



HOW REVIEW SITES CAN DRIVE MORE LOCAL CUSTOMERS TO YOUR BUSINESS

Do you know what your reputation is online? Is it full of glowing reviews from happy customers singing the praises of your business? Or are there a lot of negative reviews where unsatisfied customers vent about your business?



No matter if you are online or not, you need to be aware of what people say about your business. Over 80% of customers read reviews before choosing which local business to contact, and that number jumps to 95% for people under the age of 34. Even more important, over 50% of consumers will only use a business if it has over 4 stars from a review site.

You not only want to monitor your reviews, they also act as great feedback for your business. If you are getting several negative reviews from different people, then there is likely some disconnect between your services and customer satisfaction that will have to be changed.

There's an old adage that while a happy customer will tell 10 people about your business, an unhappy customer will tell 100. This is unfortunately magnified online, where the entire community (actually, the entire world) can see any review from your customers, good or bad.

Keeping track of reviews and responding to all of them – positive and negative – is known as *reputation management*, and the difference between a good and bad reputation can mean the difference between enthusiastic new customers confident in what you offer and you closing your doors due to lack of new sales and customers, who steer clear of you on purpose.

What are Review Sites?

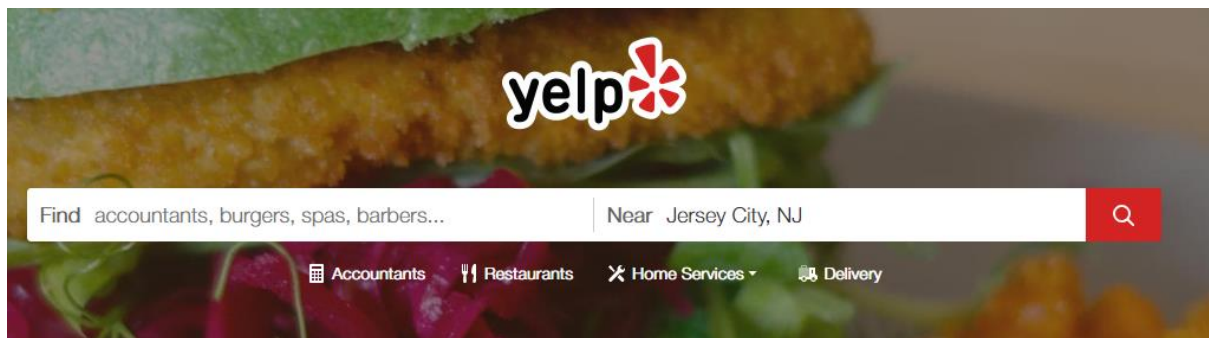
Now that you know that review sites are vitally important to the success (or failure) of your business, where can they be found?

Not too long ago, there was only ONE business that mattered when it came to reviews: The Better Business Bureau. That venerable institution wasn't so much as a place to find reviews as a place to make sure there were no bad reviews!

Since the Internet has become the primary communication tool in people's lives, dozens, hundreds, even thousands of review sites have cropped up online. Juggling between all of them is impossible. Fortunately, there are only a handful that really matter. Some are strong nationwide and even worldwide, while others are more important based on where you live. Here are some of the main ones:

