



# How Tourism Operators Can Encourage Online Reviews

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# Increase Reviews for Higher Revenue

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This guide will show you how some of the most successful hospitality and tourism brands encourage reviews, highlighting the importance of listening to visitors as well as offering practical advice on how to generate a higher level response rate for your establishment.

Any tourism operator's number of online reviews has a direct impact on key performance measures, including:

- Ranking on review sites
- Ranking on third party distribution websites (OTAs)
- Ranking in search engines
- Overall online reputation score
- Overall sales and conversion rates

With so much at stake, what can be done to legitimately increase the amount of reviews given by travelers at your establishment?



# Why Is the Volume of Reviews Important?

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The amount of reviews your tourism operator receives online can directly affect revenue. Gaining a higher volume of visitor ratings will improve your competitive online position and visibility but most importantly, encourage potential travelers to spend their money with you because your establishment appears reliable and trustworthy in comparison to competitors.

Who trusts a brand with only two reviews? It's easier for potential visitors to understand what properties offer when there are a higher volume of testimonials. This creates a stronger sense of reliability and credibility around your brand, therefore increasing the chances that a person will book with you. That is how a higher volume of reviews can be translated into revenue.

Make it easy for customers to choose you. Getting people to talk about you online is the most important seal of approval you can get.

As word-of-mouth advertising is used by a wider audience than ever, taking a pro-active approach to managing the volume of reviews you receive has never been so important.

Encouraging more travelers to invest time in recording their experiences through reviews is therefore paramount to better understanding your business.

Analyzing visitor's comments will reveal how to take pro-active measures to improve your brand from ground level - comparing and contrasting fifty reviews will give a

more global picture of overall satisfaction than a small handful.

A higher number of ratings will boost your position and ranking on both search engines and review sites. This will give you a more competitive online position by increasing your visibility and making it easier for future traveler to find your tourism operator online.



# Create a Remarkable Experience First

Before you ask for an online review, make sure you create an experience worth talking about. "Remarkable" literally means "worth remarking about". Does your customer experience live up to that standard? If not, what creative amenities or features could you offer to get people to tell their friends? This works in all types of tourism operators: from fast food restaurants to luxury resorts.

Unfulfilled expectations are the No.1 cause of dissatisfied customers. Close the gap between expectations and results and ensure expectations are correctly managed.

It's of the utmost importance to ensure your brand marketing materials accurately reflect the experience your establishment offers. Service is a key driver of satisfaction.

Adele Gutman, Vice President of Sales, Marketing, and Revenue at Library Hotel Collection shares this advice:

*"You need to WOW guests. You need to give them something to talk about. You need to shower your guest with so many magical moments that they they leave the hotel excited and inspired to take the time to want to share their experience with the world. People like to do nice things for nice people."*

This has worked well for her chain, bringing their four hotels in New York City into the Top Seven positions on TripAdvisor.

The screenshot displays four hotel listings on TripAdvisor, each with a 'Price Your Stay' button. The listings are as follows:

- Casablanca Hotel Times Square** (4 stars): Offers & Announcements Don't Miss Our Best Deal. Ranked #1 of 434 hotels in New York City. 2,544 reviews. "Home away from Home" 04/24/2013, "simply wonderful!" 04/23/2013.
- Chelsea Pines Inn**: Ranked #2 of 434 hotels in New York City. 1,006 reviews. "Wonderful place to spend my birthday!" 04/24/2013, "amazing!" 04/22/2013.
- Library Hotel** (4 stars): Offers & Announcements Up to 20% off. Ranked #3 of 434 hotels in New York City. 1,844 reviews. "Wonderful base for exploring New York" 04/25/2013, "Very comfortable hotel. Very good for..." 04/23/2013.
- The French Quarters Guest Apartments** (Travelers' Choice® 2013 Winner Small Hotels): Ranked #4 of 434 hotels in New York City. 409 reviews. "Can't wait to return" 04/24/2013, "so happy we booked these apartments" 04/22/2013.



# It's All About Exceeding Expectations

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## Exceed expectations

Avoid setting unreal expectations in advertising. Marketing communications should follow a policy of under-promising and over-delivering. Tourism operators that build up too much anticipation might risk guest disappointment on arrival.

The majority of positive customer reviews come when travelers are pleasantly surprised by what they receive. Learn from Terry Kane of the Jumeirah Group, who makes a point of avoiding hype and hyperbole in marketing even though special properties like the Burj Al-Arab could justify the use of it.

