

How to Solicit Reviews From Your Clients

by Dave Greenbaum

Online reviews are big business today and you need to solicit reviews from your clients. Each online service has rules for soliciting reviews. If you break those rules, you'll get your business in trouble. A few subtle changes in how you ask for these reviews will grow your online presence without violating the rules.

Overview of Review Services: The Big Three

For most computer repair business owners, Google reviews will be the first area of concern. When you search for computer repair in your hometown, your name should come up along with some possible reviews of your business on Google's platform.

Next in importance and search results is usually Yelp. Business owners disagree on the value of Yelp, but your business has to accept it is a popular review platform. The Yelp results also show up in iPhones with Siri and Apple maps. You can't avoid Yelp in most areas even if you don't like the company.

Unlike Google or Yelp, Angie's List is subscription only. People have to pay to be on Angie's list. The prices are location-based. The customer pays to join a particular city. The theory is you'll get better reviews on Angie's list because the reviews aren't anonymous.

Other Review Services

These type of reviews will vary within your service area. For example, my local newspaper has a <u>review section</u>. Phone directories usually have an online review section. Not sure which reviews sites are relevant? Search for your business name and your competitor and see what comes up. If there are already reviews about you or someone else, you know that's a good platform to join.

Claiming Your Business On Review Sites

Each of the big three review companies let you "claim" your business. I recommend doing that as soon as possible. This process lets you correct any errors and respond to the reviews. They'll want to verify you own the business. Usually that's just an automated phone call, but sometimes they need to send you a postcard to your business location.

Google now calls their portal <u>Google My Business</u>, Yelp calls it <u>Yelp For Business Owners</u> and Angie's List calls it <u>Angie's List Business Center</u>. None of these services charge you to list your business. Ignore any service that charges you to list your business online. Some marketing companies will offer to do this claiming process for you. I strongly advise against this. They could lock you out of your business listing. It's your business: handle your business listing directly.

Don't ask clients to review your business before you claim your business; you won't be able to respond to the review. If they review you in the wrong way, such as misspelling your business name, this could cause you more hassles trying to correct it.

The Wrong Way to Solicit Reviews

Now that you're set up for online reviews, you're probably anxious to get reviews of your business by satisfied clients. Each of the services differ on what violates their terms of service. Yelp is probably the harshest with it's Recommended (formerly filtered) reviews. Google and other services will also flag or remove reviews if they think they are bogus. These are the types of things that get most reviews banned or blocked.

• Offering an Incentive

If you give your clients a discount or something else in exchange for the review, that's a paid endorsement. That violates the Federal Trade Commission's Guidelines.

Creating a Review Template

We're all busy, so most clients appreciate a shortcut. If you give them a way to make reviews easier, the services catch that. An example is a guideline on your computer repair business website.

Setting up a Review Station

This scheme is the most common reason sites block reviews. The services watch IP addresses and browsers and instantly suspect reviews that come from the same location. While you can play around with browsers and privacy, just don't do it. If you get caught you'll be in trouble and there are better ways to get reviews.

The Right Way to Solicit Reviews

Ask How the Client Heard about You

"How did you hear about us?" is the golden question in your computer repair business. When a client tells you how they found you, you know where to focus your marketing. If they found you on a site that offers a review option, this is the first time to solicit a review. Just say "I hope I'll earn a good review for this work." You aren't asking the client for a review, just implying it. If the client doesn't know they can leave a review for your computer repair business on that site, explain the process to them. *When you're finished with your computer repair work, reinforce your desire for a positive review. A closing statement like "I hope I earned a good review" or "Thanks for being a member of Angie's List" is a great reminder. If you have a computer repair shop, avoid having them leave a review while at your shop. Although it's not fair, the review sites will think you incentivized the review and block it.

Don't Accept Tips, but Gladly Accept Reviews

It's up to you (and your local taxing authority) if you accept tips. A few extra dollars is a short term gain. A tip is usually a sign of client satisfaction. If a client offers you a tip, decline the tip. Ask them to leave a review of you online. I instruct my team to say "I can't accept tips. You're welcome to tell others you like our service using online review sites."

Highlight Reviews From Other Clients

Once you get a few good reviews of your business, share those reviews with your clients. Put it on your web page, email signature, newsletters and social media. That's a reminder to your existing clients that they can review you online. If possible, link to the review instead of just quoting it. That makes it convenient for the client to leave a review for you by following the link.

Responding to Reviews

No matter how hard you try, you can't please everyone. Sometimes clients blame you for things outside of your control. Other times, you just have a difficult client. The worst reviews are fake ones from your competitors. You need to respond to all public reviews. Once you claim your business on a review site, you'll have a chance to respond. Remember your responses on review sites are indexed in search engines—you'll be judged on your responses.. Here are some tips on responding

• Don't Attack, Threaten or Embarrass The client

Yes, it feels great to point out the client is unreasonable. If you do that though, other potential clients see that and won't do business with you. Even if the client is wrong, don't point that out. In particular, don't embarrass the client or violate their privacy. I'd love to say "if you didn't download illegal content, you wouldn't have that problem." Say it in your head and keep it to yourself.

Disagree without being Disagreeable

If the client accuses you of something untrue, you need to respond to the accusation. Statements like "We disagree on the computer's condition" or "We believe we fixed the problem" help you respond without attacking the client. Sometimes the best response is "It sounds like we weren't a good fit for your needs" which goes a long way.

Admit You're wrong

We all make mistakes. On a review site, you need to own up to it. The sweetest words to a client is, "you're right." They feel acknowledged and appreciated. There's no point in challenging them if you're the one to blame.

• Offer to Make it Right

That negative review is out there for your existing and potential clients to see. Your goal is to reassure people you're trustworthy and reliable. You can respond publicly that you'll contact the client and work with them to resolve the problem. If the review site lets you respond privately, use the private responses to work out the details.

Don't ask the client to remove the review even if you do make it right. The sites see that as review manipulation. While you can't pay for a positive review, you also can't pay to remove a negative one. If you do right by the client, go back to the original script to solicit a review like "I hope I earned a positive review."

Report Fake Reviews and Don't Get Bullied

If you think a review is fake (maybe it's a competitor), report or flag the review to the review company. Although it's against every review site policy, a client might threaten to leave a negative review. Don't allow these threats to change your policy. See a threat of a negative review as a customer service opportunity. A dissatisfied client will usually tell others. Negative reviews are just another way of doing that.

Rarely a client will try to manipulate your policy using their relationship with the review site. For example, an "elite" reviewer told me that if I didn't repair his computer ahead of all others, he'd leave a negative review for me. I refused and he left a negative review. I reported the review and it was removed. Another time a client came in after the office

was closed and left a negative review. Yelp didn't remove that review and I simply chalked it up as a bit of digital vandalism.

Advertising on Review Sites

All review sites have advertising opportunities. Some business owners think Yelp changes reviews in exchange for advertising. Whether these accusations are true or not shouldn't change your advertising agenda. Ponder it like you would any other opportunity. If you think it will have value, go for it. While they can't always change review order, with advertising your business will come up first.

The decision of where and how to advertise goes back to asking the client how they heard about you. If one review site seems to be generating quality clients, that might be a good site for ads. If a site isn't generating much traffic for you, advertising could solve that problem. I always suggest you remember that the salespeople aren't business advisors — their job is to sell you a product. They'll always suggest their product is best and will make you money.

When you properly solicit reviews, you create permanent and searchable word of mouth advertising for your computer repair business. If you do it the right way, it's a cheap and effective way to grow your business by relying on quality clients.

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