The best defense is a good offense. Having positive reviews is the best way to defend against negative reviews. Studies actually show that perfect ratings seem contrived, as 82% of consumers actually look for less-than-stellar feedback.

## Why Are Reviews So Important?

Online buyers are skeptical, but word of mouth and opinions from other people are among the top purchase influencers.

Studies show that:
- 84% of people give online reviews the same consideration as a personal recommendation.
- 90% of consumers form an opinion about a business based on less than ten reviews.
- 74% of people trust a business more based on positive reviews.

When conducting an online search, business or product reviews typically show up directly in search results, along with the star ratings.

For many businesses, the business name + reviews is a common search term showing that people are actively looking for reviews.
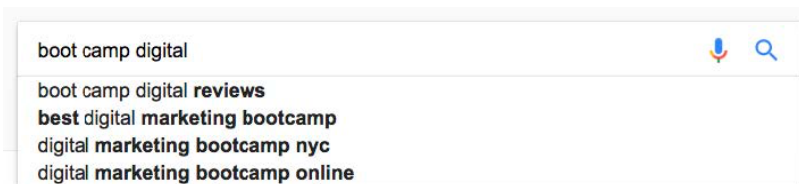
4-Step Positive Review Strategy:

1. **Identify Review Site to Target**
   Start by identifying the sites where you want to get reviews. For most businesses, this starts with:
   - Google
   - Facebook
   - Yelp
   - GlassDoor
   - Better Business Bureau
   - LinkedIn (personal)
   - Industry sites: Trip Advisor, RateMyProfessor, etc.

Start with the most important site for you to target first. Once you have built up a positive reputation on one site, you can expand to the next.

If you aren't sure where to start, consider:
- Which review sites already show up in Google search results for your business?
- Which review sites show up in search results for your competitors?
- What industry sites do people visit?
- Which sites appear in searches for the category (e.g. Hotel in Amsterdam)?

2. Determine Ideal Number of Reviews
Look at how your competitors are displayed on the sites as well as the characteristics of the review site itself.
- How many reviews do competitors have?
- How many reviews does it take to display a star rating?
- What is realistic for the size of your business?

PRO TIP: *Google suggests you have at least 10 reviews for each location.*

3. Initial Ask of Reviews
Start by asking people who you know have had a good experience with you and are likely to give a good review. You'll want to have a base of positive reviews to start with.
- Asking them personally will get a better response than mass messages.
- Set a clear goal for yourself.
    - Ask 3 people per week.
- Build over time – some sites will think it is unnatural if you suddenly go from 0 to 40 reviews in one week and could suspend your account.
- Tell them EXACTLY where to write the review and how.
- Make your request personal and authentic.

CAUTION: *Avoid the temptation to leave fake reviews.* Most networks can spot these, and they won't be published or may even lead to your account being blocked. Some businesses have also landed in legal trouble for leaving fake reviews. Ask happy customers – this is a better strategy in the long run.

PRO TIP: *Keywords in your reviews can help improve the visibility of your business. Try this to elicit a more descriptive review that includes your main keywords: Instead of "Please leave me a review," try "Thank you for trying our service. We love that your family had a great time. Could you click here and share your favorite thing about your experience?"*

4. **Operationalize Reviews**

   Build a strategy for your business to ask for reviews regularly. Companies with the best reviews often have a specific strategy to ask customers to leave them. There are four steps to operationalizing your review process:

   a) Touchpoint analysis - What are all the touchpoints you have with a customer when they could leave a review?

   b) Optimal experience - Determine when in your experience with a customer is the ideal time to ask. You may have more than one. Is it when they receive your product in the mail? A few weeks later? After they attend your class?

   c) Segment the ask – Consider segmenting the ask so that you only ask people you KNOW have had a good experience.

      For example, you can send an email after purchase with two links – if they had a good experience or have ways for you to improve. If they have ways to improve, send them to a form on your website. If they had a great experience, send them to a review site.

   d) Get Alerts – Get alerts for when reviews are left for the most common websites. This will allow you to know if your ask strategy is working and if there are any reviews that you should pay attention to.

   WARNING: Most websites have terms of service that prohibit businesses from incentivizing reviews. This means that you typically can't offer a discount or other incentive for a positive review.
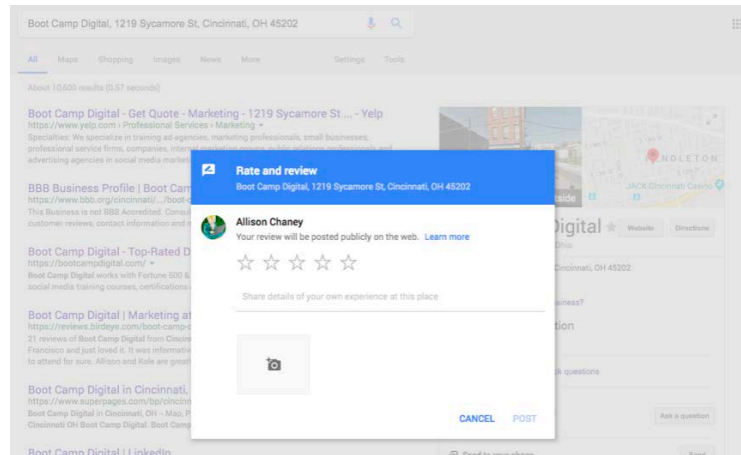
PRO TIP: *Get more Google Reviews by creating a link for users to leave a review easily in one click. Go to your Google My Business account, set up a short name for your listing, and the one-click review link will be available in the "Get more reviews" card on your dashboard.*

Avoiding Bad Reviews

The best approach, where possible, is to avoid bad reviews altogether. The following steps will help you to avoid them. Many people leave bad reviews simply because they don't feel heard or validated by the company. You can't win everyone over, but you can reduce bad reviews when you have the opportunity:

1. **Open Up Communication Channels**
   Most people don't leave a bad review unless they have contacted the company. If the company is difficult to reach or not responsive, they resort to a review. Allow people to contact you in as many different ways as possible.

