What might seem like a blackmail attempt could just be a weary customer, irritable from their travels and thus more likely to complain about basic service issues. This isn't necessarily the threat of a bad review.

Adele Gutman, VP of sales, marketing and revenue for New York City-based Library Hotel Collection, [says](#) they train staff to show sincere compassion and disarm angry guests with kindness and consideration, showing that they'll at least go the extra mile to try to resolve the issue, even if they physically can't.

Based on what's really bothering the guest, Gutman explains they then offer alternatives – like a change of room (not an upgrade), or moving the guest to another one of their hotels in the city.

“If the answer is no and they just want a free room or a suite and there is nothing left to do for them,

we offer to let them out of their reservation and help them find another hotel that better suits their needs,” she says. “That may be a financial burden for us, but we believe it is best for us if the traveller is happy, even if that means they stay someplace else.”

Independent guest house owner, Lucille Came, says she’s received a handful of blackmail threats from unreasonable guests, luckily none of whom have followed through.

“Unfortunately you do get chancers out there. We’re more than 15 kilometres away from the sea, which is clearly stated on our website, but we still had a group of guests come in and complain that they couldn’t see the ocean or have direct access to the beach.

“They said they were going straight to TripAdvisor because of how misleading we are. After we kindly explained that all relevant information is on our website and tried to find out if there was anything else we could do for them, they never did,” says Came.

“We also had issues with one person in particular, who would come in almost every week with a group of friends and say he’s not happy with the food. His friends

never complained, but he insisted his meals were bad. We always offered him a different meal free of charge, which he would gladly accept.

“For us, maintaining that goodwill between customers is more important than a free plate of food, but there must be a line. After it happened one time too many, we kindly told him that our food was obviously not for his tastes, and advised him of other restaurants in the area.”

## **Proactively report blackmail threats to TripAdvisor**

If you’re unable to disarm the situation and the customer still seems hell-bent on posting a bad review, TripAdvisor urges managers to report blackmail threats immediately via the website’s Management Centre, emphasising that these reports must appear before the suspicious review is posted.

“While most guests do not follow through with such threats, it’s important to submit your report as soon as possible to ensure that it is on record before a potential blackmail review is submitted,”



reads the website.

Simply follow these steps:

- > Log in to the TripAdvisor Management Centre and select 'manage your reviews'
- > Click the link 'concerned about a review?'
- > In the 'please tell us what the issue is' section, choose the 'report fraud' option
- > From the 'what do you want to do?' menu, select 'report blackmail threat'

You'll need to then provide additional information and describe the event in detail, which will help the TripAdvisor team identify the review if it's submitted at a later stage.

## Document evidence

If you do report threats to TripAdvisor, it's important to document your written conversations with the customer. Keep the email trail or handwritten notes showing how you tried to do everything in your power to resolve their concerns.

TripAdvisor's fraud detection experts will use these records to investigate,

and where they do find evidence of threatening behaviour, will take the necessary steps to ensure the malicious review never reaches the website.

## Responding to bad reviews

Came explains that her guest house responds to every TripAdvisor review, good or bad.

"We take a diplomatic approach to negative reviews, and try to explain our side of the story without ever getting defensive. We believe that the customer is king. They may not always be right, but they're king and we always try to treat them as such."

Hopefully as the hotelier, you're now better equipped to combat blackmail threats laid against you. Remember that online feedback tools can be helpful in monitoring guest experience and online reviews.

First assess whether the complaint is valid by factoring other customer experiences into the equation, combined with your own research, and use compassion to try to diffuse any negative situation.

Failing that, report blackmail

threats to the relevant review platform immediately, allowing their investigators to use the

documentation you've kept in making sure malicious reviews never see the light of day.



## Manage negative reviews with the 3 Rs

**N**ot everyone will be happy with what you offer all of the time, so make sure you are prepared for the day when someone is unhappy, and says so!

Having a bad review on TripAdvisor, or any online site, can either hurt or build your online reputation. A simple, polite response to a bad review can do two things for you:

- > It can minimize the damage to your reputation by making prospective guests think more

highly of you

- > It can repair your relationship with the unhappy reviewer

87% of users agree that an appropriate management response to a bad review “improves my impression of the hotel” while 70% of users agree that an aggressive/defensive management response to a bad review “makes me less likely to book that hotel” – [TripAdvisor](#)

Brian Payea, Head of TripAdvisor



Industry Relations, says the most important thing is to use the negative feedback to help you make your next customer's experience better. A three-step response is suggested.

## Using the “Three R” method of dealing with negative reviews

The Golden rule is never, ever ignore a negative review. A timely response is one of the most effective marketing tools you could possibly have at your disposal. You are not just responding to the person who wrote it but to the hundreds of people reading it too, and if you handle criticism well it creates a human element to your business that instils trust and forgiveness.

