REVINATE

How to Respond to Hotel Reviews

A Guide by Revinate



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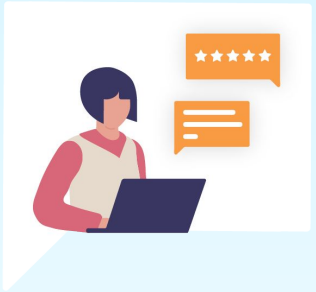
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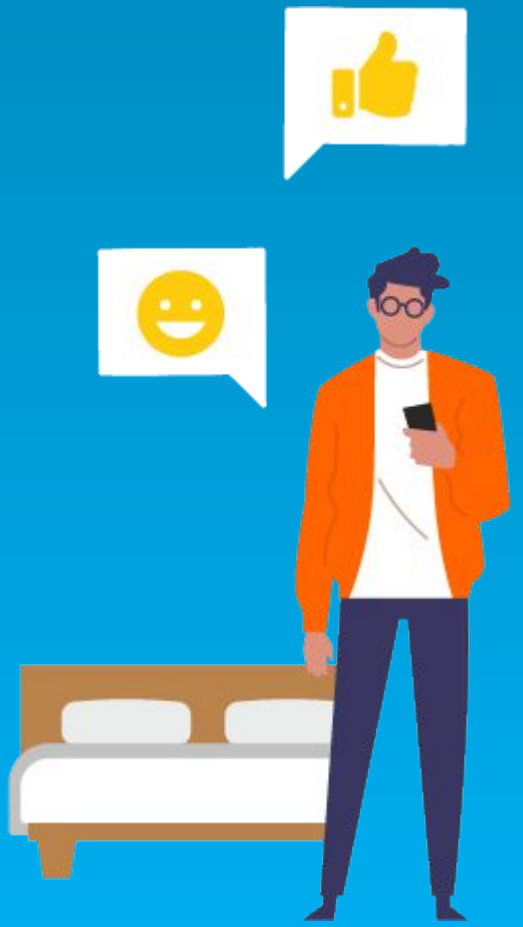




01 Introduction

From the luxury resort to the neighborhood bed and breakfast, hotels all have one thing in common: Guests. Your biggest priority is ensuring their satisfaction. You want every guest to have a great stay because you care about their happiness and want them to become loyal customers. But deep down, you also want them to spread positive feedback about your hotel.

Today, the guest experience is more visible than ever before. Reviews are front and center for the world to see, whether on dedicated review sites or OTAs.
If you provide a great guest experience, a 5-star review is likely your reward. Underwhelm a guest and you'll have to suffer the consequences of a bad review, which may cost you future bookings.





When Revinate launched in 2009, online review sites and OTAs were just beginning to become popular with travelers. Today, they are a huge part of the travel ecosystem. According to research conducted by TripAdvisor, 96% of travelers consider reviews when researching a hotel and 79% will read between six and 12 reviews before making a purchasing decision.

Proactively managing online reviews shouldn't be considered a chore. Responding to reviews has tremendous benefits. In addition to driving future bookings, reading and responding to reviews will give you a view into the guest experience that you would otherwise not have. With this perspective, you can know where your hotel's strengths and weaknesses lie and how you should focus your efforts to improve your offering.

Ensuring your hotel remains competitive within the ever expanding landscape of hotel review sites has become a key priority for hoteliers across the world. In this guide, you'll learn how to respond to online reviews and why nailing the response is so important.

02 Reputation myths busted

Myth #1: “People only write reviews when they want to complain or want to get something for free.”

We analyzed 50 million emails for our 2020 Reputation Benchmark Report and globally, the average review score is 4.2, which is quite positive. When we look at the data by region, the lowest average review score is in the US and Canada (4.0), followed by Europe (4.1) with the highest at 4.4, in Asia Pacific.

So why do people write reviews? They do it to help other travelers, to share tips and great experiences or just to reward staff for a job well done.