*"We try not to use superlatives to hype the properties on social media channels, as this is not necessary. It is important to be there and promote why the stay will be special, but with a sense of individuality for the user. Normally, we find that it is actually the guests that leave reviews that use superlatives to describe their incredible experiences."*

## Get the right team in place

Tourism operators that earn the best reviews tend to place a strong emphasis on recruiting the right people and encouraging them to work to exceptional standards.

Jonathan Raggett oversees some of the most popular hotels in London as CEO of Red Carnation Hotels. Rajul Chande interviewed him at the Egerton House Hotel and shared his observations on increasing reviews:

*"They consciously recruit 'characters' with personality and flair. So for example you have Antonio at the hotel's bar who is famous for his martinis. Then there is Alex who not only checks you in but may also sing at your table! There's also friendly Murat – one of the managers who cheerfully showed me around the hotel."*

*All the staff I ran into had a calm and relaxed attitude. This isn't always the case in luxury hotels which often have an overbearing formality in the air."*

*The staff here seem to be driven by an expectation of success rather than a fear of failure. This frees them to be themselves and excel."*

In the end, the decision for someone to write an online review often comes down to a single interaction that a customer has with one of your staff members. Focus on consistently delivering impressive service to increase the number of positive reviews you receive.

## Provide options

People should leave a review wherever it feels most comfortable or wherever they already have an account set up. Avoid limiting your request to just one website, which could restrict the overall number of reviews you receive online.

# Is It OK to Pro-actively Ask for Reviews?

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There is no reason why asking for reviews should be a difficult or awkward process.

You can also approach your customer in an endless variety of ways – however best works for your business, or personal style. But as always, it's important to consider various factors before making such a request. These include:

## Their experience

First and foremost, it's essential to be alert to the kind of experience your customer has had before considering whether to ask for a review. If they have had a fantastic, trouble-free time then, by all means, feel free to go right ahead.

On the other hand, if a traveler has had a negative experience, ask yourself if your management has done everything within their power to rectify the issue before considering a review request.

The way an establishment deals with difficulties can speak more about the management than a problem-free experience.

Visitors may still maintain a positive impression (despite negative experiences) if you have gone above and beyond the call of duty to rectify problems.

By reacting to issues efficiently and methodically, people will recognize your efforts. It is precisely these reviews that are worth reading - potential visitors know that things won't run smoothly 100% of the time - what matters is *how* you dealt with issues that have arisen.

For these reasons, sometimes a "negative" experience may even result favorably for your establishment because you reacted in such a way that the person left feeling satisfied or even impressed with your team's problem-solving abilities.

## Your audience

Who is your audience? If you attract a young, fashionable crowd or your brand already has a strong focus on technology and design, then your customer demographic is likely to be familiar with social media outlets and review sites. As a result they will probably be open to the possibility of using these.

It's also quite possible that some people - such as groups of business travelers or those over 65 - simply won't have the desire, time or patience to leave an online review.

In all cases, it is important to assess each customer's unique standpoint. There are many different levels of proactivity and approaches that can be enlisted to cater to a range of travelers and review channels.



# When to Ask for a Review

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## In response to comment cards

If someone leaves very positive feedback on a comment card, don't let the feedback stay on paper. Contact the customer by email or telephone and ask them to consider sharing their thoughts with others online.

## Sign on exit

Leaving a sign in a prominent location will serve to remind visitors that you value their opinion. This non-invasive option is particularly effective if asking directly isn't right for your brand's target group.

## On business cards

A growing number of professionals are maximizing their social media presence by adding a link or icon to their business cards. This is savvy marketing. Others have attached a card with popular review-site icons onto a copy of the invoice for the customer's consideration.

## During the check-out process in a hotel

This is the best time to ask since positive memories from their stay are still fresh. Your staff can ask if the guest had a positive experience at your establishment. If they did, encourage them to share their thoughts on a review site of their choice. See the next page on asking at checkout.

## In follow-up emails

Many businesses send an email after travelers leave to thank them for their stay. Consider placing a link to review sites within this message. Or for business travelers, email them the invoice and include a link to review the tourism operator.

## In social media channels

Engage with travelers on social media channels. Pay attention to what they are saying about you and ask if they'd mind repeating any positive comments on a review site..

## When receiving unsolicited feedback

When someone says something positive about your brand this is a great opportunity to direct them to review sites. You need these stories to be told online as a way of benefitting others.

**NOTE:** Extra care must be taken when asking travelers for reviews while they are still at the hotel, restaurant or attraction. Several review sites have policies against this, and some will even mark reviews as fake if sent from the same location.