### how to deal with negative reviews:



Here are the three R's of turning a negative review into a better reputation:

### React

No matter how outrageous, malicious or petty you think the claim is, it must be taken seriously and dealt with immediately. A response should be given within 36 hours of a bad review, so do internal investigations as quickly as possible before typing a single word. If necessary, gather an account from all members of staff who dealt with this particular client to get a clear understanding of why this person is unhappy with their experience. If you dealt with them personally or know where the complaint is coming from take time to draft a response.

### Respond

A response must be written by someone in the highest level of management. Be personal and polite and never condescending, dismissive or defensive, regardless of whether or not you think the complaint is coming from someone looking for a 'freebie'! A generic or defensive response, seemingly written by someone without the authority to make any changes, will have the online community grabbing their pitchforks faster than

you can say “it wasn’t me”. Let your response read like an old-fashioned letter. Make it honest, personal and heartfelt with impeccable language and grammar. Yes, unfortunately people will judge your professionalism not only by your excellent hospitality, but also by your spelling. Always sign off using your name and designation.

## Repair

A response has to include an apology, a solution to the problem and an invitation to re-review. Always invite the reviewer back to experience the changes you have

implemented. Unless there is proof that they were treated terribly, you do not have to offer complimentary compensation, just acting on and responding to their complaint shows good service and confidence that the problem has been dealt with and that you are willing to risk being publicly reviewed by them again.

At the end of the day, you can’t stop people from leaving their thoughts about their experience online if they want to, so make sure you capitalise on their feedback whether positive or negative to improve your online reputation rather than damage it.



## Why you should never block a bad review (and what to do instead)

**N**o one likes to get a bad review online. The sinking feeling when

you see a one or two out of five rating and the harsh criticisms



of unhappy customers erode at the heart of a good hospitality professional, and at the reputation of your business.

As a result, many managers have come up with ways to prevent negative reviews from reaching the public, some of which are distinctly unsavoury. Some businesses have attempted to stifle poor reviews simply by preventing customers who had negative experiences from receiving the establishment's usual review request email, and others have gone so far as to attempt to sue or fine patrons for bad reviews.

As dreadful as it is to see your life's work slated online, however, you should never attempt to block, censor or circumvent negative reviews by duplicitous means or force. Between brand damage, operational oversight and possible legal consequences, the harm that can be done simply isn't worth it.

Here are just a few of the reasons why you should accept criticism gracefully, and some steps for managing your online reputation the right way.

## **Why you shouldn't try to block negative reviews**

**It doesn't work**

First and foremost, trying to silence people in the information age doesn't work. There are simply too many ways for people to share their opinions and experiences – there are hundreds of review sites, OTAs and social media platforms where people can write whatever they like, there are news outlets always looking for a story, and there is still good old fashioned over the garden wall word of mouth.

## **By raising expectations you could set yourself up to fail**

Even if keeping accounts of negative experiences off review sites successfully influences people to choose you over your competitors to begin with, you can still be setting yourself up for failure by presenting a more positive image of your establishment than you can deliver, which will result in even more disappointed customers, and more people who want to write negative things about you online.

For many of your patrons, travel is a big investment of both time and money. By manipulating your reviews, you mislead your potential visitors, denying them the opportunity to get a complete picture of what a visit to your business might be like, and preventing them from making an

informed decision – not a good start to a relationship.

## People's opinions on what is "negative" differ

Not everyone has the same views on what constitutes a drawback. For example, your hotel might get a bad review because the club next door pumped all night, but while Mrs Beige who was missing her cats might not have appreciated the noise, Nikki and her party-loving group of friends will be thrilled to learn about your area's nightlife.

## People suspect censorship when there are no bad reviews, and don't like it

Research has shown that **68% of people trust reviews more** when they see both good and bad opinions, and, if they only see positives, 95% of people suspect censorship or faked reviews and distrust the establishment. Considering the aforementioned investment of time and money that you are asking potential customers to make in your property's ability to offer them a good experience, trust is not something you can afford to jeopardise.

