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HOW TO WIN DIGITAL AND REAL-WORLD TRAFFIC WITH LOCAL REVIEWS

By Jay Baer & Daniel Lemin of Convince & Convert

Introduction

Marketing a local business today is harder than ever for two primary reasons: trust and context.

The nature of consumer trust now overwhelmingly favors peer-to-peer feedback and content — especially online reviews. Studies show that consumers now trust information from other consumers more than any other source of information, including aunts, mothers, and friends.

Context has shifted too, as consumers aren't looking for information in the same places. Where a consumer once started their search for a local business with a question to a friend or family member, they can now turn to online reviews for that same information or, for example, to research the best dishes available in a restaurant. Consumers today have an insatiable appetite for information about local businesses.

To capitalize on the opportunity presented by these changes, marketers must position trustworthy content in the right context for the consumer to see it, remember it, and act on it. This creates a mandate for marketers to get good at this new reality, and fast.



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Shifting Sands of Consumer Behavior

Online ratings and reviews have disrupted the traditional local search and marketing funnel by introducing the complexity of peer-to-peer feedback platforms. This disintermediates the usual relationship a brand has with consumers and creates some frustration for marketers. There's no need to "burn down" your marketing house. But you should understand how customers are using location reviews and establish processes for managing, monitoring, and responding to them quickly.



THREE LEVELS OF REVIEWS



Brand Reviews: **Impact Reputation**

Reviews of your company or brand displayed on your Facebook brand page, or on business reputation sites such as TrustPilot and Better Business Bureau (BBB).



Product Reviews: **Impact Demand**

Reviews of a specific product for sale on your own website, or on an ecommerce site such as Amazon.com.



Location Reviews: **Impact Behavior**

Reviews of a specific business location displayed in search results, mapping apps, or local search sites like Yelp. For businesses seeking to drive foot traffic, location reviews are the most important level of online reviews.

Consumers Have Embraced Local Reviews Rapidly

Shocking though it might seem, 90% of consumers say their buying decisions are influenced by reviews. And 86% say negative reviews influence their purchase choices.¹

Has reading POSITIVE/NEGATIVE reviews influenced your buying decisions?



As the diversity of rating and review content grows online, so does the consumer's appetite to consume vast amounts of it. Today, consumers seek out 10.4 pieces of information, on average, before making a local purchase. That number doubled from the year before, and reflects the demand for data and information about your local brand experience.² A consumer's desire to research purchase decisions is not endless, however, and the consequence is that they have come to rely on reviews to battle decision fatigue. It creates a signal that influences whether a buyer considers your local business, or not.

That purchase journey itself is also far less linear today than it has traditionally been, which further complicates marketers' lives. But the strategies and tactics you have studied and built capabilities around for the last decade are still valid and useful.

In fact, search marketing — a discipline with a long history — still plays a central role in the consumer's local purchase decisions. For most consumers, the decision journey for a local purchase involves multiple information sources and devices, but search outperforms any other information source by more than double.³ With consumers increasingly relying on reviews to make purchase decisions and search engines devoting significant search result real estate to displaying them, reviews have to be considered a key component of search marketing today. This has two key impacts on your brand, your marketing efforts and your success with local search and reviews.

¹ "Customer Service and Business Results," Dimensional Research. 2013.

² "The Zero Moment of Truth Study," Think With Google. 2011.

³ "Survey: Under 40 Percent Start A Local Search With A Search Engine," Search Engine Land. 2016.

IMPACT ONE:

Search and map results on mobile and desktop now include star ratings of your locations. These star ratings are crucial to the search user experience. They need to be represented, and should accurately reflect the true consumer perception of your business. If you aren't "starring in search," you're missing a major opportunity to position your locations and your brand. If your star ratings are not accurate, you could be losing out on significant foot traffic.

**IMPACT TWO:**

When consumers leave search results to dig in a little deeper on your business they'll often end up on a local listings site like Yelp. There, their attention will shift from the star rating to the written reviews of your locations. What are consumers saying about you? Are you taking advantage of every opportunity to engage with consumers?

Time is most certainly of the essence when it comes to local purchase decisions, with 63% of decisions reached in less than an hour.⁴ That means local decisions are generally made quickly, without another intercept opportunity. If you lose the customer at this juncture, they're not likely to stop and come back to their decision later on. The time frame for consumers making decisions today has been compressed.

