

## Consumer Generated Content

Consumer Generated Content (CGC) comes in many forms. These include online reviews, blog entries, consumer email feedback, message board posts, forum comments, Wikis, videos on sites such as YouTube, personal web sites and personal email and each of these forms relates to countless different industries – including ours.

Consumers are increasingly turning to online reviews when booking travel and it is vital for the travel industry to understand and embrace the revolution of CGC online. To put it simply, travelers trust other travelers a lot more than they trust the advertisers and companies who stand to profit from their business. As such, travelers the world over are turning to the collective knowledge and opinion of the people they trust the most when booking holidays: each other.

### TripAdvisor

While our customers are globally reviewing, messaging, posting, emailing and commenting on numerous websites, it is well-known that one of the most prominent travel sites engaging with consumers is [TripAdvisor](#).

TripAdvisor is the world's largest online travel community with over 30 million monthly visitors. It features more than 25 million reviews and opinions from real travellers around the world and covers 400,000+ locations.

**Your hotel on TripAdvisor: our recent site audit** – we conduct regular audits of the TripAdvisor site to gauge what consumers are saying about XYZ Hotel's Australian hotels, including yours. And they're saying a lot! As is the case with most hotels, there was quite a mix of reviews: from glowingly positive to extremely negative. Consumers can also grade their hotel experience, which influences the hotel's TripAdvisor ranking. Unsurprisingly, our hotels received everything from five (the highest) to one (the lowest).

**Online reputation management** – although some managers may regard online reviews as a thorn in their side – *there's just no pleasing some guests, so why even try?* – it really is important for a variety of reasons. The CGC phenomenon is growing exponentially and showing no signs of slowing down. Hotel Managers need to be as aware of managing their hotel's reputation in the *online* environment as they are in other mediums, and targeting their market where they live is highly effective. In terms of negative reviews, think of it this way: when one of your customers has a terrible experience at your hotel, they're using TripAdvisor to actively and immediately tell a massive number of your future customers about it. Why just sit there and take it when you have the right of reply?

### TripAdvisor and hotel managers

Part of TripAdvisor's beauty is that it allows hotel managers to use it, too and this is the main purpose of this document. Hotel management should be viewing social media such as TripAdvisor regularly. Designate responsibility within your hotel: General Manager and Sales & Marketing Director, for example, and lock this in as a weekly task.

[Please see the end of this document for instructions on how to access and contribute to TripAdvisor.]

The most significant observation made in our audit of TripAdvisor was not the large number of reviews but the low frequency of responses from hotel managers. This is something we hope to rectify.

**Why should hotel management access TripAdvisor?**

Management's use of TripAdvisor serves several purposes:

1. It gives hotel managers the right of reply
2. It humanizes the hotel product
3. It can be used for consumer feedback
4. It helps build trust in your hotel – consumers place far more trust in CGC sites than they do in advertising
5. It builds brand awareness, credibility and therefore loyalty
6. It is a source of continuously generated content, usually containing lots of links which can help your Search Engine Optimization (SEO)
7. It builds your press mentions
8. It provides a full audit trail which can help make strategic decisions
9. It's FREE




Managers should not only reply to negative comments on TripAdvisor. Yes, it is often the case that customers don't take the time to comment about something unless they want to complain, but a huge number of the comments relating to XYZ Hotel hotels are also extremely positive (see page 5 of this document).

## Negative reviews

So what should a hotel manager do when they see a review for their hotel that is negative or at least contains some constructive feedback?

To put this into context, here is an example of a negative consumer review of an XYZ Hotel hotel posted recently on TripAdvisor.

“ Not What it Pretends to Be ”

  Shields\_9  1 contribution  
Boston, MA

[Save Review](#)

Jun 7, 2009 | Trip type: Couples






This is a mediocre hotel portraying itself as upscale. From the moment we showed up it was clear this wasn't up to expectations. We had been traveling in Australia for over a week and the Receptionist was the first, and consistently rude person we'd dealt with. No, they didn't have a room the following night and "you'll have a very hard time finding a place in Melbourne". No offer to help, or provide guidance. We were handed a letter that the pool wasn't working (part of the reason we booked there but not told in advance of the change) and the fitness center was "temporary". Our room was tiny with a plastic tube, no tissues and limited towels, etc. We had just come from a Sydney hotel which was on \$20 more but exponentially better.

Looking for a room for another night we went into another hotel and the Receptionist couldn't have been nicer, quite a contrast. He printed off all the available rooms and suggested ways of contacting hotels, etc. And this was from a hotel where we weren't even guests!