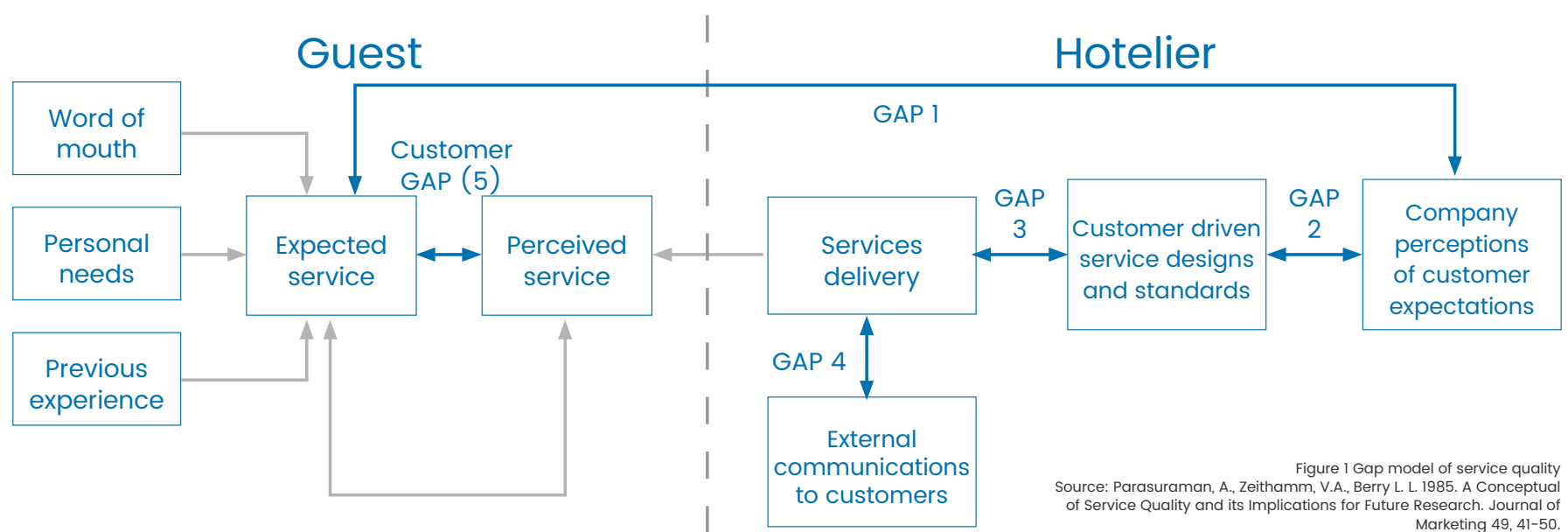
## You face public backlash if you are exposed

As the Union Street Guest House in New York found out the hard way, trying to suppress bad reviews can, unsurprisingly, create a groundswell of public outrage. Although they are not the only business to have one, the Union Street's "gag clause" attracted a fair bit of criticism online in 2014. The guest house attempted to claim the right to fine bridal couples \$500 dollars for every negative review posted online by a member of the wedding party. The Economist **referred to it** as a "car crash of a policy" and the guest house's Yelp listing was inundated with hundreds of negative reviews within days of the public getting wind of its attempt to threaten patrons into silence.

## It's against the rules, and possibly illegal

Most review sites have regulations and terms of use in place to prevent travellers being misled. TripAdvisor, for example, has **a list of practices it considers fraudulent** and will penalise. Among these prohibited behaviours are "selectively soliciting reviews (by email, surveys or any other means) only from guests who have had a positive experience" and "prohibiting or discouraging guests from posting negative or critical reviews of their experience".





Gaps can exist between the expectations and experiences of a guest, and between the perceptions of guests and management. It is in these gaps that service quality, as perceived by the guest, often falls short.

If the site's own terms of use aren't enough to discourage these underhanded tactics, consider that they are also potentially illegal. There are laws in place across economic regions that protect the consumer's right to complain online, and forbid the enforcement of "gag clauses" such as Union Street Guest House's.

As the Meriton Chain in Australia has also discovered, even doing something as subtle as selectively excluding people from a mailing list can land you in legal hot water. The group was **found guilty** in court of "misleading or deceptive conduct" because they were preventing their review invitation emails from being sent to guests they believed might write poor reviews.

**You block your own chance to show you care and**

## are dedicated to solving problems

People know that you can't be perfect all the time, and that things do go wrong. More important than whether a visit was perfect or not is how your company's team handled the imperfections.

For example, rather than stopping review requests being sent to patrons who were at your establishment when something went wrong (as Meriton did when their lifts broke or when they had no hot water), give these customers the chance to tell others how you promptly rectified the problem or graciously made up for it.

## What to do instead

**Respond quickly, politely, and professionally**

Responding well to negative reviews is essential to maintaining a positive online reputation. When negative reviews do end up online, they give you the opportunity to respond as management and show the public that when the inevitable does happen, you deal with it appropriately, and are dedicated to rectifying your mistakes.

The way you respond to reviews can sway people to either book with you or not. **87% of TripAdvisor users say** that an appropriate management response to a bad review improves their impression of the hotel, while **69% say** that a defensive or aggressive response makes them less likely to book.

