

Get Great Reviews, not just Good Ratings

A guide and outline for more effective reviews and testimonials. Better understand 'social proof,' what takes a good review to great, and how to better ask for more specific reviews or testimonials from your customers. Improve your brand's storytelling abilities through its customers' experiences.

About This Guide

This guide is designed for small business owners, tourism operators, and hospitality professionals who want to stand out in an increasingly competitive marketplace by leveraging the power of customer reviews. Whether you manage a boutique inn, run guided tours, operate a family-owned restaurant, or offer niche travel experiences, this guide will help you transform generic ratings into impactful, story-driven testimonials.

By focusing on actionable steps and simple, effective strategies, this guide is especially valuable for business owners without formal marketing training. You'll learn how to ask for and showcase reviews that do more than just list stars—they'll tell compelling stories that attract new customers, build trust, and showcase what makes your business unforgettable.

Your potential customers are looking for businesses they can trust, and great reviews act as a powerful form of social proof. This guide will show you why those reviews matter and how you can consistently collect the kind of feedback that drives bookings, sales, and lasting customer loyalty.

Disclaimer: This guide is for informational purposes only and does not guarantee compliance, accuracy, or specific results. Please check with your email marketing platform provider for further assistance and guidance on the most up-to-date information to ensure you follow best practices.

1. Understanding Social Proof

What is Social Proof?

Social proof is the idea that people are more likely to trust and follow the actions or opinions of others, especially when they are uncertain about a decision. It's a basic principle of human psychology: we look to others for guidance on what's trustworthy, popular, or valuable.

In marketing, social proof works because potential customers trust the experiences of others more than advertising. Seeing positive reviews, testimonials, or photos of people enjoying a product or service makes customers feel more confident in choosing your business. It's like a digital form of "word of mouth," but with a much wider reach.

Example:

1. If a hotel has hundreds of 5-star reviews saying the staff is helpful and the rooms are clean, you're more likely to book it.
2. If you see photos of happy families on a tour you're considering, you'll imagine yourself having the same great experience.
3. Social proof taps into a basic human behavior: if others like it, it must be good. This trust drives sales, builds credibility, and helps your business stand out in a crowded market.

2. What Makes a Good Review Great

Characteristics of a Great Review

1. Has Specific details:
 - a. e.g., “The guide shared fascinating stories about the local wildlife.”
2. Focuses on experience and emotion, and demonstrates emotional impact:
 - a. e.g., “This trip was unforgettable; my kids are still talking about it!”
3. Mentions standout features:
 - a. e.g., “The quick response time made all the difference!”
4. Outlines a problem and how the product or service solved it
 - a. e.g., I have very sensitive skin. All other products I used only made it worse, but this was a game-changer for me!”
5. Addresses common hesitations or doubt head-on:
 - a. e.g., “I’ve tried products like this before and didn’t believe the results others bragged about, but it worked great for me!”
6. Mentions target demographic:
 - a. e.g., “As someone who has struggled with x...”

Example: Good vs. Great Review

Good: "It was nice."

Great: "The sunset cruise was breathtaking, and the captain's storytelling made it even better."

3. Preparing to Ask for Reviews

Timing Is Key:

1. Suggest ideal moments (e.g., at the end of a tour, after a meal, or upon checkout).
2. Use prompts like, “We’d love to hear about your experience while it’s still fresh in your mind.”

Create Opportunities:

1. Leave feedback cards or QR codes in easy-to-spot areas.
2. Send follow-up emails thanking customers for their visit and inviting reviews.

4. How to Ask for Reviews Effectively

Personalized Requests:

1. Example email: “Hi [Name], we’re thrilled you stayed with us! If you have a moment, we’d love to hear about your favorite part of the experience.”
2. Encourage Storytelling:

Use questions like:

3. “What made your visit special?”
4. “Was there someone on our team who stood out?”
5. “How did we make your experience easy/enjoyable?”

Offer Prompts:

6. “Did you enjoy [specific feature]? We’d love to hear how it improved your stay.”
7. Avoid Overwhelming Them:
8. Keep requests short and focus on one key takeaway (e.g., “Can you tell us about your favorite part of the hike?”).

5. Improving Brand Storytelling with Customer Experiences

Spotlight Great Reviews:

1. Share examples in your marketing materials or social media.
2. Add visuals (e.g., photo of a customer enjoying the product or service).

