

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU RECEIVE A NEGATIVE REVIEW

InsideOut Solutions guide for the savvy innkeeper on what to do with negative reviews - October 7th, 2009

The Internet has many advantages for the hospitality industry. With a good website and marketing plan, small inns may reach out to potential clients around the globe. The more savvy travelers become, the more they are using the Internet to find good inns and good deals. Travelers may then share their experiences with a much broader audience than ever before; in addition to friends and family who will hear about the trip first hand, travelers may submit a review of an inn on several sites, such as Trip Advisor, Yelp.com or BedandBreakfast.com. Now, thousands of people can read whether or not a guest had a positive experience at your inn.

When guests are perfectly satisfied, there is no better publicity. They rave about the inn, the innkeeper, the food, the rooms, the location... you name it. Prospective travelers researching online will see these positive reviews, and as a result, your business could grow.

On the flip side, when a person feels disappointed about his or her experience at your inn, the same tools are available for them to leave a scathing review. In addition to friends and family who hear about the dissatisfaction first hand, thousands of people read about it online; and your business could be affected.

So, what can you do when you discover a negative comment about your business online? What follows are a few simple guidelines to help you through this process:

BE VIGILANT:

You can't respond to a review if you don't know about it. Have systems to catch on-line reviews of your business. The following can be useful:

- Google Alerts - provides regular email or RSS updates of Google search results
- Technorati - search engine specific to blogs. Setup an RSS feed for your name.
- FriendFeed Search - examines Flickr, Delicious, YouTube and other sites.
- Talk to your online marketer about other online tools.
- Twitter – Tweetbeep.com does just what Google Alerts does but for Twitter.

READ COMMENTS:

- Don't Panic: panic inspires rash action.
- Avoid Impulsive Response: take time to calm down, think, and come up with a plan of action.
- Honest Evaluation: is there any validity to the negative review? Ask a trusted, impartial third party.
- Take Responsibility: acknowledge what could have been done differently.
- Timely: don't be rash, but be sure to act swiftly. You don't want a negative review to go ignored.

RESPOND:

- Be Gracious: be polite at all times
- Be Thankful: thank the person for the review, and for any positive remarks made.
- Apologize: you are sincerely sorry they had a negative experience.
- Course of Action: explain how you intend to address the problem so that it never happens again.
- Communicate: offer a way for unhappy client to communicate with you directly.

RESOLVE THE ISSUE:

Share complaint with staff.

Fix it:

- Hot water in short supply? Put in a larger/newer water heater.
- Staff was rude? Train them.
- Bed was uncomfortable? Could some rooms have different mattresses?
- Food was terrible? Ah, now you're getting personal. Emphasize that you can meet special dietary needs with advance notice. Come up with a few new recipes. But in this case, a sincere apology that they were dissatisfied is best.
- Document the process whenever possible, using photographs, videos, and interviews.

FIGHT BACK:

- Let the Internet community know the issue is resolved.
- Respond to comment on the site where it appeared, offering proof of how problem has been resolved.
- Positive campaign: ask all future, satisfied guests to leave positive reviews on that specific website.
- Blog: if you have a blog on your business website, write about how the problem was resolved. Provide evidence.
- Market yourself: if you feel that real damage was done to your business from the review, market your business in new places. Contact the local newspaper. Invite professional reviewers/journalists to stay at your inn.

Remember, one of the most important things you can do throughout this process is to listen and be gracious. Prospective guests want to see this more than anything. Most people understand that sometimes things go awry, and that both guests and innkeepers can have bad days. What they want are assurances that if something happens during their stay, you will listen to them, be respectful, and do your best to resolve the problem.

Inns and B&Bs are, by nature, personal businesses. Innkeepers tend to be very much a part of the experience, and it is important to not take the review personally. This is especially true if the complaint is more subjective than functional. You may never again get the business of the person who wrote the negative online review, and that's okay. Sometimes a guest and an inn are simply not a good fit. However, you don't want one vocal person's opinion to impact your business.

General Pointers:

- It is best not to publicly offer a pat response with a coupon for a free stay. This could inspire some folks to write negative reviews simply to get something for nothing.
- If you feel the review is a hoax, or were written by a competitor, know that this is extremely difficult to prove. Contact the organization that posted the negative review and communicate your concerns directly with them.
- Each review website has their own policy regarding reviews. Familiarize yourself with them.
- Don't go negative in a response, as it will never turn out good.

About InsideOut Solutions

Founded in 1995, InsideOut Solutions is a destination-marketing firm offering Web, Print and Marketing services nationwide. InsideOut has created and implemented dynamic marketing programs for hundreds of clients in the US, Canada, Ireland, Bahamas and Mexico.

At InsideOut Solutions, our expertise is in connecting you with your target market. We have become a leader in the destination marketing industry because of our ability to provide customized solutions to companies of virtually any size or sector, from small family owned Bed and Breakfasts to multi-city tourism marketing groups.

InsideOut Solutions experience is reflected in our commitment to excellence, from beginning to end, in every one of our working relationships. We strictly adhere to ethical business principles and realize that the secret to success on any project is applying expertise while exercising control in accordance with client objectives.

We complete an extensive analysis of each client's needs to design a uniquely tailored plan of action. Meticulous quality control assures that specific project goals coincide perfectly with client needs. Our goal is always to not only reach, but also go beyond, our clients' expectations.