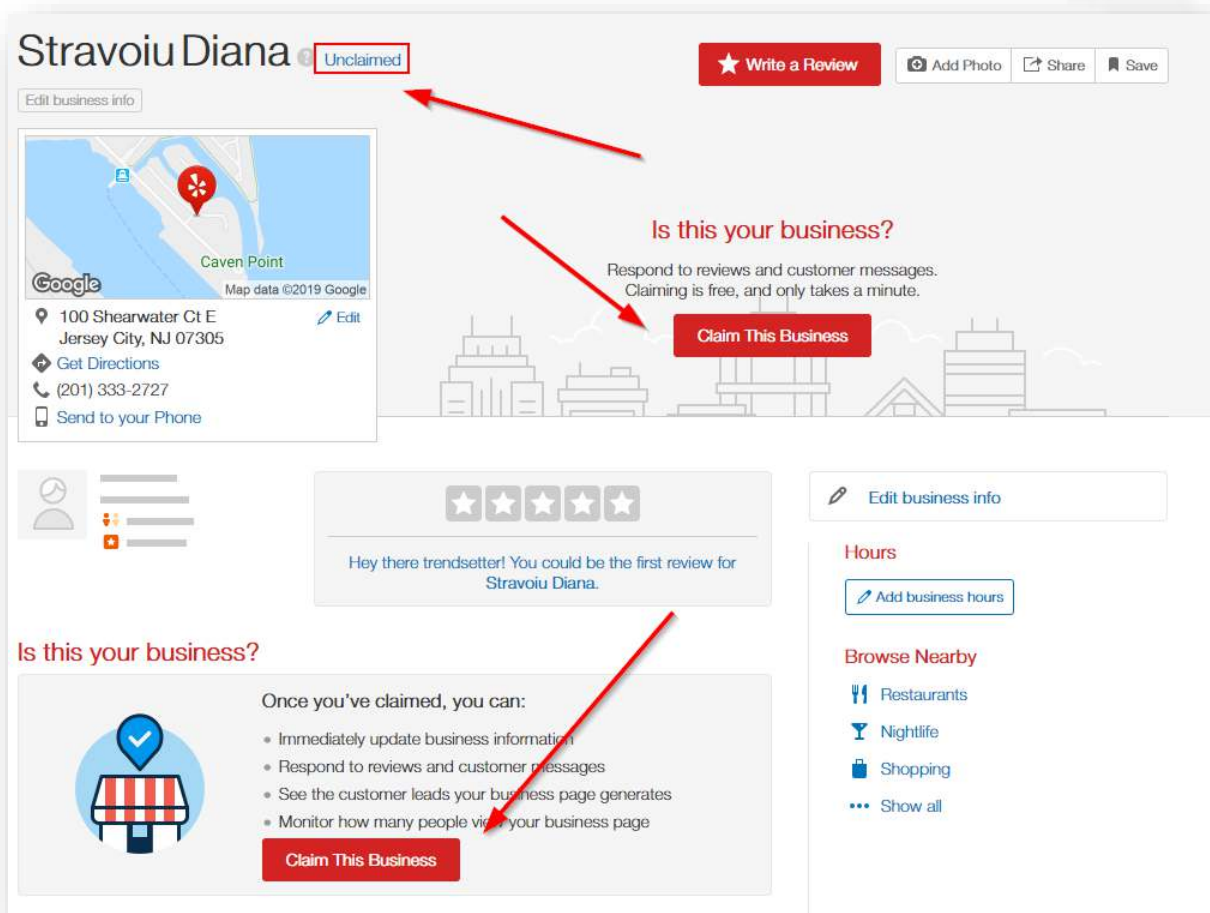
Yelp

<https://www.yelp.com>



Yelp is the king of review sites, and has been for over a decade. Almost 150 million people visit Yelp every month. The website has reviews for every possible business niche, from restaurants to massage therapists to lawyers to phone repair shops. If there is any place where you will likely find reviews for a business, it will be here.

You will likely find your business here, even if you haven't set it up yourself ... somebody else likely has. You can easily claim it by clicking the "unclaim" button once you find your business:



In fact, most (if not all) review sites will have some sort of way for a business to claim and control their listing, so it's just a matter of writing your own list and going out and signing up and claiming them.

