

Should you solicit online reviews?

There's no doubt that online reviews are influential. There are specialized review sites like Trip Advisor and then there's the seemingly all-purpose Yelp. I admit I read reviews and have been swayed about staying at a hotel or eating a restaurant because of what other people say, and that is the point.

As a business, should part of your marketing efforts be to solicit reviews?

Let's start with the fact that reviews will happen whether you solicit them or not. Sadly, because of our passive-aggressive culture, it's become more likely that an unsatisfied customer will take to social media to complain about your service. Which is to say, that if you give bad service, you will most likely get negative reviews.

However, negative reviews are always balanced out by positive reviews. If, as a consumer, you are researching anything, you will read both the good and the bad reviews. Most people will be able to identify disgruntled employees or nit-picky reviewers. If most of the reviews are positive, you will discount the few reviews that are negative. Likewise, if most of the reviews are negative, you will discount the reviews that are positive. The lesson here is that genuine, positive reviews are important.

What generates positive reviews? Good service or product! As a business, you will need to focus most of your energy on providing positive experiences for your customers. If you don't, whether you solicit them or not, you will get negative reviews.

There is a difference between feedback and reviews

I recently had my hair cut at a salon I have gone to for a couple of years. The salon actively pursues online engagement. After my appointment, I got an email from the salon asking to provide feedback. The “feedback” was actually a link to give an online review. I was in a quandary. I had a bad experience this time: the receptionist was unhelpful and confused; I was made to wait 30 minutes; and the water was cool (on a very cold day) when they washed my hair. My stylist tried to make it better by giving me a discount and comping me a bottle of shampoo. But I thought management needed to know that things were not working well. Is the best way for me to give them a one or two-star review? Is that going to communicate to the salon something is wrong?

Businesses should actively solicit feedback AND positive reviews. They are not the same. In the hair salon’s case, they are confusing feedback and online reviews.

A better way to get BOTH is to say something like:

We are committed to providing the best possible service. If we did not meet your expectations, please contact (manager). We want to know how to improve our service!

If you enjoyed the service today, we’d love if you reviewed us here (link to the site).

Thanks for your patronage.

The answer then is yes, you should solicit positive reviews, but don’t think of that as feedback. You need to be aware of what is wrong so that you can fix it.

What are your thoughts about online reviews? Is it part of your marketing to solicit them?