How to get reviews for local SEO: The must-do list

Online reviews are important. They improve trust signals with users, provide social proof that your brand is who it says it is, and can even assist in SEO efforts.

While the focus on reviews in SEO tends to be on how reviews affect rankings, rankings are just a small part of why reviews are important for local SEO.

Benefits of a healthy review profile include increased leads, social proof, customer service opportunities and increased customer loyalty and engagement, to name a few.

Why does this matter?

Great and terrible reputations alike spread quickly. While you don’t want to be known for having a bad reputation, you also don’t want your brand to get lost in the shuffle.

Reviews are a free way to generate brand recognition, a reputation for responsiveness and great customer service, positive exposure, SEO benefits and influencing purchasing decisions with potential clients.

Even negative reviews offer an opportunity – showing potential clients how you respond to or handle frustrations (all reasonable clients know that things can and do go wrong occasionally), and they provide you with free feedback on which aspects of your business can be improved upon.

Use critical reviews to better your offering and client experience. This will show in your overall review profile over time, and in client satisfaction immediately. If all of your customers hate the coffee in your lobby, change it.

Getting reviews for a local business

So how do you go about getting reviews?

One of the most common questions we get from clients when it comes to reviews for their local businesses is how to encourage their customers to leave reviews without annoying them or risking public negative feedback.

Here are some top tips on how to secure reviews for local SEO.

The Ask

It seems simple, right? Ask, and ye shall receive. But

The "Person You Already Know" Ask

Good sources of online reviews include:

- Clients.
- Customers.
- Colleagues.
- Business partners.
- Personal contacts (depending on the platform).

This is a great way to source reviews because if you're asking someone you know and are comfortable with, you likely have an established relationship with them and they're more likely to leave a great review.

While Google does not allow reviews from non-customers, Facebook does not limit reviews to paying clients and customers. Industry partners, your neighbor, and even your mail carrier are totally welcome to leave a review.

Don't ask them to lie, however, as authenticity is key here. If it's not a client or customer, ask the reviewer instead to

speak to your integrity, professionalism, personality, or character vs a brand-specific experience.

The “Verbal” Ask

Like the person you already know, the verbal ask allows you to decide whether someone would be a good candidate for a positive review.

You can ask a customer in passing, or even pick up the phone and call them. If you’re going to call them, it’s often best to start the conversation by thanking them for their business and asking for their feedback to let them know that you care about their experience with your brand before asking them to do you a favor.

The “Digital” Ask

The digital ask allows you to choose who you’d like to receive a review from. The digital ask can be delivered via email, text message, or even directly on your social channels.

Not everyone you ask will take the time to review their experience with you. However, this is a great way to grab some positive low-hanging fruit.

The “Passive” Ask

Your reception area, flyers, and other printed materials offer a fantastic opportunity to provide a QR code directly linking to your reviews.

Add some social proof, such as an image of one of your best reviews, a star rating, or some verbiage on why you want them to scan the code to encourage participation.

Review Request Tips

- Make sure to add a personal contact for a real human in messages – this allows an opportunity to talk to an unhappy customer and smooth things out **before** they share a public review.
- Keep it simple! People do not have time to read a five-paragraph essay on why you want them to review you. Respect their time and get to the point quickly.
- It’s OK to follow up in a few weeks if they don’t review you, but be careful to not get annoying. You do not want someone reviewing your business when they’re irritated with you.
- If you can add personal details without laying it on too heavy, it’s great! Be careful to avoid potentially embarrassing or overly personal information. (“we’re so glad we were able to get rid of the bed bugs in your hotel!” will not go well for you)

A variety of review management tools can help you request, compile, and respond to online reviews.

Be careful if you use a third-party tool to request or respond to reviews to ensure they aren’t engaging in questionable tactics for displaying or managing review content.

Review management platforms have recently been under fire from the FTC for “avoiding the collection or publication of negative reviews,” which violates FTC guidelines.

Mike Blumenthal of NearMedia has been following recent FTC cases and guideline updates and does a fantastic job explaining them on the Near Media blog.

Strategies to Ensure a Positive

Review Profile

- **Always respond to reviews (positive and negative):** Showing your current and potential customers, business partners, and community members that you're paying attention and actually care about what people have to say can go a long way in building a positive review profile and brand reputation.
- **Know your customers**: Not only does this foster a positive connection with your customers, but it also helps you spot fake reviews from disgruntled employees or the competition quickly. Knowing your customers also helps you successfully plan initiatives, promotions, and offers that will be popular with your customer base.
- **Make it easy – provide instructions if needed**: If your customer base is not tech-savvy or may have difficulty submitting an online review, help them. Create easy-to-follow instructions that walk them through the process. This can be digital or printed out. Bonus points for visual aids and clickable links or scannable QR codes.
- **Encourage honest feedback**: Don't bribe or guilt people into leaving a positive review. Encourage them to be honest in their reviews so you know your strengths and weaknesses alike.
- **Make sure your request is personalized**: Whether you're sending an email or asking in person, make sure you let the customer know that you know who they are and care about their experience with your brand BEFORE you request the review. Asking how their kid's sporting event went, or if their spouse is enjoying their new job can go a long way in fostering a positive, long-term relationship.

What Not to Do When Seeking Reviews

for Local SEO

- **Don’t get hung up on one platform**: Meet your audience where they are, because chances are, if they frequently turn to Yelp to leave reviews, you have other customers looking there for information about your brand. You don’t want to overwhelm people with options and create decision paralysis, but give them two or three options for review sites.
- **Don’t pay for or incentivize reviews**: Ever. Never, ever, ever.
- **Don’t ask people to leave fake reviews**: This is tacky, bad business, and it will come back to bite you.
- **Don’t leave fake reviews for your competition**: As with requesting positive fake reviews, leaving negative reviews that are not accurate or true will not go well for you. Just don’t do it.
- **Don’t ignore the feedback you receive**: Look at negative reviews as an opportunity to provide your customers with a better product, service, or experience. Take the feedback and learn from it, or you’re doomed to continue repeating past mistakes.
- **Don’t use Facebook’s autoresponder for reviews**: People can tell, and you will lose their trust.
- **Don’t delete negative reviews**: Use them as a tool to show current and potential customers that you’ve taken the feedback seriously and improved your business.

Online reviews for local business: The bottom line

Why do reviews matter so much?

Great and terrible reputations alike spread quickly. While you don’t want to be known for having a bad reputation, you also don’t want to get lost in the shuffle.

Reviews are a free way to generate brand recognition, a reputation for responsiveness and great customer service, positive exposure, SEO benefits, and of course, influencing purchasing decisions with potential clients.

Even negative reviews offer opportunities. It shows potential clients how you respond to or handle frustrations (all reasonable clients know that things can and do go wrong occasionally) and they provide you with free feedback on which aspects of your business can be improved upon.

Use critical reviews to better your offering and client experience. This will show in your overall review profile over time, and in client satisfaction immediately. If all of your customers hate the coffee in your lobby, change it.

Remember, online reviews help with lead gen, have SEO benefits, show you what your customers really want and expect from your business, inform you of areas of your business that have room for improvement, and help drive conversions.

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About The Author

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