

# How To Win Digital and Real-World Business with Local Reviews

By Jay Baer & Daniel Lemin of Convince & Convert



# Introduction

Marketing a local business today is harder than ever for two primary reasons: trust and context.

The nature of consumer trust now overwhelmingly favors peer-to-peer feedback and content — especially online reviews. Studies show that consumers now trust information from other consumers more than any other source of information, including aunts, fathers, and friends.

Context has shifted too, as consumers aren't looking for information in the same places. Where a consumer once started their search for a local business with a question to a friend or family member, they can now turn to online reviews for that same information, or for example, to research the best dishes available in a restaurant. Consumers today have an insatiable appetite for information about local businesses.

To capitalize on the opportunity presented by these changes, marketers must position trustworthy content in the right context for the consumer to see it, remember it, and act on it.

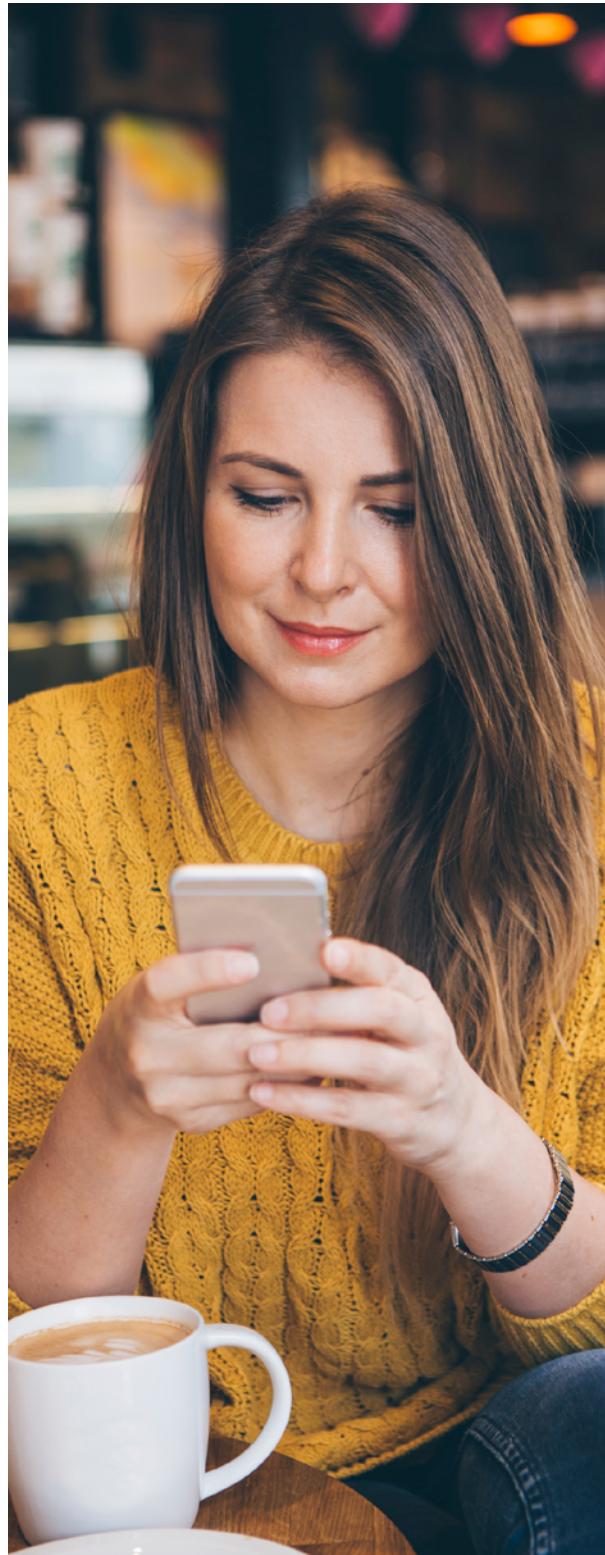
So get good at this new reality — and fast.



**Jay Baer**  
President,  
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Head of Consulting,  
Convince & Convert



# Shifting Sands of Consumer Behavior



Online ratings and reviews have disrupted the traditional local search and marketing funnel by introducing the complexity of peer-to-peer feedback platforms. This disintermediates the usual relationship a brand has with consumers and creates some frustration for marketers.

There's no need to "burn down" your marketing house. But you should understand how customers are using location reviews and establish processes for managing, monitoring, and responding to them quickly.

## Three Ways Reviews Can Help Your Business



### Brand Reputation

Monitoring and responding to reviews can increase ratings over time and create a better online brand perception.



### Business Operations

Your customers are offering insight into your business with every review they write. By analyzing their sentiments and understanding your strengths and weaknesses, you can take action to improve your business.