# Example: Asking When a Traveler is Leaving

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Taking the time to speak to customers when they are leaving is one of the best ways to ensure that people don't leave disappointed. It is also the perfect moment to remind them how valuable their feedback is.

**citizenM hotels** uses a system that works very well with their clientele. Each of their properties receives many more guest reviews than the average hotel.

The company has developed a standardized procedure for use during the checkout process. Like many hotels, citizenM staff, called **Ambassadors**, ask guests how they enjoyed their stay as they are checking out. If there was any issue, direct communication with a manager is encouraged for prompt resolution. But if the person had a good experience, they are asked to share their thoughts on a review site.

Unlike many hotels, the invoice is sent automatically by email, providing one more touch-point and opportunity to ask for a review. This follow-up reminder significantly increases the reviews received, since many travelers forget to post a review immediately after their stay.

According to Diego Sartori, citizenM's Social Media and Internet Strategist, the number of reviews is a result of everything else. *"You have to deliver good service and create clear expectations of what people can expect.*

*This is what encourages more reviews. We get people saying, 'I usually don't write a review, but my stay at citizenM was so special because you did this specific thing that made me think WOW.' So that's why we always try to set the right expectations, deliver excellent service and then surprise guests with something unique."*

[Click here for the full citizenM Case Study.](#)



*You have to deliver good service and create clear expectations of what people can expect. This is what encourages more reviews."*

# Creative Ways to Stimulate Engagement

## Add special touches to spark conversation

Give travelers something to talk about and you have already opened new avenues of conversation. Creating memorable and original experiences is something that all tourism operators should do, irrespective of whether you are a small B&B or an amusement park, because by increasing engagement with customers you are playing an important role in encouraging reviews.

[The Townhouse in Maastricht](#) does all it can to provide warm hospitality and memorable service. Upon arrival, guests are treated to a cup of homemade soup as a symbol of the warm hospitality delivered by staff.

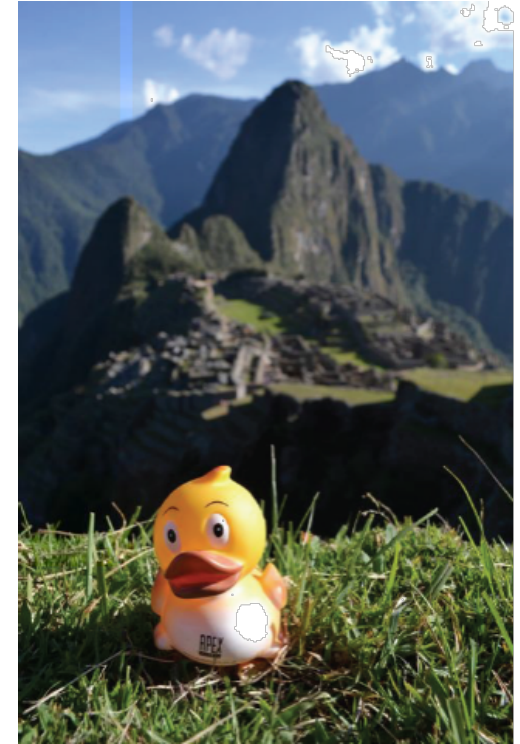
Lone travellers are also offered a companion for the night. That's right – for only €5.00, guests can spend the evening with one of the house goldfish!

## Involve travelers in creating online content

Similarly, [Apex Hotels](#) provide branded rubber ducks in each bathroom, a playful addition that makes guests feel right at home. Ducks are colored differently in each of Apex's seven hotels, adding the impression of collectability.

*"People collect them and take photos of them all over the world. We have a competition where the best photo of the year wins a hotel break...Fans can also name the new duck whenever a new hotel opens."*

This imaginative approach encourages active participation and continued patronage from guests because it is so simple and fun to do. Guests share photos of the ducks online and so the marketing almost takes care of itself, growing organically as friends of guests see the uploaded images.



# Creative Ways to Stimulate Engagement

## Online conversations in real-time

When one of the web's most powerful CEO's, Marc Benioff of Salesforce.com, [tweeted his arrival at Corinthia Hotels](#), he wasn't expecting to have a direct online conversation with the management from the privacy of his hot-tub.

*"[Corinthia Hotels] tweeted right back, engaging in a direct conversation with me...delighting customers is knowing who they are and what they like. Corinthia Hotels got me this morning...they figured me out."*

Not only did Benioff discuss his engagement with Corinthia at a large conference in London, but also went as far as to say: *"This is a unique opportunity for service that other companies should learn from."* Getting exposure like this is priceless. Engaging with guests through social media sites like Twitter not only demonstrates that you are at one with their online lifestyle, but that you are also listening to guests in real-time.