## Use the feedback in reviews to improve your offering

When customers share negative experiences online, they give you the opportunity to see your business from their point of view and may help you to identify strengths or weaknesses you never knew existed. If you keep track of trends in criticism and act appropriately upon negative feedback to rectify problems,

you will improve future customers' experiences, and ensure that you earn more positive reviews through providing a superior offering.

## Dilute negative reviews with more positive ones

More reviews are almost always better. Most people prefer to read several reviews to get a balanced perspective of a business before they decide for or against booking. **79% of TripAdvisor users** prefer to read 8 – 12 reviews before they choose a hotel, and the algorithm that calculates your ranking on TripAdvisor is also influenced by the number of reviews you have (as well as recency and rating).

By proactively asking customers for reviews, you can encourage people who were satisfied but who may not have been inclined to write a review on their own to give you a review. Often, the visitors compelled to write reviews online are either of the very happy or very angry variety, while the “silent majority” – those whose expectations were met but not exceeded or fallen short of – don't bother to go through the effort if left to their own devices.



On average, **GuestRevu clients receive more than 200% more reviews** on TripAdvisor





Our research data shows that **reviews collected via GuestRevu surveys have a higher average star rating** than reviews guests leave on TripAdvisor by themselves.

## Provide customers with a way to communicate with you

Don't force patrons to use public forums such as TripAdvisor and Yelp as a way to let you know that your establishment didn't make the grade. Rather, give customers a direct line of communication with your business. This lets them know that their concerns have already been heard, and by the time they come to writing their TripAdvisor reviews, they are less likely to want to air their grievances publicly.

GuestRevu data shows that customers who have gone through the process of filling out a direct online questionnaire form a business before they submit a TripAdvisor review tend to give the establishment a higher rating.

## Fight review blackmail and fraud the right way

No manager should accept unjust reviews or allow themselves to be

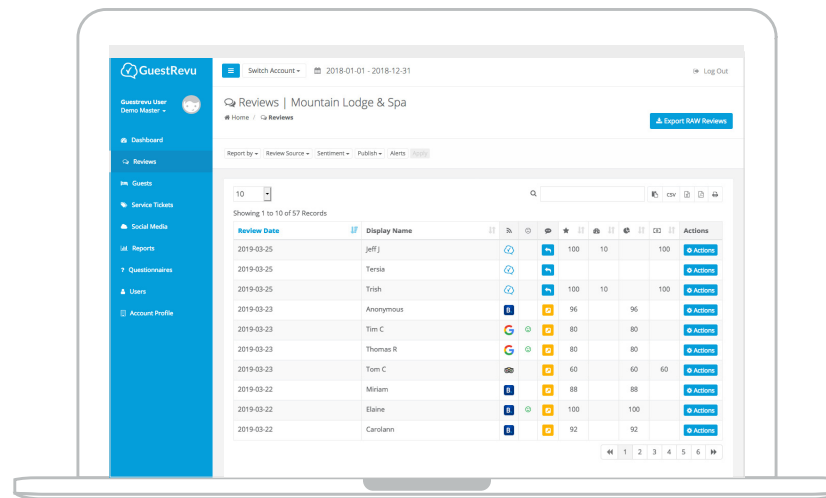
bullied and blackmailed. If you suspect a review is fraudulent in some way (for example if it was written by someone who wasn't a bona fide customer or was posted in an attempt to blackmail you) there are ways to bring these reviews to the attention of review site moderators and combat review blackmail.

## How to move ahead

Attempts to prevent negative feedback from reaching the public are a hot topic in the travel industry, but if recent events have taught us anything, it's that attempting to stifle or censor criticism is not only futile, but can potentially do irreparable damage to your brand.

When it comes to managing your online reputation, you have two options: Be transparent and part of the conversation and reap the rewards or do it wrong by trying to falsify your image and suffer the consequences.





## BECOME AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION

As a TripAdvisor Platinum Partner, GuestRevu helps hotels, serviced apartments, restaurants, activity providers and more to actively engage with their guests and visitors.

- > **Our feedback surveys encourage guests to leave reviews on TripAdvisor** directly from the questionnaire, without needing to log into the platform or even have a TripAdvisor account.
- > **Our consolidated dashboard brings together feedback from surveys and online review platforms** across the web to help you monitor reviews and analyse trends.
- > **Our review manager helps hospitality professionals to respond to reviews with ease**, while our service tickets make sure that details from the reviews are brought to the right staff member's attention.

**BOOK A DEMO TODAY**

[or visit www.guestrevu.com](http://www.guestrevu.com)