### Traffic and Conversion Rates

Generating and publishing reviews to your website can help you win more traffic (we've seen them increase click-through-rates by as much as 153% in search results)<sup>1</sup>. They can also increase conversions when shared on check-out pages, in marketing emails, or in paid ad displays.

**85% of consumers trust reviews as much as recommendations from friends and family members.**

-[BrightLocal](#)

<sup>1</sup> Yext Search Behavior Study, September 2016

# Consumers Have Embraced Local Reviews Rapidly

Shocking though it might seem, 90% of consumers say their buying decisions are influenced by reviews. And 86% say negative reviews influence their purchase choices.<sup>2</sup>

## Has reading POSITIVE/NEGATIVE reviews influenced your buying decisions?



As the diversity of rating and review content grows online, so does the consumer's appetite to consume vast amounts of it. Today, consumers seek out 10.4 pieces of information, on average, before making a local purchase. That number doubled from the year before, and reflects the new demand for data and information about your local brand experience.<sup>3</sup> A consumer's desire to research purchase decisions is not endless, however, and the consequence is that they have come to rely on reviews to battle decision fatigue. It creates a signal that influences whether a buyer considers your local business, or not.

That purchase journey itself is also far less linear today than it has traditionally been, which further complicates marketers' lives. But the strategies and tactics you have studied and built capabilities around for the last decade are still valid and useful.

In fact, search marketing — a discipline with a long history — still plays a central role in the consumer's local purchase decisions. For most consumers, the decision journey for a local purchase involves multiple information sources and devices, but search outperforms any other information source by more than double.<sup>4</sup> With consumers increasingly relying on reviews to make purchase decisions and search engines devoting significant search result real estate to displaying them, reviews have become a key component of search marketing today. This has two key impacts on your brand, your marketing efforts, and your success with local search and reviews.

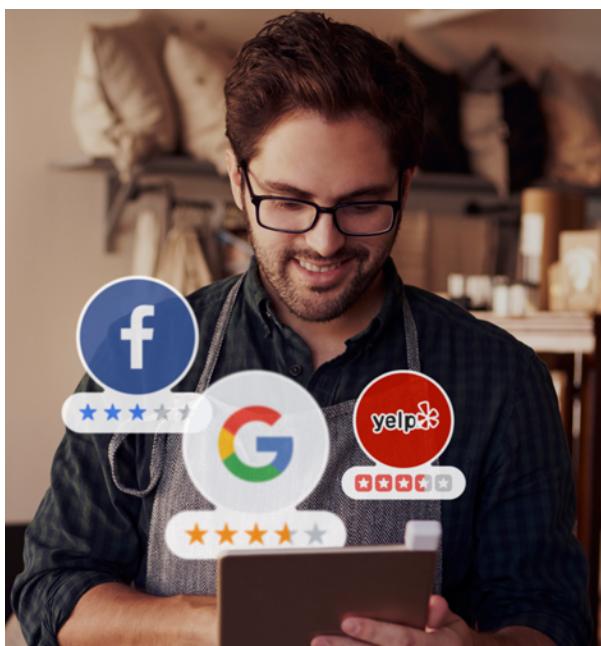
<sup>2</sup> "Customer Service and Business Results," Dimensional Research. 2013.

<sup>3</sup> "The Zero Moment of Truth Study," Think With Google. 2011.

<sup>4</sup> "Survey: Under 40 Percent Start A Local Search With A Search Engine," Search Engine Land. 2016.

## Impact One:

Search and map results on mobile and desktop now include star ratings of your locations. These star ratings are crucial to the search user experience. If you aren't "starring in search," you're missing a major opportunity to position your locations and your brand — and you could be losing out on significant foot traffic.



## Impact Two:

When consumers leave search results to dig in a little deeper on your business, they'll often end up on a local listings site like Yelp. There, their attention will shift from the star rating to the written reviews of your locations. What are consumers saying about you? Are you taking advantage of every opportunity to engage with consumers?

Time is most certainly of the essence when it comes to local purchase decisions, with 63% of decisions reached in less than an hour.<sup>5</sup> That means local decisions are generally made quickly, without another opportunity for you to nurture them along in the decision-making process. If you lose the customer at this juncture, they're not likely to stop and come back to their decision later on. The time frame for consumers making decisions today has been compressed.

Put another way, your battle for prospective customers will be won or lost in search and with online reviews. If you lose that opportunity to bring them to your doorstep, you won't have a chance to surprise, delight, or disrupt them with your products and services.

<sup>5</sup> ["Survey: Under 40 Percent Start A Local Search With A Search Engine."](#)  
Search Engine Land. 2016.