## Social spaces

[citizenM](#) has created a communal space equipped with Wi-Fi as a way of inspiring a sociable atmosphere within the hotel. This automatically opens avenues for discussion - managers often take the initiative to casually bring up their social media presence to guests in conversation.



# Extensive Staff Training

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## /// David Craig, Hotel Teatro

“Hotel Teatro has an inherent culture of exceptional service. We hire our hospitality professionals very carefully and work diligently to train them to 5 Star & 5 Diamond Standards. We have the ability to involve our associates in many of the global decisions that affect the way the hotel operates so there is a strong sense of ownership. Our team is empowered to make active decisions that will create a successful experience for our guests. We have seasoned operational managers on duty 24 hours per day, 7 days per week so there is always intense scrutiny over our daily operations.

We also spend the first portion of every staff meeting reading our newest TripAdvisor reviews aloud to the group. This establishes a forum for recognizing favorable performance and for developing solutions where we have areas of opportunity.

We are blessed with many wonderful guests, a large number of whom have been returning to Hotel Teatro for many years. Every day we receive cards, letters and e-mails of thanks. I make certain to respond to each one personally and whenever I do, I typically finish my correspondence with a phrase like the following:

Thank you for taking the time to relay the details of your experience at Hotel Teatro. I am so glad that you had a wonderful visit. If you'd like to share your experience with others, I encourage you to do so at [www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com).”



# Subtle Guidance Reflects Brand's Ethos

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/// Michael Vogt at Layana Resort and Spa

Our philosophy is rooted in small size, luxurious accommodation, unobtrusive personalized attention, tranquility and peace, gracious Thai hospitality, and value for money. We work hard to ensure guest satisfaction based on our philosophy, and pay a lot of attention to detail.

Most of the time, this works well and is reflected in favorable guest comments on Internet forums such as TripAdvisor and HolidayCheck. But from time to time we drop the ball and this too is religiously reported, which in turn gives us the opportunity to further refine our product.

[Encouraging online reviews] has been an issue of much management debate. We have taken a conscious decision not to adopt any techniques to encourage our guests to talk about their experiences with us online.

We have done this because we perceive the types of guests we attract don't respond positively to being coerced or manipulated into becoming marketing tools for us. And yet they are glad to share their positive experiences as long as it remains their preserve to do so.

The closest we get to encouraging guests to write an online review is by providing direct links from our website to TripAdvisor and, for example, World Luxury Travel Awards to enable guests to vote for us.

“

*...from time to time we drop the ball and this too is religiously reported, which in turn gives us the opportunity to further refine our product.”*



# Measure & Improve Visitor Satisfaction

/// Luigi Rotunno, President of ABR

“The association’s leading resorts are those with a higher quality of service, better positioning in the market and consequently, are top of their compsets in the Brazilian market.”

Understanding the potential of the competition is key to understanding the positioning of each resort and the areas that should be worked on to improve guest satisfaction.

From online reviews and comments, the association can understand the best performing areas in the resorts. When sending reports to members, each resort is expected to dedicate some time and attention to making improvements, analyzing what other members are doing “better” and also identifying strengths to further enhance those areas.

Destination associations can leverage guest feedback to better understand and benchmark visitor satisfaction, empowering change and growth within the destination. By using the insights effectively, destinations can:

- Measure & improve the overall visitor experience
- Help operators prioritize operational & service improvements
- Leverage strengths in communication & marketing activities.
- Strengthen a destination’s overall reputation.
- Attract more visitors on a city, regional or country level.

# Summary of How to Encourage Reviews

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Every establishment has its own style of attending to the needs of customers. While some enjoy a hands-on approach to encouraging reviews, others prefer to stand back and allow high standards of service and facilities speak for themselves. Here is a breakdown of common themes that have emerged from the examples in the previous slides.

## Raise staff awareness

Make sure all staff know that you would like to encourage reviews, and tailor an approach that you think best suits your brand's ethos. Provide a script for staff to follow if necessary.

## Pro-active management

Whatever your management style, the only way to ensure a positive experience is by proactively engaging with customers.

Troubleshoot problems as soon as they arise and respond personally to

needs or requests. Travelers are far more likely to discuss their experience online afterwards if they know that their voice is heard while still on-site.

## Respond to reviews and join the conversation

Maintain an active social media presence to take control of your company's reputation.

[Respond to reviews online](#) and use negative feedback to correct what went wrong. Reputation management tools like ReviewPro also help you to track what people are saying online.