2. **Respond Quickly**
   Even if you don't have an answer right away, respond immediately (personally – not through an automated message) so people know you are looking into it. Giving people time to sit and stew feeling ignored is a good way to get poor reviews.

3. **Be Nice + Build Connections**
   Customer service studies show that we are less likely to complain about people we like. Friendly doctors are sued less often. One of the keys to people liking you is to build rapport based on common interests. Apple has great customer service and their phone support is trained to find natural connection points (I see you are from Ohio – I used to live there!) to build a connection in the first few minutes of the call.

4. **Empower Employees**
   Mistakes will be made – empower your employees to make things right to minimize the probability that a customer leaves a bad review. Sometimes small gestures can go a long way.

5. **Set Expectations + Communicate with Customers**
   Most people are reasonable (not all). If you are having an issue that you think could result in a negative experience set expectations and acknowledge it.

Imagine if you are seated at a restaurant and the server immediately informs you, "We had a big group just come in, so I think the kitchen may be slow, and it could take about 30 minutes for your order to be ready. I'll be sure to keep your drinks topped off while you wait." This simple warning changes the experience from bad – waiting too long for food – to good – attentive drink refills.

Steps for Dealing with Negative Reviews

No matter how great your business is, negative reviews will probably happen. Here are some tips to deal with them.

1. **Keep it professional –** While it's tempting to defend yourself or recount the details of the customer's behavior during the experience in question, it's rarely a good look. No one ever wins when debating online. Keep your answer courteous and polite.

2. **Don't get defensive** – While you may be right, defending your business at all costs is rarely a good strategy. Step back, try to see the situation from the customer's point of view, and cool off before responding.

3. **Respond quickly** – Even if you are just looking into it, the longer people wait for an answer, the more upset they get. While you may be working on a solution or investigating, let the user know – otherwise, they may feel ignored and continue to escalate.

4. **Respond Personally** – Canned responses can be infuriating and make the commenter or reviewer feel ignored. Make your response personal so that it is clear that you actually care.

5. **Directly Address the Issue** – Don't dance around the issue or use generalities. Address it as directly and specifically as possible. This shows that you care.

6. **Empathize without admitting fault –** Show empathy for the other person's situation. You'd be Frustrated, too if you waited on hold for two hours, got the wrong order, found an error with a consultant report or fill in the blank. You can empathize without admitting fault, so the person feels heard.

7. **Always offer a public response in the same channel –** When you can, offer a public response in the same channel. This allows OTHER PEOPLE to see that you care and are responsive. Even if you can't win over the reviewer, your customers will see the review and observe how you handled it. If you get a comment on Facebook, respond on Facebook – don't try to push the dialogue to your website.

8. **Do your best to take it off-line –** Offer to call the reviewer, ask the reviewer to call you, or suggest they stop in to talk to a manager. You don't want endless back and forth adding drama. Words on a screen are subject to dramatic interpretation. Real people having a real conversation resolve problems. Plus, by publicly offering to connect with the reviewer you convey that you're interested in hearing about their experience and you're making yourself available to them. If they choose not to engage further with you, that's on them.

9. Have a few templates ready to deploy – You can't please everyone. Say it aloud with me. "I can't please everyone." There will be reviews that are worthy of an investigation and those that aren't. Start with these three responses and customize them as necessary.

- "Thank you for letting us know about your experience. We'll look into it."
- "Thank you for sharing thoughts about your visit. We strive to satisfy our customers. Please call us or come in to speak with a manager so we can learn more."
- "Thank you for your thoughtful feedback. Sometimes criticism of our services is hard to hear, but it often leads to positive change. We appreciate your willingness to give us that opportunity to improve."

10. When you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all – Your mom wasn't wrong. When you've attempted to reach out to the reviewer, yet they continue to berate you online, don't engage. Trust us on this – going toe-to-toe in the virtual world with a reviewer who is intent on making you look bad is NEVER a good idea. You'll come off as defensive, immature, and easily provoked, even if none of those characterizations are accurate. A virtual argument will speak louder than the most glowing of reviews. Disengage totally.

11. Know if Review Sites Can be Updated – Some sites can be updated after the initial review. If you have a bad review but you make it right, consider asking the person to update their review if you are able to turn things around.

Measuring Reviews

Evaluating your KPIs can help to determine if you're online review strategy is effective in building a positive brand reputation. Here are a few KPIs to start with:

1. Volume and Quality
   a. Check the amount of reviews that you are receiving.
   b. Are there keywords in the reviews?

2. Response Rate
   a. The rate at which people respond to review requests.
   b. The rate you respond to reviews.

3. Positivity Rate
   a. Compare the amount and quality of positive reviews to any negative reviews.