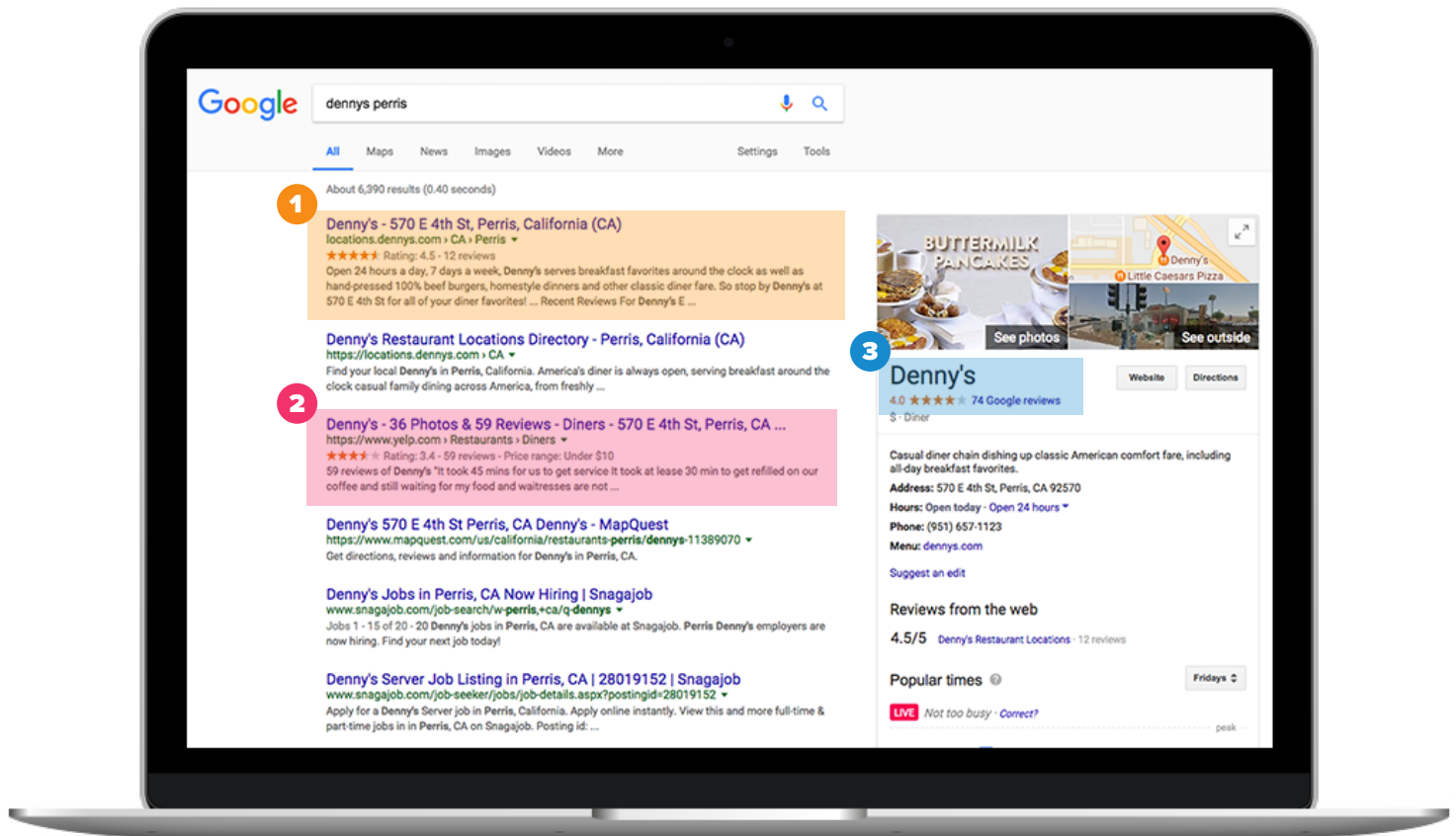
Put another way, your battle for prospective customers will be won or lost in search and with online reviews. If you lose that opportunity to bring them to your doorstep, you won't have a chance to surprise, delight, or disrupt them with your products and services.

⁴ ["Survey: Under 40 Percent Start A Local Search With A Search Engine."](#) Search Engine Land. 2016.

Search Engines are Changing the Rules

Search platforms — especially Google — have not overlooked the opportunity to deliver a more relevant and useful experience to their users. They've fully embraced ratings and reviews. Most local searches on Google today serve up no fewer than three permutations of online star ratings:

- 1 **Reviews from the merchant's own website,** reflected as a star rating on the search rich snippet or the Knowledge Card.
- 2 **Reviews from third-party websites,** like Yelp, displayed as rich search snippets often among the top three search positions and the Knowledge Card.
- 3 **Google My Business ratings,** displayed in the Knowledge Card, which are derived from your Google reviews.



How to Maximize Local Listings Presence with Online Reviews

Google puts a lot of emphasis on ratings and reviews content because consumers trust reviews to help them make better decisions quickly. To take full advantage of the new ratings and reviews paradigm on Google, it is necessary to realign your marketing efforts around three new key ratings and reviews concepts. Addressing these key areas will help you master the rating and review presence on Google that is key to getting more foot traffic.