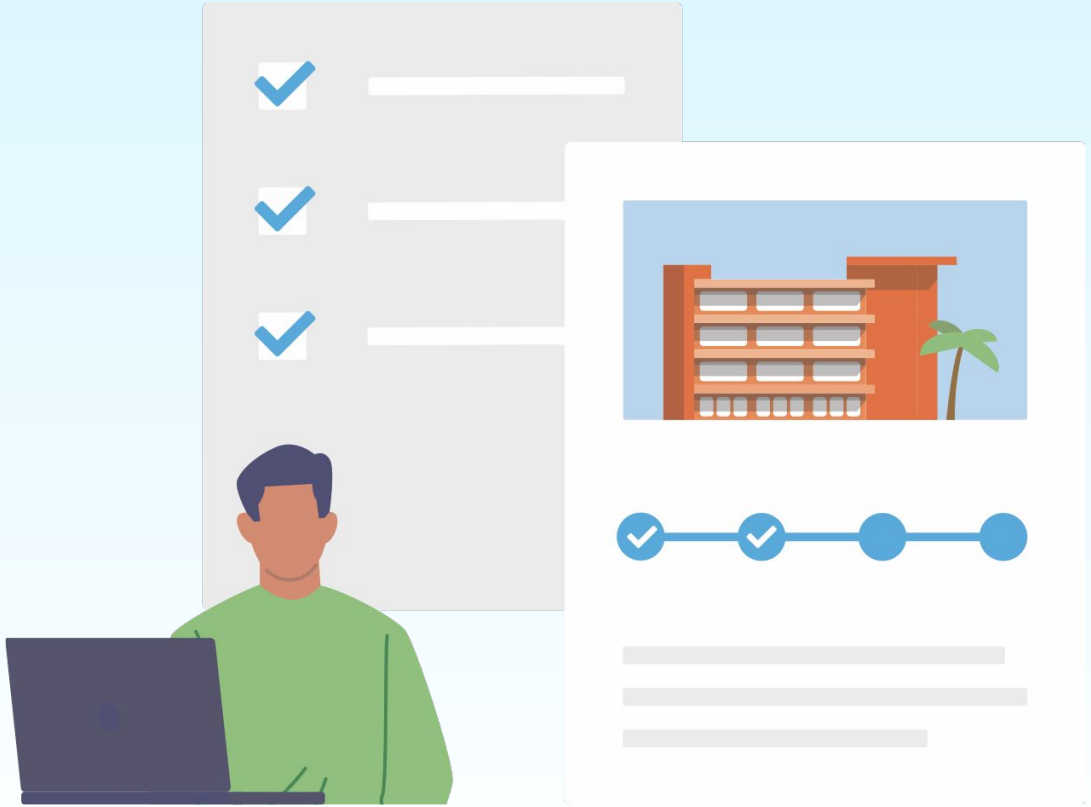


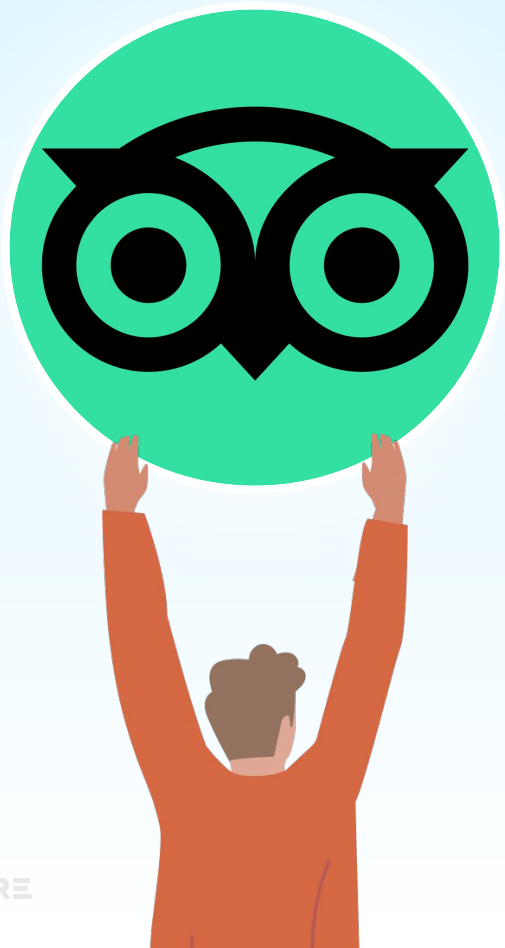
Myth #2: “No one reads review responses.”

Don’t use this myth as an excuse to avoid responding to your reviews. According to a Cornell study, responding to reviews, particularly negative reviews, improves the consumer’s perception of a business, as measured by increases in rating scores. Furthermore, 78 percent of consumers say that seeing management respond to online reviews makes them believe that the business cares more about them.

