Negative reviews from ex-employees are finally against Google's guidelines



I hear complaints from business owners and marketers all the time that the Google My Business guidelines are often ambiguous, and I tend to agree. It can be easy to read a guideline and interpret it incorrectly.

I have learned that the key to understanding the guidelines is through time and experience. Seeing what Google will and will not act on can provide insight into what things they really care about, and this can help you read between the lines.

Until recently, I had always assumed that reviews from former employees were considered to be in violation of Google My Business guidelines. This was based on the following two passages from their review policies page:

1. **"Make sure that the reviews on your business listing, or**

those that you leave at a business you've visited, are honest representations of the customer experience. Those that aren't may be removed." This is the golden rule at the heart of Google's guidelines, which is why the company usually removes peer reviews or reviews you got your friends to write for you. (Note that a reviewer doesn't technically have to be a customer, but they do need to have had customer *intent* – for example, if someone leaves you a negative review because you never called them back, that would still be considered a legitimate review because they intended to hire you and you exhibited poor customer service.)

2. **"Conflict of interest: Reviews are most valuable when they are honest and unbiased. If you own or work at a place, please don't review your own business or employer."**

My interpretation here was that reviews left by any employee – current or past – would not be in line with Google's review policies. After all, how on earth is an employee's point of view an honest representation of a customer experience? An employee is not a customer.

However, when I tried to assist business owners in getting negative reviews from former employees removed earlier this year, I discovered that Google only considered reviews from *current* employees to be against its guidelines.

Stupid, right? I have tried to wrap my head around this, and I can't understand what possessed Google to come up with that policy.

Here is a recent example. In this thread on the Google My Business forum, a business owner was trying to get a review from a former employee removed. They stated that the employee no-showed on her shift three times and was let go. In the review, the user states:

> *“Yes I am an ex employee. My opinion of [omitted] was the same while I worked there as when I stopped working there.”*

She continues to argue that her opinion is the same as the customers’ and starts comparing them to one of their competitors.

In another example, an ex-employee reviewed a preschool and made negative comments about the business owner and mentioned that their inability to run the school well is why they can’t keep staff.

How Google considers these reviews reflective of a customer experience is beyond me. Yet in both cases, Google refused to remove the reviews and clarified that it’s not against their guidelines because the employee doesn’t currently work there.

The good news, however, is that Google updated their review policies on December 14, 2017, and it looks like reviews from former employees are finally now able to be removed. The new guidelines are now in the Maps help center (they used to be under Google My Business), and they note that “posting negative content about a current or former employment experience” is no longer allowed, as it is considered a conflict of interest.

If you were one of those unfortunate businesses that had experiences like the two examples above, now is the time to contact Google My Business and ask them to remove the reviews. Hopefully, this time, you’ll get an appropriate response!

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