First-Party Reviews:

Your first priority for maximizing a ratings and reviews presence on Google starts with something pretty simple: your own website. In late 2016, Google amended its treatment of Schema.org markup for online reviews and clarified what it considers a relevant review on your website.⁵ In order for reviews from *your own* website to display in organic search, current rules require the reviews to be “first-party:” that is to say, they cannot be pulled in from a site like Yelp via a widget. Some platforms tempt marketers with the ability to surface only positive reviews, which creates an inaccurate snapshot of your brand and customer experience. This also violates the Google’s publisher guidelines. To make the most of this opportunity you’ll need to collect your own, first-party feedback, good and bad, and host those reviews directly on your website using a tool like Yext Reviews. This ensures that you get full credit for review content on your website so you can “star in search.”

Third-party Reviews:

Do any search for a local merchant on Google and you’ll immediately notice a trend — sites like Yelp and Facebook often rank in the top three results. Google loves these sites and gives them prominence in search due to their highly relevant fresh content, and as a business you want to maximize that opportunity. Freshness is actually a mutually beneficial organism, of sorts. Third-party review sites depend on freshness to remain relevant to Google’s algorithm, and Google depends on fresh content to keep its search results high quality. All of this requires — as you might have guessed — fresh content. Asking customers for feedback specifically on these third-party sites can help you build and sustain a positive online presence. That brings us to the third and final tip to maximizing local listings presence.

⁵ [“Google updates local reviews schema guidelines.”](#)
Search Engine Land. 2016.

#FireUpYourFans:

Think about the last time you reviewed a business. Was it a spontaneous decision? What was your state of mind when you wrote the review? Were you angry about a bad experience, or jubilant about an amazing display of service? This is the case for many online reviews. Not actively fostering feedback online puts you in a 50/50 gamble for every review you get. Either the customer was so angry they couldn't think of another outlet but to attack your business online, or they were so amazed they couldn't help but write effusively about it. In either case, a 50/50 bet isn't a marketing

strategy — it's a crapshoot. To build the most durable online presence for your business, you need to *#FireUpYourFans*. Make it easy for your customers to give you feedback in the right places, and ask regularly. People don't think to review you until they're asked. But when you do ask, guess what: 7 out of 10 people will leave a review for a business.⁶ Make it part of your marketing efforts. Doing so will help you sustain a presence on third-party review sites, protect your positions and reputation in Google search results, and build a whole lot of goodwill with your customers.

NEGATIVE REVIEWS?

No matter how well you run your business, you will inevitably receive negative reviews. It happens to the best of us. Responding to negative reviews allows you to resolve issues as they arise with the goal of winning those customers over and making your business run more smoothly. Businesses who respond to reviews are 68% more likely to raise their rating by a half-star in 6 months. It's also a clear signal to potential customers that you care about the customer experience.

Time is of the essence, and you want to ensure your response has maximum impact. Responding to reviews within 24 hours allows you to address issues while the customer's experience is still fresh.

Lastly, always remember to show appreciation regardless of sentiment. Telling customers how much you value their feedback can go a long way in minimizing the impact of negative reviews and signaling to potential customers how much you care.

⁶ ["Local Consumer Review Survey."](#) Brightlocal. 2016.



Yext Reviews is a comprehensive review management solution designed to generate authentic reviews directly from your customers, ensure your ratings across the PowerListings® Network are consistent and compelling, enhance customer relationships, and gain valuable insights that help you learn, improve, and win. Let Yext help you put the best version of your business on the map so you can star in search.

Generate powerful customer reviews.

These widgets, powered by Schema.org best practices, allow search engines to display those reviews directly in the organic SERP — boosting clickability and customer engagement.

Spam? No, ma'am.

Yext's Review Quarantine feature allows you to screen the reviews you generate for up to 7 days before they go live, and automatically flags inauthentic or inappropriate reviews for removal. This quarantine period also allows you to address authentic but negative feedback before it goes live.

See stars in the SERP.

Once you generate reviews from your customers, Yext's prebuilt Review Publishing widgets make it easy to add those reviews to your own website and location pages.

Strengthen your rating across the PowerListings Network.

In addition to generating your own reviews to leverage the organic SERP, use Yext to encourage customers to rate your business on Google, Facebook, Yelp, and other sites across the PowerListings® Network. Yext's proprietary Review Balancing algorithm dynamically chooses the most impactful site to direct customers to, ensuring an even distribution.



Yext puts business on the map. The Yext Knowledge Engine™ lets companies manage their digital knowledge in the cloud and sync it to over 100 services, including Apple Maps, Microsoft Bing, Facebook, Google Maps, Instagram, Siri and Yelp. Yext Listings, Pages, and Reviews help businesses around the globe facilitate face-to-face and digital interactions that boost brand awareness, drive foot traffic, and increase sales. Learn more about how we help put business on the map at yext.com.

Based in the heart of New York City, Yext has been recognized as one of America's fastest-growing companies by the Inc. 5000 (2015 & 2016), one of Forbes' Most Promising Companies (2014 & 2015) and one of Fortune's Best Places to Work (2014, 2015 & 2016).

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