Myth #3: “Online reviews were a big deal a decade ago but they’re not as popular today.”

False! The number of reviews published on review sites and OTAs has been growing year-over-year for a decade. Covid-19 halted that growth since so few people traveled, but we expect to see volumes return to pre-pandemic levels in 2022 as travelers return to hotels and want to share their experiences





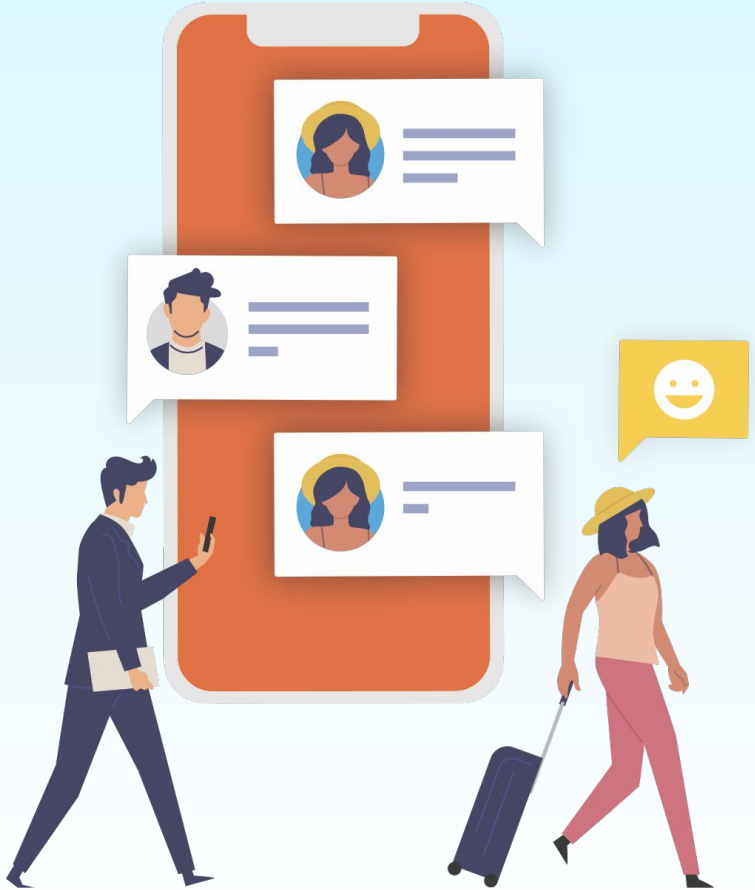
Myth #4: “TripAdvisor is the only site that really matters.”

The online review landscape has changed a lot over the last decade. While TripAdvisor used to be the biggest online review site, Google has now taken the lead. Hoteliers should respond to reviews on all sites where you have reviews. Prioritize your time according to review site popularity, but leave responses on all sites so it’s clear you’re paying attention to guest feedback. Here’s a look at the pre-pandemic numbers:

REVIEW SITE	VOLUME	PERCENTAGE	Y/Y GROWTH
Google	30,055,805	31.7%	+75%
Booking.com	28,301,892	29.9%	+10%
TripAdvisor	11,328,252	11.9%	-21%

Myth #5: “I need to respond to every review.”

A study by Cornell University found a positive correlation between response rates and bookings revenue. That is, hotels that respond to 40-45% of reviews may see up to a 2.2x lift in bookings revenue, as compared to hotels that don’t respond to reviews at all. However, the study noted that there are diminishing revenue returns for hotels that respond to more than 40-45% of their online reviews. So, the truth is that you don’t need to respond to every single review.



