

How to make online reviews work for you

This article delves into the reviewsphere, and in particular the review site Yelp, to build up a picture of who online reviewers are and what motivates them to write.

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“One of the worst evenings out in a while,” began S1nsand, a Trip Advisor reviewer in his one-star rating of The Blade Bone Inn near Reading, England. His scathing review provoked a 1,000-word response from the restaurant owner, who accused the reviewer of trying to get freebies. The whole episode went viral and unleashed a wave of international media attention.

At stake was more than the beef rib and mashed potatoes in question; it was about the power that online reviewers – a group of average consumers and virtual strangers with until now unknown agendas – have to make or break a business.

Reputation, of course, is everything, especially in an online world. Here, word of mouth spreads like wildfire; with just one click, a rant or rave reaches an audience of thousands or even millions. While it takes more than one review to launch a business to success or trash it to oblivion, the impact of customer reviews cannot be shrugged off as irrelevant.

This article delves into the reviewsphere, and in particular the review site, Yelp, which has over 47 million reviews and counting of almost every type of local business, from restaurants to plumbers, in a growing number of national markets around the world.

Based on our studies of this and other such platforms, we have begun to build up a picture of who online reviewers are and what motivates them to write – which may not always be for

the pure joy of belonging to and giving back to the community.

Armed with a better understanding of how the reviewsphere works, businesses will be in a much better position not only to engage with these sites, but to reap the benefits of what is undoubtedly a growing global phenomenon that is here to stay.

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