## Personalize customer service

Pay close attention to your customer demographic and travel purpose. Did they book directly or through an OTA? Are there kids in the travelling group? Business travelers will engage differently to families, so consider this

when preparing material, writing emails or greeting them. A well-informed concierge service with connections to other businesses (for customer discounts) are touches that demonstrate you are dedicated to ensuring their experience is enjoyable.

## Under-promise and over-deliver

In the end it boils down to delivering a great experience. It is better for travelers to feel pleasantly surprised by unexpected special touches than underwhelmed by a host of "extras" they had been anticipating as standard.





# Frequently Asked Questions

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## How many reviews should I have?

Take your market into consideration. Look at other businesses in your area, and compare volume of reviews with competitors. Potential travelers are likely to look at reviews most similar to establishments like your own.

The way in which visitors make bookings will also play a role in how many reviews you can generate. If you receive a lot of group bookings, these customers may or may not review your establishment online. If a customer books offline, they may also be less likely to share their experience online. However, this doesn't mean you can't showcase photos of the offline guestbook via Twitter or Facebook for example. People booking through an OTA are also more likely to leave their review there.

## What is the best metric to track while trying to encourage more online reviews?

Try tracking your "bookings to review" conversion rate. Take your monthly review volume, divide by the number of bookings during this period, and calculate the score.

**Competitive Benchmarking** is also useful to identify how your business is performing online in direct relation to your competitors. Understanding your competitors' strengths and weaknesses is key to developing a powerful strategy for success.

Competitive Benchmarking enables you to compare and contrast the overall number of reviews (and reviews per source) with those of your direct competitors. In doing this, a much clearer picture of review distribution will emerge.

ReviewPro's Competitive Benchmarking feature aggregates data from your chosen competitors, providing tailored information on the review channels that most attract customers (your own and those of competitors).

By learning more about where travelers are leaving reviews you will be in a stronger position to tailor review requests according to the sources that need more attention.

See answers to the **FAQ "How can I encourage reviews on a specific OTA"** for more information on this topic.





# Frequently Asked Questions

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## How can I encourage reviews on a specific OTA?

An establishment may have hundreds of reviews on one website, but if the most important revenue channels are elsewhere, it is important to encourage reviews on these booking sites too. A report from PhoCusWright indicated the volume of reviews on OTAs is exceeding those on social travel sites, which could make encouraging reviews there increasingly important.

Many OTAs only allow reviews to be written for purchases made through their website. You may consider:

- Testing a special offer to raise interest in that channel.
- Purchasing a sponsored listing on the site for additional visibility
- Creating a private promotion only accessible through Twitter or Facebook for people booking through this OTA.

## Can I offer incentives to leave favorable reviews?

Put simply: no.

Most review sites now have strong penalties if a business is caught incentivizing reviews and with good reason. Offering a discount or other reward in exchange for a (positive) review is considered unethical because it encourages fake responses, generating “pay to play” reviews that fail to reflect the hotel in an authentic light.

Giving away incentives in exchange for reviews also gives the impression that you might have offered incentives with all reviewers, negating authenticity and discouraging trust in the long-term.



# 3 Marketing Professionals Share Their Tips

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The following comments were made on a [HotelMarketingStrategies.com](https://www.hotelmarketingstrategies.com) post.

## **Sara Borghi**

What I experience with my clients is that most of their customers are reluctant to create an account on TripAdvisor and post a review there.

However, since most of them here in Australia book through the major OTA websites (e.g. Total Travel) which also allow reviews, they would feel more keen to go back there to post their review. And certainly this helps in the new Place Search battlefield as well.

## **Alistair Lattimore**

If the property distributes their rates using a channel manager, which most do these days – it would also be a good idea to tailor the email to promote reviews on the OTA they booked through first (if they accept reviews) as the guest is already familiar with that site and will already have an account – where as they quite likely do not have an account for TripAdvisor.

If they didn't come through an OTA, or the OTA doesn't support reviews or they booked direct, then promote TripAdvisor reviews.

## **Brian Simpson**

Make [asking for reviews] natural and not pushy. But don't ignore this. I am in the process of creating custom web landing pages for each hotel that will have links to our Facebook, Twitter, Blog accounts and also a direct link to TripAdvisor with its logo.

We are also working on putting the TripAdvisor logo on other collateral. At checkout I do believe it is important to encourage guests, especially the satisfied ones, to leave a review.





[www.reviewpro.com](http://www.reviewpro.com)

[info@reviewpro.com](mailto:info@reviewpro.com)

[@ReviewPro](#)