03 Reputation best practices

Accept that online reviews are influencing prospective guests

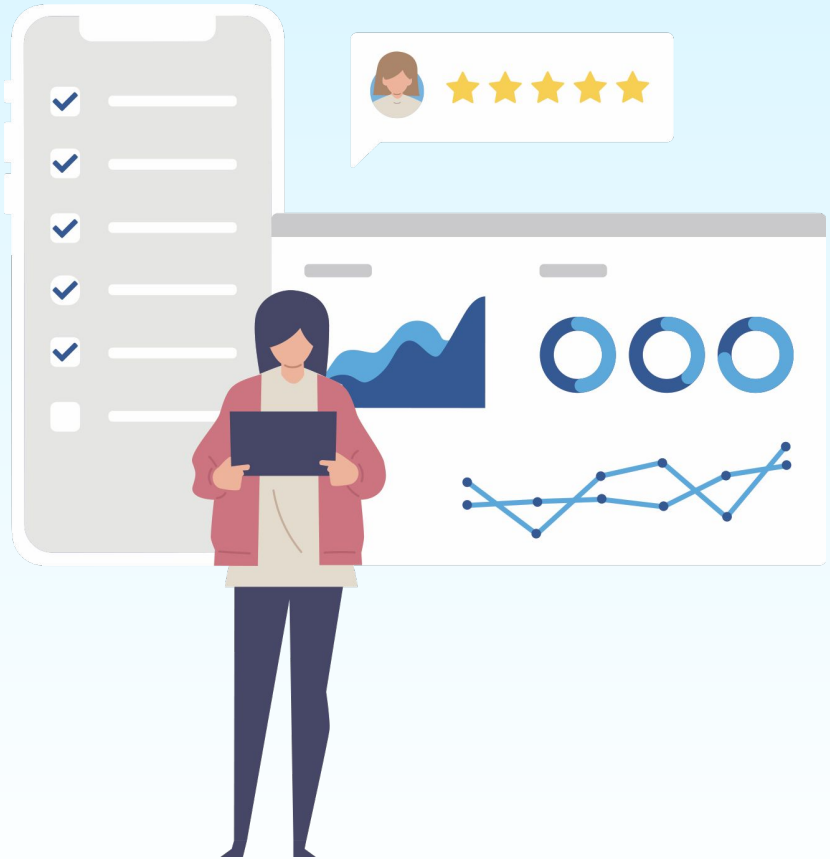
It's tempting to dismiss online reviews and discount review sites as online destinations for disgruntled guests. However, online reviews have been growing in popularity for more than a dozen years and study after study proves their influence. Even if you don't visit online review sites when picking your hotels, the vast majority of travelers do seek out past guests' opinions. The sooner you accept that online reviews need to be part of your hotel's sales and marketing strategy, the sooner you can begin using them to your advantage.



“Online reputation is important because by showing your guests that you’re embracing their feedback, you are also encouraging repeat visits and attracting new guests as they benefit from the publicly available reviews”



Daniel Sampaoli
Customer Success Manager
@ Revinate



Actively monitor online reviews

Monitoring online review sites isn't something you do when you have a minute. It's something that you actively plan for and do every day. In fact, many hotels and brands have someone dedicated to this role. In some hotels, it falls to the General Manager or Head of Marketing.

In 2020, hotels, on average, received 29 reviews per month, down substantially from pre-Covid days. But travel is picking up and even with smaller volumes, it's best to automate the process, using an online reputation management platform, like Revinate.

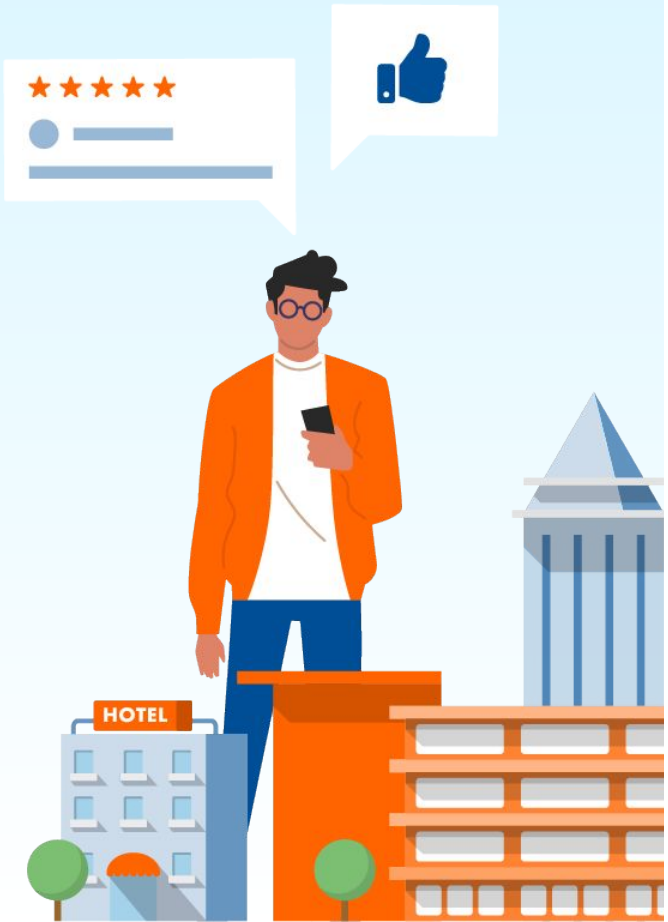
Revinate Guest Feedback will help you monitor all the online review sites so you never miss a review. It will also help you respond to reviews, action critical feedback, set goals and track your competitive set.