The next morning at Novotel the same person was just as rude checking us out. I would definitely not recommend this hotel if you want nice accommodations and an inviting atmosphere.

Internet access as very expensive! We ended up in a hotel a few blocks away for less money and much more accommodating!

**My ratings for this hotel**

 Value	 Service
 Rooms	
 Location	
 Cleanliness	

And to continue the example, here is the hotel manager's response:

Management response from  
Manager  
(Management representative)  
Jun 14, 2009

Dear Shields\_9,

Thankyou for passing on your feedback. I am shocked by your comments and would appreciate it if we could discuss further.

As you will read on most travel blogs, warm, sincere service is one of the key reasons our hotel is so popular.

This one staff member has obviously let down our entire team and had a negative effect on your stay. If you would be so kind to reply to me I would appreciate it. My email address is \_\_\_\_\_

Warm regards,

\_\_\_\_\_

### Handling negative reviews

As mentioned, negative reviews are pretty much inevitable, and as unpleasant as they can be, they do actually serve a key purpose – so long as they are dealt with correctly. Here are some tips for handling negative reviews:

1. Post a Management reply on TripAdvisor, firstly thanking them for taking the time to leave a review.
2. Next, highlight any positive aspects or comments the reviewer left – you want to draw other readers of the review to these, not to the negative points.
3. Let them know that you're shocked to hear that their experience was anything less than 100%. You usually receive such positive feedback from guests and you want this guest, and future ones, to know that their experience was not a typical one.
4. Apologise for any legitimate complaint. Sure, you can explain some mitigating circumstances, but what the reviewer really wants is an apology, not an excuse – they want to be *heard* by management.
5. Explain how you will act upon their feedback. If you read the negative review example above – and had subsequent concerns about the quality of the hotel's housekeeping – you might feel better knowing that management is taking action to address any problem.
6. Provide an offline channel for continuing the conversation. Do you really want to get into a long online debate with a single guest about the quality of the breakfast? You'll likely enter a conversation that will distract others from deciding to book with you. Instead, leave a lasting impression by inviting the reviewer to call your office or email you directly, where you'll personally listen to their comments and review their concerns. What a strong message you'll send to future guests – a message of "Wow, this hotel really cares about its guests!"

### The benefits of negative reviews

Do you think negative reviews serve no purpose beyond giving consumers the opportunity to vent? Wrong! Here's how hotel management can benefit from negative reviews:

1. **You need to know.** If your products or services are no good, then you need to know about it. It's better to hear it from your customers – so you can fix it – than never know about it and wonder why your sales are low.
2. **Negative reviews build credibility.** Negative reviews add authenticity to your reputation. Consumers are smart – *mostly* – and they know that if you have 1000 customers, a few will be upset over something. Take a wide look at the reviews on TripAdvisor. Just about every hotel has a review that mentions dirty sheets, cockroaches, or rude staff, and any hotel with 100% glowing reviews does not seem real. Consumers still stay in hotels with occasional poor reviews – they just look for the ones that have the best *overall* reviews and rankings.
3. **Negative reviews let you fix the problem publicly.** Research suggests that a customer will tell 10 people about a negative experience with a business. However, if you fix the problem to their satisfaction, they'll tell 20 people how happy they are! Look for negative reviews and fix the problem! Respond online with details and show even more future customers that you are listening.
4. **Your responses show you care.** Potential customers look at how you handled the situation. If you do find yourself with a negative review or critique, rectifying the situation publicly will demonstrate to potential customers that you care about your reputation – and your customers.

5. **CGC sites allow you to learn from competitors' mistakes.** Don't just read *your* negative reviews, read those of your competitors, too. If you learn where your rivals keep slipping up, you can fine-tune your offering to make sure you don't make the same mistake. Better still, how about reaching out to an unhappy customer of one of your competitors and fixing their problem – you could win a new customer for life! [Source: MarketingPilgrim.com]

**Reviews that breach Tripadvisor's publication guidelines:**

Of course, some reviews may contain non-constructive information which can be regarded as abusive or is simply a gripe. These reviews may go against Tripadvisor's guidelines and, if deemed to do that, can be removed from the site.

The example, below, relates to a 'review' by a former staff member at Novotel Swan Valley The Vines. It is not a travel review, it is merely a disgruntled ex-employee's grumble and was removed from Tripadvisor.