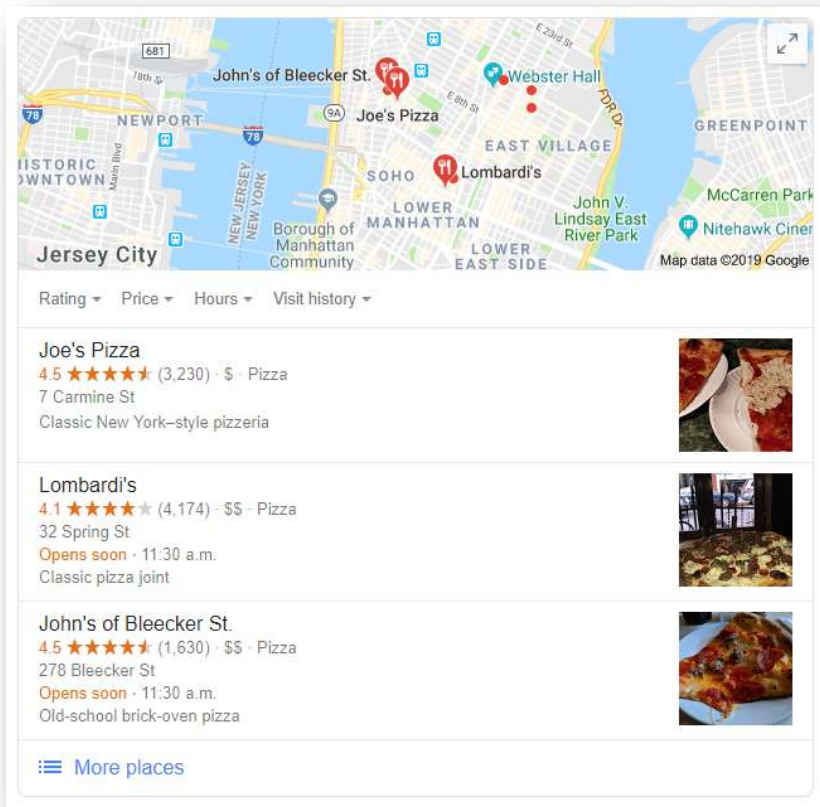
Once you claim and verify yourself as the owner of the business, you can respond to any reviews on your listing.

Google My Business

<https://business.google.com/>

Google itself has a built-in review site for their local listings, which is tied to Google Maps. When you do any search, Google will first determine whether it's a general search or a search with local intent.

If it's local, they will present the searcher with Google Maps and a list of local businesses, with ratings, above any regular, "organic" search:



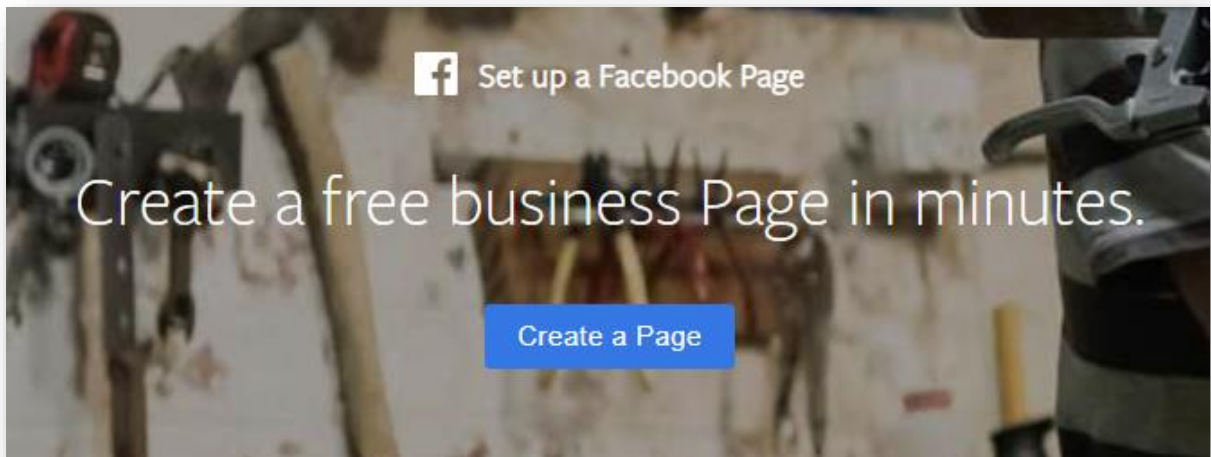
This special screen is known as the Local Pack, and usually features the map and 3 businesses in close proximity to the search or the searcher's intent.

To respond to reviews, sign up for Google My Business, claim your business, and fill in as much detailed information as possible about your business. Doing so will help you with accuracy and optimization in Google search.

Once your business is verified (usually through a PIN code mailed to your business address), you can respond to reviews through your account.

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/business/pages/set-up>



Every business should have a Facebook Page as well. While there likely won't be "official" reviews about your business on Facebook without you knowing it (as the verified business needs to set up their business page before reviews can be published), you should have a Facebook presence for the obvious reason that nearly everybody is on Facebook!

When you set up your own business page, you can promote it to others and encourage reviews. When people search for businesses on Facebook, your business will more likely be showcased if your friends have mentioned you and tagged your page.