# Search Engines are Changing the Rules

Search platforms — especially Google — have not overlooked the opportunity to deliver a more relevant and useful experience to their users. They've fully embraced ratings and reviews. Most local searches on Google today serve up no fewer than three permutations of online star ratings:

## 1 Reviews from the merchant's own website

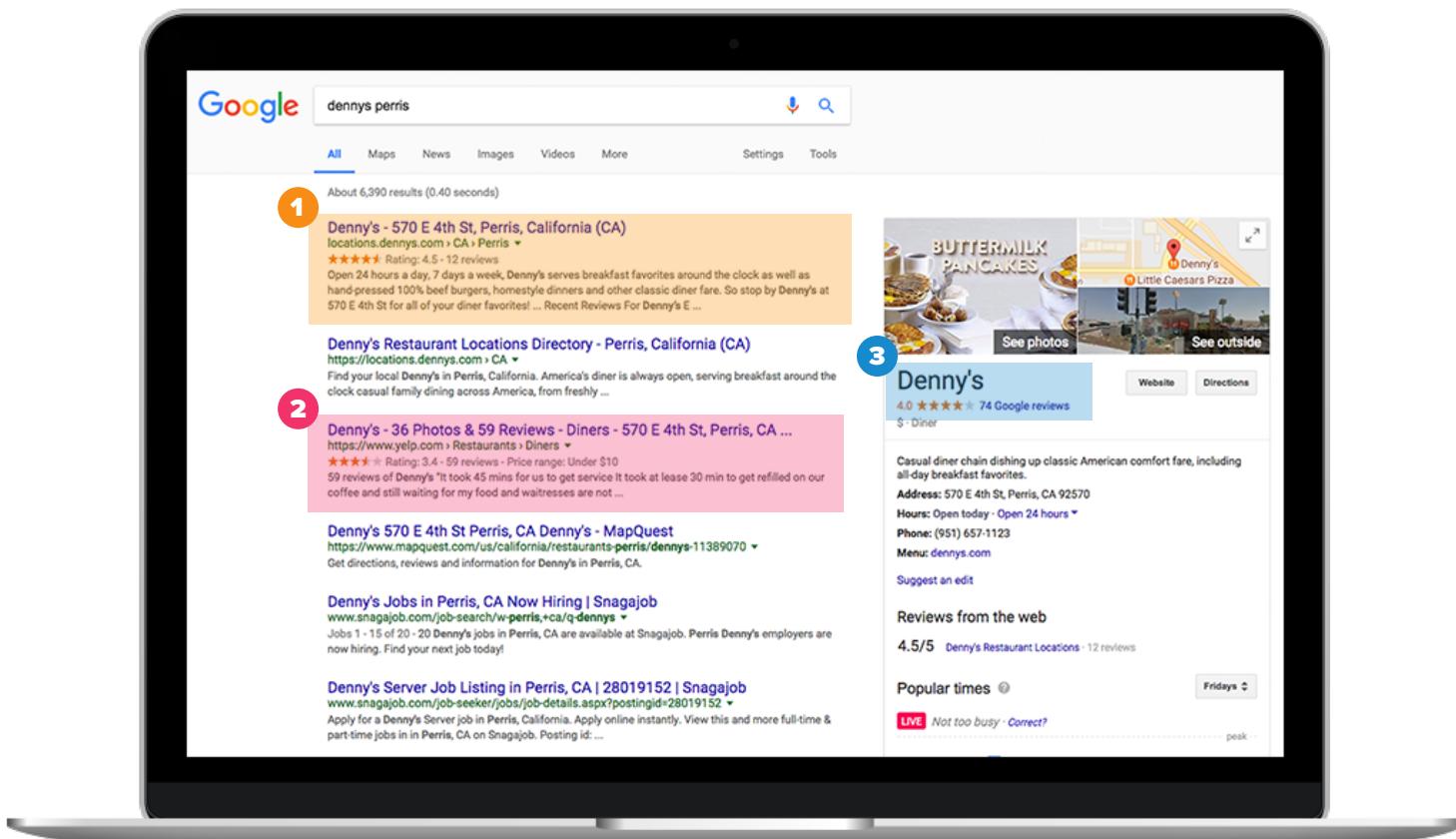
reflected as a star rating on the rich search snippet or in the Knowledge Card.

## 2 Reviews from third-party websites

like Yelp, displayed as rich search snippets often among the top three search positions and the Knowledge Card.

## 3 Google My Business ratings

displayed in the Knowledge Card, which are derived from your Google reviews.



# How to Maximize Your Digital Presence With Online Reviews

Google puts a lot of emphasis on ratings and reviews content because consumers trust reviews to help them make better decisions quickly. To take full advantage of the new ratings and reviews paradigm, you must realign your marketing efforts around three new key ratings and reviews concepts. By addressing these key areas, you'll be on your way to mastering your rating and review presence — which is key to getting more foot traffic.

## **Gain Deeper Insight**

Consumers shouldn't be the only ones using your reviews to make decisions about your business. Customer reviews hold valuable insight into what people do and don't like about your brand experience. By reading through your reviews, you'll discover which areas you're excelling in, and also figure out what issues are harming your brand's reputation.