If a review breaches the site's guidelines as this one did, you should contact Tripadvisor directly using the following link:

[http://www.tripadvisor.com/ContactUs?topic=someone\\_posted\\_a\\_review\\_that\\_does\\_not\\_meet\\_your\\_review\\_guidelines\\_how\\_can\\_i\\_report\\_this](http://www.tripadvisor.com/ContactUs?topic=someone_posted_a_review_that_does_not_meet_your_review_guidelines_how_can_i_report_this)

## Positive reviews

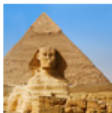
Although it may not seem immediately necessary, it is just as important for management to respond to *positive* reviews as well as negative. This tells consumers that the hotel not only cares about their guests and their reputation, but that they are also fully abreast of the social media that they themselves are using.

Here are some tips for handling positive reviews:

1. If someone takes the time to leave a positive review – how much time does it really take for you to say thank you? Make it a weekly part of your routine. Doing this will take you less than an hour a week.
2. Did you get an email or comment card praising your staff or complimenting you on your premises? Reply, thank them, and provide them a link to a place where they can share their comments online. A simple “Thank you for your kind comments, if you find yourself with a few spare minutes, we’d love it if you could share your feedback here [www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com)” will do wonders for increasing the positive reviews your hotel receives on the site.
3. Don’t just copy and paste a generic reply – personalise the reviewer’s comments. This will make the reviewer feel valued and they will be far more likely to return and tell their friends about their positive experience at your hotel.

To put this into context, here is an example of a positive consumer review.




**“ Great Place, glad we stayed there ”**



**2304fish** 9 contributions  
New Jersey  
Jun 28, 2009

Save Review

My son and I were travelling Australia and booked 3 nights at the Hauborside. I upgraded to Harbor view. It is well worth the money to have the view. I don't know what the other rooms were like but ours was like this. The view and balcony were fabulous, can't remember what floor but I think there was 2 floor above us. Getting off the elevator was a little disappointing, the ceilings were low in the hallway and lighting was dim, with a slight musty smell, but once in the room everything was better. The beds were unbelievable, I don't like soft mattresses but these beds were like sleeping on clouds. I wish I stayed there after visiting the outback not before. I could have used the luxury after Ayers rock. The staff was very accomodating, check in and out was a breeze. There was an Asian girl at the counter and her smile went from ear to ear. A little too much all the time, but it put smiles on our faces everytime we saw her. We couldn't help but laugh, she was so pleasant and smilly. The first night we arrived it was rainy and the staff lent us an umbrella. They have shuttle buses leaving every hour to and from town.(free). The drivers were pleasant and even one time there was too many people for the shuttle and the driver made 2 trips. You might be able to walk downtown, don't think it's far for someone who enjoys walking and has the time. We hired a taxi to take us to the marina one morning only \$10.00 and to the airport \$15.00. Our 2 full days we had tours so we really didn't get to use the facilities at the hotel (resturant,pool, there is no gym).

**My ratings for this hotel**

<span style="color: green;">●●●●●</span> Value	<span style="color: green;">●●●●●</span> Service
<span style="color: green;">●●●●○</span> Rooms	
<span style="color: green;">●●●●●</span> Location	
<span style="color: green;">●●●●○</span> Cleanliness	

**And here is the response from the hotel manager.**

Management response from General Manager  
(Management representative)  
*Jun 29, 2009*  
Dear 2304FISH,

I am so glad that you enjoyed your time in Cairns and also The Mercure Harbourside.

I love the photo's that you took from your room, they turned out great and really highlight how great our location is.

The views over the mountains are just as good on sunset and of an evening the city lights light up the night.

I will let my receptionist know that her smile made your day. She does smile alot but it is just natural for her...That's what Cairns does to you...

Thank you for taking the time to write a review on our hotel and I do hope that you have the opportunity to visit us again in the furture.

Best Regards

*This response is the subjective opinion of the management representative and not of TripAdvisor LLC.*

New users are viewing and joining TripAdvisor every day and will see this great response from the hotel's General Manager.

## What now?

1. If you're not already – get ready to get online! Remember, hotel management should be viewing social media such as TripAdvisor regularly. Designate CGC responsibility for your hotel: General Manager and Sales & Marketing Director, for example, and lock this in as a weekly task. [Please review 'Join the Conversation', the CGC for hotels guide for more information on how to access and contribute to TripAdvisor.]
2. Contact the Online Marketing team if you have any questions. Plus, feel free to send us through your drafted responses for proofreading or advice before posting them online. For more information visit the Hotel Reviews page under Online Marketing.
3. Have you published a good management response?