Respond to online reviews

The best way to show your guests that you care about their experience is to respond to reviews. Responding to reviews sends the clear message that you are looking for feedback, take all guest feedback seriously and will use it to improve the guest experience. According to a 2018 Harvard Business Review study, when hotels start responding to reviews, their ratings increase, on average, by 0.12 stars.

In 2020, hoteliers responded to, on average, 33% of reviews. Revinate makes it easy to respond to online reviews by allowing you to view and respond to dozens of review sites within Revinate Guest Feedback's portal, saving you the time of bouncing to all the different review sites. Revinate also has a ticketing system, which allows you to assign tasks based on feedback.





Encourage fresh reviews

Because prospective guests are searching for validation, and because review site algorithms take volume and review age into account when ranking hotels, it's a great idea to encourage your guests to write reviews when they check out and return home.

Hotels that use Revinate Guest Feedback can use the content syndication feature to turn private survey feedback into reviews on Google or TripAdvisor. Customers can see a 409% increase in online reviews by using this feature.

Use reviews to improve the guest experience

Reviews are a treasure trove of great data that your hotel should be using to understand what guests love and where you can improve. Devote time at your daily stand up to discussing issues from online reviews. Acknowledge positive mentions of staff. Use reviews in training or onboarding exercises as real-world examples. We even see hotels using data from reviews to back up requests for capital expenditure or to determine management bonuses.

04 Responding to reviews

The way that you respond to reviews will differ depending on how the guest rated your hotel. In general, here are some best practices:

- Respond to 100 percent of negative reviews, and about 50 percent of neutral and positive reviews
- Response should come from a GM or someone on the management team
- Respond to negative feedback within 24 hours
- Be sincere, polite and professional
- Put yourself in the guest's shoes when responding



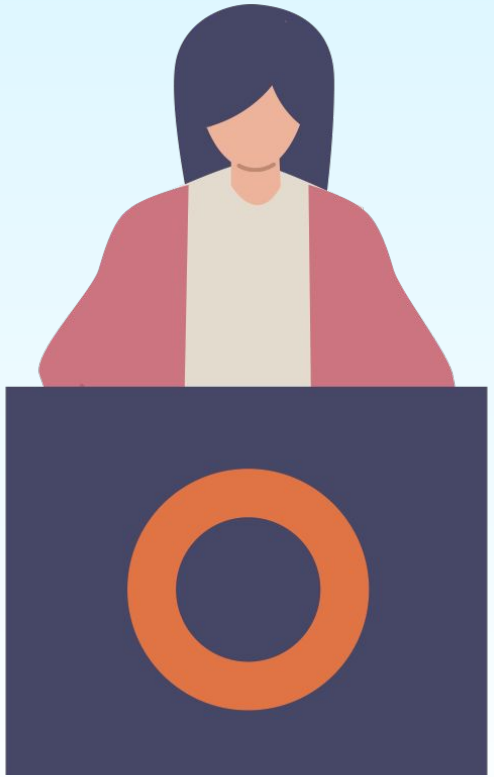
Responding to positive reviews

A 4- or 5-star rating is considered a positive review. We all love those! And while it's easy to respond to the positive reviews, we recommend that hoteliers respond to about 50%, and only as long as they can personalize the response based on details in the review. Avoid a templated response to ensure that you sound authentic. Here are our best practices for positive reviews:

1. Thank the reviewer

Your guest took the time to write a review that will be seen by thousands of prospective guests. The least you can do for this free marketing is to say "Thank You"! Here are some phrases you can use to avoid saying the same thing over and over again:

- *Thank you so much for your recent review. It made our day!*
- *Thank you for taking the time to post your review. We are so happy that you had a great time with us!*
- *Thank you so much for the kind words. We loved reading about your time spent with us.*
- *Thank you for sharing your experience.*