Encourage Emotional Connections:

3. Use testimonials to highlight how you solve problems or fulfill dreams (e.g., “I’ve always wanted to see the Northern Lights, and your tour made it happen!”).

Build Narratives:

4. Collect snippets from reviews to create before-and-after stories (e.g., “Before the tour, I didn’t know anything about the local ecosystem. Now, I can’t wait to share what I learned!”).

6. Tips for Making It Easy for Customers

Provide Clear Instructions:

1. Explain how and where to leave reviews (e.g., “Click here to share your thoughts on Google.”).

Simplify the Process:

2. Use pre-filled review forms or templates to guide their responses (e.g., “Tell us about your experience in three sentences!”).

Be Accessible:

3. Offer multiple platforms for reviews (Google, TripAdvisor, Yelp, etc.).
4. Ensure feedback options are mobile-friendly.

7. Following Up on Reviews

Express Gratitude:

1. Always thank reviewers for their time (e.g., “Thank you for sharing your experience. Your feedback helps us grow!”).

Engage with Feedback:

2. Respond to all reviews (both positive and negative) promptly and professionally.
3. Use responses to build rapport (e.g., “We’re so glad you enjoyed the guided tour, and we’ll pass your compliments to [specific staff member]!”).

Learn from Criticism:

4. Share examples of how feedback led to improvements.

8. Examples and Templates

Create Email Templates:

1. Post-visit: “Hi [Name], we’re so glad you visited! We’d love to hear about your experience. Please share your thoughts [link to review site].”
2. After a positive interaction: “It was great to host you today! If you enjoyed your visit, please let others know [link].”

Provide Real Review Examples:

3. “The best part of my trip was [specific detail]. I’ll never forget how [staff/experience] made me feel.”
4. “The [specific feature] was above and beyond. Here’s why...”

9. Avoid These Common Mistakes

Don't Fake It:

1. Explain why authenticity is critical (e.g., fake reviews can damage credibility).

Avoid Generic Requests:

2. Don't say: "Leave us a review if you have time."
3. Instead, say: "We'd love to know what you think about [specific aspect of experience]."

Don't Ignore Bad Reviews:

4. Outline steps for handling negative feedback constructively.

10. Measuring Success

Track Key Metrics:

1. Volume of reviews.
2. Ratings (and their trends over time).
3. Specific mentions of improvements or standout features.

Analyze Impact:

4. Use reviews to inform marketing strategies.
5. Identify recurring themes or strengths to highlight in branding.

11. Bonus Tips

Incentivize Reviews Ethically:

1. Provide small thank-yous (e.g., discount for a future visit) without directly tying them to positive feedback.

Leverage Visual Content:

2. Encourage customers to share photos or videos alongside their reviews.

Create a Review Culture:

3. Train staff to recognize opportunities to request feedback naturally.

Use an Appropriate Length

4. For social media posts, landing pages, pop-ups, and even emails, shorter testimonials tend to be more effective. General rule: 50 words or fewer. If you have longer testimonials, highlight the most essential keywords in bold to guide the reader's attention.

Editing Reviews

5. Do not make edits to the content of the review, except where absolutely necessary, such as spelling and grammar.

11. Bonus Tips

Source Attribution

1. The best testimonials will include the reviewer/author/writer's:
 - a. Name
 - i. Can be abbreviated for anonymity. Eg. "Jane S." instead of "Jane Smith" is acceptable if required
 - b. *Title*
 - i. *not required in B2C, but highly recommended in B2B use-cases.* Eg "VP Sales"
 - ii. Make sure the title makes sense, especially to other prospective customers who may be considering this testimonial.
 - c. *Company/organization name*
 - i. *not required in B2C, but highly recommended in B2B use-cases.* Eg. "ABC Supplies Inc."
 - ii. Make sure the title makes sense, especially to other prospective customers who may be considering this testimonial.
 - d. Image
 - i. A *real* photograph of the customer, take it from their IG, LinkedIn, Google review profile, etc.
 - ii. Do not use a photo if you do not have permission from the reviewer.
 - e. Relationship
 - i. specify if they are a past or current customer, and the type of service or specific product they used. It provides greater context when you can be more specific in your relationship to the reviewer.

Congratulations!

You've completed this guide. By following this checklist, your guide will empower even novice tourism operators to solicit and leverage impactful, high-quality reviews that boost trust, attract new customers, and elevate their brand.

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