## Points to remember

Finally, to reiterate some important points to remember when responding to positive or negative reviews:

- Don't ignore bad or good reviews – they're seen by hundreds, even thousands of people
- Be honest – if something needs to be addressed, admit it
- Be relevant – if someone complains about the quality or service of the breakfast, don't talk about new bedspreads
- Don't blame others – take responsibility for the issue and say how you are working to fix it

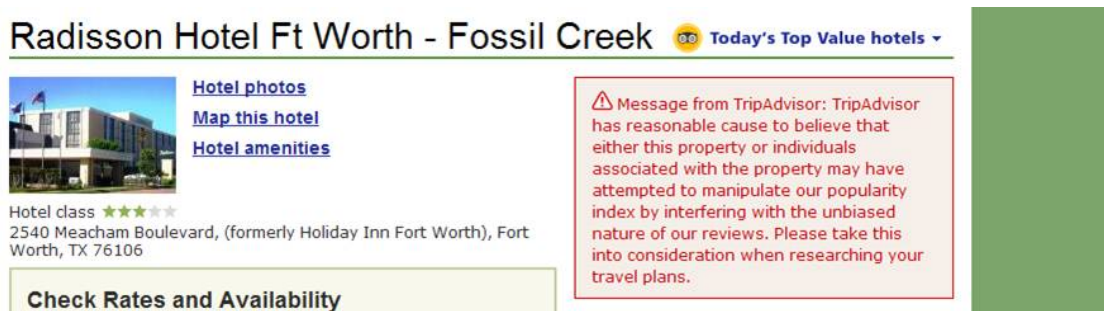
- NEVER argue with the customer
- ALWAYS be courteous
- ALWAYS spell check your response – responses should look professional and reflect the amount of time put into composing them
- ALWAYS welcome guests back to your hotel
- No matter how great the temptation – NEVER review your own hotel or write a deliberately negative review of a competitor.

## Writing fake hotel reviews

It is not acceptable for any hotel to write fake reviews designed to improve their popularity rankings or hurt competitors. Not only is this a waste of time and resources, but it is also extremely unethical and there are real penalties for hotels who are found to be doing it.

TripAdvisor now posts disclaimers to warn customers of hotels they suspect of writing fake reviews. The red disclaimers near the names of hotels show that TripAdvisor has a problem with fake reviews regarding that particular hotel.

### Example of a Tripadvisor fake reviews disclaimer



The screenshot shows a TripAdvisor listing for "Radisson Hotel Ft Worth - Fossil Creek" with a "Today's Top Value hotels" badge. On the left, there is a photo of the hotel, a "Hotel class" of 4 stars, and the address "2540 Meacham Boulevard, (formerly Holiday Inn Fort Worth), Fort Worth, TX 76106". Below the address is a "Check Rates and Availability" button. On the right, a red-bordered box contains a warning message: "Message from TripAdvisor: TripAdvisor has reasonable cause to believe that either this property or individuals associated with the property may have attempted to manipulate our popularity index by interfering with the unbiased nature of our reviews. Please take this into consideration when researching your travel plans."

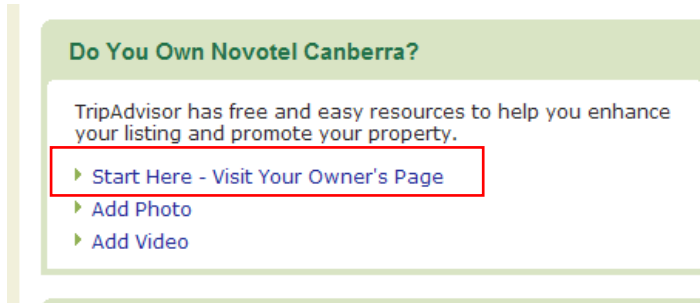
It is crucial that only genuine content appears on sites like Tripadvisor.

If you suspect a competitor has posted fake reviews about your hotel, please contact Tripadvisor directly using the appropriate channels on the site.