You also need to gauge where your brand's reputation stands in relation to competitors. Give yourself a good grasp of the competitive landscape so you can see how you stack-up against those around you.

## **Hug Your Haters**

No matter how well you run your business, you will inevitably receive negative reviews. It happens to the best of us. Responding to negative reviews allows you to resolve issues as they arise with the goal of winning those customers over — and making your business run more smoothly. Businesses who respond to reviews are 68% more likely to raise their rating by a half-star in six months.<sup>6</sup> So hug your haters by reaching out and rectifying issues. It's a surefire way to improve the quality of your service, and increase revenue by boosting customer loyalty and retention.



<sup>6</sup> [“Online reputation management: Estimating the impact of management responses on consumer reviews.”](#) Proserpio & Zervas, 2016

When it comes to reviews, time is of the essence — and you want to ensure your response has maximum impact. Responding to reviews within 24 hours allows you to address issues while the customer's experience is still fresh in his or her mind.

Lastly, always remember to show appreciation, regardless of the reviewer's sentiment. Telling customers how much you value their feedback can go a long way in minimizing the impact of negative reviews and signaling to potential customers how much you care.

### **Encourage Feedback**

Your first priority for maximizing a ratings and reviews presence on Google starts with something pretty simple: your own website. In late 2016, Google amended its treatment of Schema.org markup for online reviews and clarified what it considers a relevant review on your website.<sup>7</sup> In order for reviews from your own website to display in organic search, current rules require the reviews to be “first-party” — meaning they cannot be pulled in from a site like Yelp via a widget. Some platforms tempt marketers with the ability to surface only positive reviews, which creates an inaccurate snapshot of your brand and customer experience. This also violates Google’s publisher guidelines. To make the most of this opportunity, you’ll need to collect your own first-party feedback — good and bad — and host those reviews directly on your website using a tool like Yext Reviews. This ensures that you get full credit for review content on your website.

**Answering a forum complaint increases advocacy by 25%.**

**Not answering decreases advocacy by 38%**

*-Hug Your Haters: How to Embrace Complaints and Keep Your Customers,*  
**Jay Baer**

<sup>7</sup> [“Google updates local reviews schema guidelines.”](#)  
Search Engine Land. 2016.



Yext Reviews is a comprehensive review management solution designed to generate authentic reviews directly from your customers, ensure your ratings across the PowerListings® Network are consistent and compelling, enhance customer relationships, and gain valuable insights that help you learn, improve, and win. Let Yext help you put the best version of your business on the map so you can star in search.

#### Stay informed and act on customer feedback.

There's no shortage of places online where consumers can leave you feedback. And staying on top of it all, for every one of your locations, can seem nearly impossible. **Review Monitoring** leverages Yext's direct integrations with publishers in the PowerListings Network, pulling all your reviews, for every location, into a single dashboard — so you stay informed in real time, at scale.

#### Engage with customers on their terms.

**Review Response** makes it easy to continue the conversation, improve relationships with your customers and show prospects and customers alike that you are listening. Not convinced? When you respond to online reviews, customers are 16% more likely to recommend your business.

#### Understand customer sentiment.

Your customers have already told you exactly how to improve their experience. With **Sentiment Analysis** in Yext Reviews, you can identify trending keywords, view modifiers related to those keywords, and see how those keywords correlate with positive or negative reviews.

#### Measure and act on ratings and reviews at scale.

Get a bird's eye view of your listings across all your locations. With **Review Insights**, you

can see the total count and distribution of your ratings on your own website and across the PowerListings Network. See how you compare to your peers with **Industry Benchmarking**, and how you stack-up to the local competition with **Competitive Intelligence**, to give your ratings context — and uncover areas for improvement.

#### Generate powerful customer reviews.

To show star ratings in organic search results, Google requires that you generate your own reviews directly from your customers. **Review Generation** makes it easy to collect reviews from customers — any way you choose.

#### Spam? No, ma'am.

Yext's **Review Quarantine** feature allows you to screen the reviews you generate for up to seven days before they go live, and automatically flags inauthentic or inappropriate reviews for removal. This quarantine period also allows you to address authentic but negative feedback before it goes live.

#### See stars in the Search Engine Results Page (SERP).

Once you generate reviews from your customers, Yext's pre-built **Review Publishing** widgets make it easy to add those reviews to your own website and location pages.

ated their Name, Country, State

Welcome to One Madison Avenue. We put business on the map.  
yw

# yext



The Yext Knowledge Engine helps you manage the public facts about your brand everywhere they appear online, so you can drive face-to-face interactions that boost brand awareness, drive foot traffic, and increase sales. Our mission is to put you in control, everywhere, and put every customer engagement to work for your brand — no matter where it takes place. That translates into more business and more happy customers finding you in the moments that matter.

# yext

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