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HOW TO DEAL WITH A NEGATIVE CUSTOMER REVIEW

By Todd Collins

It happens to every restaurant owner at some point. You wake up and get a notification, or one of your employees tell you about that customer from last night that left you a one star review on Facebook, Yelp, Google or another review site. We have all been here, you start running through your mind. "I hate Yelp, or this is just one of those customers, or why wouldn't they tell me there was an issue while they were here?"

At this point you are pondering on the wrong issue. The real issue at hand is how do you respond? How do you deal with this customer that has had a less than satisfactory experience? Let's start with the review itself. Read it thoroughly and try to remove any emotional heart-strings while doing so. Try to see it from the customer's perspective. I know that this may be difficult, however we have all had bad service in one way or another at some point. Once you have read and reread the review, look for evidence of fake or malicious sentiment. Has the customer ever reviewed any business before? If there is evidence of fake or malicious sentiment you need to move your attention to flagging the review. Only flag the review within the review page in question if you do in fact see this type of sentiment.

If you and your staff did fail the customer, then we need to move quickly to respond publicly to this customer. First apologize to the customer. A future customer will only read maybe the first sentence of your response so being apologetic at the beginning is important. Follow your apology with the importance of customer feedback to your restaurant. Give the customer a contact, and information to reach you toward the end of the response. Do not, under any circumstances, offer the customer a FREE meal or discount upon return. This will open you up to not only more negative feedback but is slighting your positive review customers.



Most review pages give you the ability to privately message a customer who left a review. It is important for you to understand that a private message can be screen-shotted even if deleted so be careful of what you say in these messages. Odds are you may never hear from this customer again. You did your due diligence, and followed procedure in your process. The result here is that you reached out, and tried to resolve the issue the customer had. The great benefit to following this procedure is a future customer will see you cared enough to take the time to respond, and resolve the issue. This will not only show the reviewer, but future reviewers you are paying attention to what is happening in your restaurant.

No one likes getting a negative review, however if you do not have a process in place to generate positive reviews or address negative reviews then nothing will change. The world is changing, and the opinions of others are always more believed than what you say about yourself ... this definitely holds true in the online world. You do have the ability to state your side so you should take advantage of that opportunity. Your customers will appreciate it, and it will show your future customers that you care about what is being said about you online.

Today is the day to change your process. Accept it and you will see the advantages of tackling negative reviews head on. ■

[Todd Collins will be authoring a *Better Branding* column each month and can be reached at todd@beveragejournalinc.com]

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