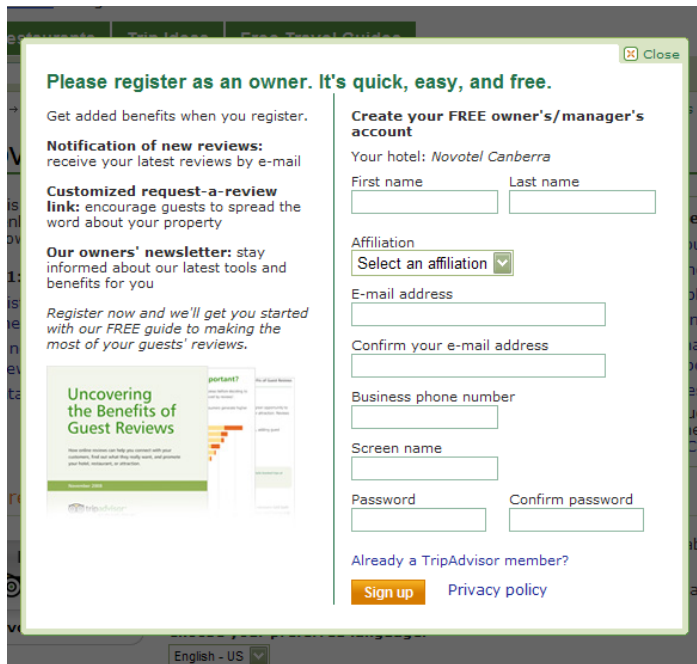


## How to Respond to a Review

1. Go to your hotel page on TripAdvisor and click on ‘Start Here – Visit Your Owner’s Page’ at the bottom of the page.



2. A pop-up will appear asking you to register as an owner – fill in your details and click ‘sign up’. You will then need to activate your account (they will send you an email with a url within it, which you need to click on to continue).



3. From here, select ‘Respond to a review’ from the Step 2: Engage column.

### - Business Resources

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On this page you will find a set of resources that will help to promote your business and enhance your listing on TripAdvisor. Take the following steps and start utilizing the power of the TripAdvisor traveler community:

<p><b>Step 1: Monitor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Register now as an owner or manager!</li> <li>• Get notified of guest reviews</li> <li>• Contact us</li> </ul>	<p><b>Step 2: Engage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Respond to a review</a></li> <li>• Update property details</li> <li>• Add a photo or description</li> <li>• Post a video</li> </ul>	<p><b>Step 3: Promote</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Display your awards</li> <li>• Display reviews</li> <li>• Ask guests to write a review</li> <li>• Link to TripAdvisor</li> </ul>
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**Get help**

- Dispute a review
- Ownership change
- Problems with search
- Ratings
- Management responses
- Rates and booking

For questions about another topic, go to our [Help Center](#).

4. Fill in all your review information in all fields and SUBMIT. You will receive a confirmation email when you have completed your response.

**Write a response**

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TripAdvisor allows representatives of hotel, restaurant, or attraction management to respond to reviews written about their property. Responses meeting our posting criteria will be displayed on the TripAdvisor site directly underneath the relevant review. We will not forward your response to the reviewer. We will not post responses directed solely to the author of the review. We will not post responses directed to TripAdvisor staff, or commenting about TripAdvisor policies.

Please note that TripAdvisor may contact the property to verify that you actually do represent it.

The same editorial guidelines apply to owner responses as to reviews, and responses containing any of the following will not be posted:

- Profanity or threats
- Personal insults
- Reports of violent criminal activity
- Commercial e-mail addresses or phone numbers
- Text entirely in ALL CAPS
- Hearsay
- Content not relevant to tourists
- HTML

See our [Management response guidelines](#) for more information about our editorial criteria.

All fields on this form are required.

Select the title and date of the review you are responding to from the list below:

Name of the establishment you represent:

City, state/province (if applicable) and country in which it is located:

Your connection with this establishment (e.g., owner, manager, public relations manager):

Write your response here:

5. Please note that due to Tripadvisor’s editorial approval process – and depending on how busy they are – it can take up to five days for your response to be published on the site.

## How to Set Up Your Feed – Getting Alerts From Tripadvisor

To set up Tripadvisor alerts you first need to set up an RSS feed.

First, go to your hotel 'owner's page' (link to this is found at the bottom of each hotel page).



From there, select the 'Get notified of new reviews' option.

Then select the type of feed you would prefer. (Google is an easy one, but note you may need to set up an account if you don't already have one) and click on the icon on the left hand side.

From there, you need to select whether you prefer the *homepage view* or the *reader view* by clicking on the relevant button. If you choose to do this for more than one hotel then each hotel you do this for will be added to your feed. You can also add feeds from any other site or blog here, too.

To then access your feed, you simply need to go to that feed's web address

<http://www.google.com/reader/view/#overview-page> .

Add it to your favourites and make a point of checking it each week. All new content added to Tripadvisor regarding your hotel/s will feature here so you can see it at a glance rather than having to go through the steps of going into Tripadvisor.