

There are many ways these days to glean reviews for a business or product before you buy. Restaurants are no exception. The big players for restaurant reviews are Google and Yelp. But what if one of your patrons decides to unleash an attack on your restaurant? How should you respond? What can you do to repair the damage?

Many of our restaurant clients tend to have a love hate relationship with services like Yelp and Google reviews. There are even those out there who believe that Yelp will extort money from restaurant owners in the form of higher level memberships before removing a bad review. In fact, according to Richard Torrenzano, CEO of The Torrenzano Group, Yelp has developed and uses algorithms that punish members who provide only negative reviews by moving their review further down the list or by hiding them completely.

So what should you do if you are attacked on one of these review sites? How can you respond in a way that doesn't create more bad press for you or simply make it worse?

First of all, try to approach the bad review as an opportunity. You may learn something about your restaurant that you can improve that will over time be a benefit to you. Also, the bad review can give you an opportunity to turn a negative review into a compelling story that can generate positive press for your restaurant. So begin by allowing your emotions to ebb before you respond. If you allow a little bit of time to pass before you reply then you are less likely to do so emotionally and perhaps make things worse. So, no name calling, no threats and no arguing.

Before you plan your response to the criticism, keep a few things in mind. Remember that the reviewers are your paying customers. Remind yourself that they are also human beings and like all of us can have unpredictable feelings and sensitivities. It is also often true that those who might actually take the time and effort to write a review are often opinionated and vocal people. Plan your response by empathizing with their feelings and their experiences.

One mistake that many businesses make is fashioning a response that comes across as highly impersonal or corporate. People like to do business with people, not faceless nameless corporate entities. People will tend to side with the individual over the corporate image so make sure that you meet them with your response as another human being, empathetic to their feelings. Another mistake some restaurant owners make is to publicly promise coupons or

freebies to the complaining reviewer. If you want to offer something to them along these lines, it is best if you do it via a private message to them. If possible, you should also assure your reviewer that he or she has in some way helped you improve your business or contributed to positive changes in the way that you will run your operation.

Sadly, when attacked, you do need to respond. Leaving no reply at all still leaves you mired in the negativity. Just remember that when you respond you are getting the chance to be in control of the issue and the conversation. Your response should be carefully calculated.

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