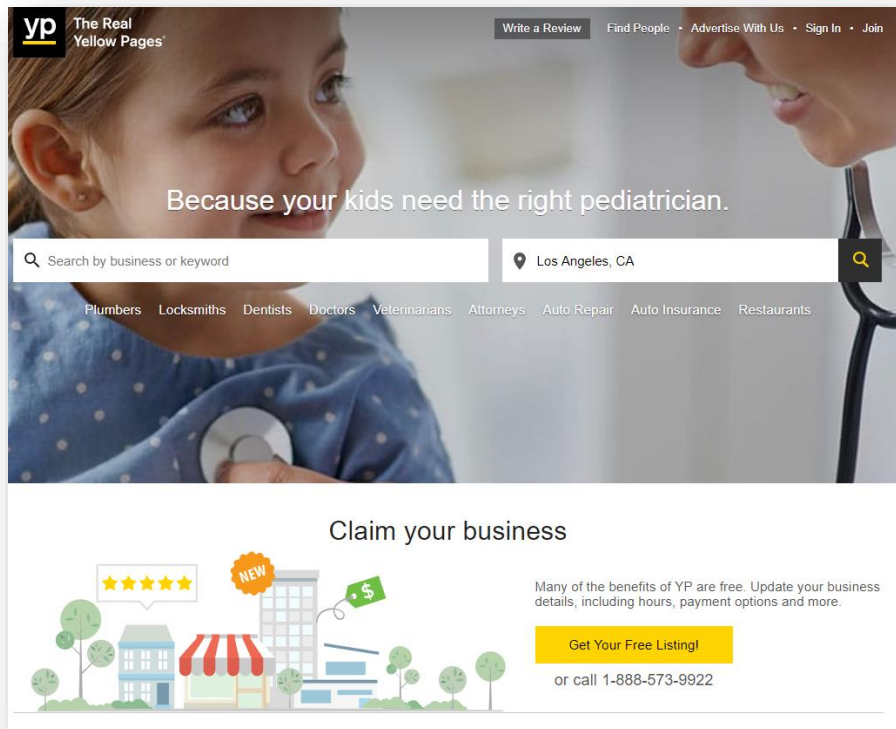
Your page rating (out of 5) is calculated by reviews around Facebook, reviews published on your page by others, Likes and recommendations.

Facebook is one of the few websites where a business owner can actually HIDE reviews and recommendations (good and bad).

Yellowpages

<http://www.yellowpages.com/>

Yup, Yellowpages still exists, only now in online form. Similar to Yelp, customers can write reviews for businesses, and businesses themselves can claim or create their listing.



Foursquare

<http://business.foursquare.com/>

Not as popular as Yelp, it still has a huge treasure-trove of business information, reviews and 50 million users. To claim your business, go straight to the business URL to find your listing, not from the homepage.

Better Business Bureau

<https://www.bbb.org/>

To keep itself relevant, the BBB quickly organized itself into a premier consumer review site, with the ability to still file complaints (and businesses to resolve complaints).

You don't have to be accredited to be in the BBB directory, and can still claim your business, as well as respond to complaints or reviews.

Other important sources for reviews:

- **Superpages** - <http://www.superpages.com/>
- **Manta** - <https://www.manta.com/>
- **Bing Places** - <https://www.bingplaces.com/>
- **Thumbtack** - <https://www.thumbtack.com/>

Here's also a sampling of important review sites based on business niche:

Hospitality, Restaurants

- TripAdvisor.com
- Zomato.com
- Zagat.com

Home Contractors

- AngiesList.com
- Houzz.com
- HomeAdvisor.com
- Trustedpros.com

Health Care Professionals

- Wellness.com
- Healthline.com
- WebMD.com

Don't forget your own hometown or area, which may have its own popular ratings website or source!

How to Start Your Review Strategy?

To find out which review sites are most important for your business, it is necessary to find out where most of your existing customers come from. How do new customers find you? They rarely (if ever) just show up out of the blue asking for your services (unless you are a restaurant, and even then, many would have checked reviews first to see if your food is good.)

While some may find you through that tiny ad you put in the local community newspaper, the vast majority will have found you through an online search or review site ... often through reading a review after an online search!

