



Enhance Your Online Brand With Yelp

The Importance of Online Branding

In this digital age, managing your [online brand](#) is key. More than ever, customers and clients rely on web searches and recommendations when making purchasing decisions. It's especially important for service providers who don't have a tangible product that clients can see. Instead, customers are buying the information they find online about the service — and the reputation you've built to support it. But online brand goes beyond your website. There are countless places where previous and/or current clients contribute to the online conversation about you and your firm. One of the most popular of these websites is Yelp.

What is Yelp?

[Yelp](#) is a website with local search, social networking and discounted deal content. The site includes business listings, directory information and user-generated reviews.



According to Yelp, it received "... a monthly average of 117 million unique visitors in Q3 2013. By the end of Q3 2013, Yelpers had written more than 47 million rich, local reviews, making Yelp the leading local guide for real word-of-mouth on everything from boutiques and mechanics to restaurants and dentists."

In fact, some [studies suggest](#) positive rankings on Yelp can boost a business' bottom line between 5%-9%.

Yelp is increasingly popular for people seeking professional services, including CPAs. Not sure if anyone has reviewed you or your firm? [Do a simple search on the site](#) to find out. If you want to claim your own business page, it only requires a few simple steps. [Unlocking your business page](#) and setting up a Business Owner's Account is free, takes only a few minutes and is a great way to get involved in the Yelp community.

The Lowdown on Reviews

Testimonials and reviews have tremendous power to persuade other people to seek out your firm for services. Shared experiences help boost credibility because it shows that your service has been "tested" by the public. Encourage your happy clients to leave a review or comment on your Yelp page. You can make this easy by putting a link to your Yelp page on your website.

However, since Yelp is designed as a place for people's voices to be heard, negative reviews and comments are inevitable. Although every situation is different, you can take some simple steps to turn a negative around.

What Do You Do When You Get a Negative Review on Yelp?

1. **Relax** — A bad review can feel like a personal attack, and you may immediately feel defensive and want to fight back. Take a moment to relax, take a deep breath and think about what you are about to type. A level head may save you from an impulsive comment you can't take back.
2. **Respond** — Since your response is in writing, often tone doesn't translate. If a reviewer perceives you as being disingenuous, condescending or curt, it will only make matters worse. Be professional and offer a solution when appropriate, keeping your response simple and sincere. Of course, be sure not to reveal any sensitive client information, even if the reviewer posted specifics of the situation. Having a second set of eyes review a response before it is posted is always helpful.

If your firm has a communications or marketing professional on staff, check with him or her about any established best practices or policies when it comes to responding to online questions and complaints. If not, have a friend, spouse or someone on your professional team check over your intended response.

3. **Reroute** — If you can, take your conversation offline by getting in touch with the reviewer directly. This helps resolve the problem quicker and avoids a back-and-forth playing out in a public forum. Yelp allows you to send a private message via the website. If the reviewer is a former client, you likely have his or her contact information. A public response on Yelp usually is appropriate when you want to clear up any misinformation or shed light on a topic that might help other readers (see below).

Sample Response to a Negative Review:

"John, thank you for your business and feedback, and I understand your frustration. I would like to talk to you so I can better understand where your needs weren't met and explore possible solutions to remedy the situation. Please contact me at your earliest convenience."

[Darnell Holloway](#), Yelp's manager of local business outreach, says responding to reviews, "... can provide feedback insight into how your product or service resonates with customers, as well as ideas for how you can do better. Second, it can show users that you care and are engaged."

Resolving negative comments and reviews can help turn someone's opinion around, and it also shows potential clients that you care enough to try to make things right.

What About Fake Reviews?

Some companies are willing to post positive reviews to Yelp on behalf of your firm. Not only is it a big no-no to hire someone to leave a fake review on your Yelp page ... it's illegal.

According to the [Federal Trade Commission](#), a review is considered deceptive advertising if any material connection between the reviewer and the business being reviewed is not disclosed in the review. In a recent example of enforcing these regulations, the New York attorney general went after reputation management companies, which produce fake reviews in bulk.

Instead of paying for reviews, rely on the power of your existing clients to help spread the word of your great work.

Interested in learning more about more opportunities for social networking? Check out the [AICPA's social media resources](#).