Step 1: Claim Your Business Listings

The first thing to do is do a search for your business name in Google. You may be surprised to already find mentions of your business in Yelp or other review sites.

List in a spreadsheet all the websites that mention your business. Then claim and verify them as your own, and clean the listings up. Often the address or phone number may be wrong or missing. Add extra information necessary, especially for Google My Business.

Step 2: Search for Other Popular Sites

In the future, some of your customers may have their own preferred review site. Do a search and list a dozen or so other websites where you will list or claim your business. Think of your business niche and the specialty review sites in your niche. Are there any popular local websites where you can add your business?

You can also do a search for your competitors and see if they are listed in review sites. Chances are that as you grow, you will appear there as well.

Step 3: Monitor and Respond to All Reviews

Now that you know where most of your potential and current customers spend their time online, monitor and respond to new reviews, even if it's just a "Thank you!"

If you feel overwhelmed by all the review sites you have to monitor, just focus on the largest 3 in your business. Use the 80/20 rule ... 80% of your business will come from 20% of your sites. Google My Business, Facebook and Yelp should be the big ones, though don't discount a niche player if they play a large factor in traffic to your business.

Dealing with Positive Reviews

Positive reviews are gold, and it's what potential customers are looking for. You don't have to be too detailed, but don't make it look like you are automating them with spam comments, either.

Simply say thank you, but be specific. If the reviewer's name is Jim, say "Thank you, Jim, for those kind words!"

You can also go further and market yourself a bit. If you are a restaurant with a secret sauce, let them know that if you come by again that you'll get a free container of that sauce. Or, if they come again and bring a friend, they will get 50% off their bill!

Dealing with Negative Reviews

While positive reviews are of course fantastic, you can even turn negative reviews into something positive. How you respond to a negative review is the exact same as how you respond to a positive review. In both cases, potential future customers, clients and leads will read how you react.

Keep things simple, apologize, sympathize, and try to solve it.

The first step is acknowledging that a problem occurred. Apologize and sympathize.

Next, apologize but with a bit of a marketing angle. Something like *“we are normally known for our exceptional attention to detail, and we regret that this didn’t happen in this case.”*

Finally, end it by offering to talk offline, and give them your personal name and your phone number to try and resolve the issue.

However, don’t mention your business name. You don’t want the potential of this actual negative review showing up in the search results when somebody types in your name or business!

No matter what, though, always respond to negative reviews. Future customers looking you up will see that you took the time, care and energy to answer it.

Fake Negative Reviews

It’s an unfortunate fact that competitors, feeling threatened by your success, may attempt to sabotage your reputation by creating fake reviews. If this happens, there are a few things you can do:

Respond and call them out – This is a bit risky and could backfire, but you can state that you don’t recall them coming to your place of business, but that you do know that they are your competitor. This will make them look petty. However, make sure you have iron-clad proof that it was them!

Try to get the fake reviews removed – There is a way to report the review, and you can explain that it is your competitor. Detail the reason why you think it’s fake. The review site may or may not remove it.

Bury the review – You can encourage your customers to leave great reviews to bury the negative one.

How to Encourage Reviews

There are many ways to encourage your customers to leave reviews:

- Ask for a review in a follow-up email (after you know they are satisfied!)
- Create business cards with review instructions on the back
- Place a review button on your website ... and list the reviews once you have some
- Ask on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, etc
- Give instructional flyers to satisfied customers as well

You can also incentivize reviews, such as offering a discount on future services for a review, receiving a referral bonus, entering your name in a weekly draw, or offering a free drink or appetizer if you are a restaurant.

How and when will you ask for customer reviews? If you are a limo company, asking right after the ride is best, because it is fresh in their minds.

If you are a home improvement company, it's best to ask a week or so after everything is complete. That way, your customer will have had time to enjoy their new addition or renovation, and you can phone or email them for a follow-up. During that time, you can find out if they love everything or if there are some problems. If there are problems, you want to get those fixed before asking for an online review!

Having reviews and feedback is crucial for every business. Monitor and respond to every online review, and encourage and make it easy for people to leave reviews. This will grow your business, make you much more visible online, and leave you with much more comfortable control over your reputation.