2. Make it personal

Pull something out of the review to let the guest know that you read the review carefully and you're not simply using a templated response. Consider your brand voice when writing a response. Here are some examples of how you can personalize the response:

- *I am so happy that you enjoyed the spa. I hope you're still feeling the effects of true relaxation.*
- *We're thrilled that you loved the room decor. We just did a remodel and agree - - the rooms look great!*
- *We loved reading that Sally made your stay great. We'll make sure she sees the review and will acknowledge her in our next team meeting.*

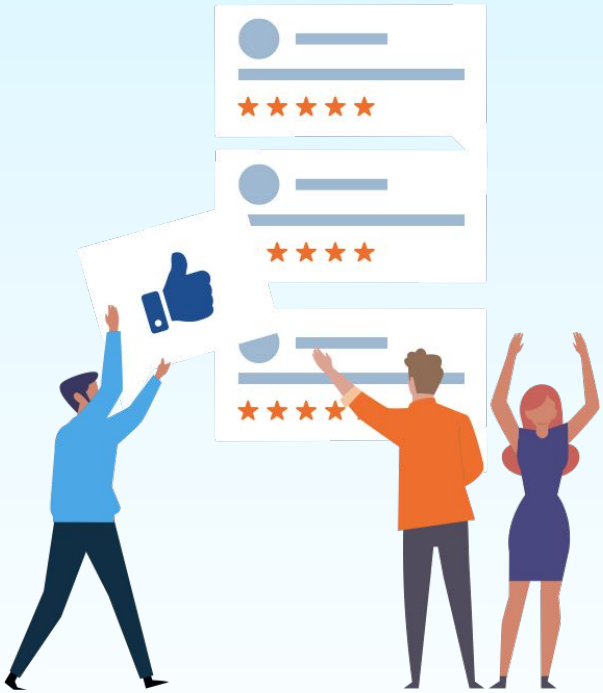
3. Invite the reviewer back

Anyone that writes a positive review should be made to feel like a VIP and invited back to the property. Here are some ways to do it in your management response:

- *I can't wait to welcome you back on your next visit.*
- *Please come back soon and reach out prior to your arrival so I can welcome you back in person.*
- *I hope you'll stay with us again when you return to {city}. I would love to welcome you back personally.*

Note: If you are a Revinate Marketing customer, you can see past reviews that your guests wrote in the Arrivals Report, allowing you to thank the guest, upon check-in, for the review and ensure that the stay is personalized accordingly.





4. Encourage further engagement

Don’t let happy guests slip away. Encourage them to ‘like’ you on Facebook or follow you on Twitter to stay abreast of hotel news and specials. You may want to say:

- *Please come back and see us again, and please let your friends know about us.*
- *Follow us on Twitter for our weekly specials. We would love to see you again soon.*
- *Don’t forget to sign up for our newsletter so you can be the first to hear about our special rates.*

Sample Positive Review Response 1

Response from XXX

Responded 2 days ago

Name,

Thank you so much for taking the time to review {hotel name}. One of the pleasures of my job is sharing guest feedback with the team and I can't wait to read this review at our next meeting. I'm so happy that you enjoyed {insert detail} and we were able to provide you with a great stay. I hope you will return soon.

Sincerely,

Your name

Sample Positive Review Response 2

Response from XXX

Responded 2 days ago

Name,

It was such a pleasure to see your review first thing this morning. Thank you so much for taking the time to review {hotel name}.

I was pleased to hear that {insert detail} hit the spot and that you'll be staying with us again when you return to town. Please feel free to ask for me when you return. I would love to put a name with a face.

Sincerely,

Your name

Sample Positive Review Response 3

Response from XXX

Responded 2 days ago

Name,

I'm so thrilled that you had a great stay with us and took the time to share your feedback. We truly appreciate it.

We hope that you will return to {hotel name} when you're back in town for more {what they loved} and {city name} love.

We look forward to hosting you again!

Sincerely,

Your name

Sample Positive Review Response 4

Response from XXX

Responded 2 days ago

Name,

I have been in this business for many years but reading great reviews never gets old. Thank you so much for taking the time to write a review and share your travel experience. We really appreciate the kind words you said about {detail from review} and will make sure the staff knows their hard work is recognized.

We look forward to seeing you when you're back in town.

Sincerely,

Your name

Responding to neutral reviews

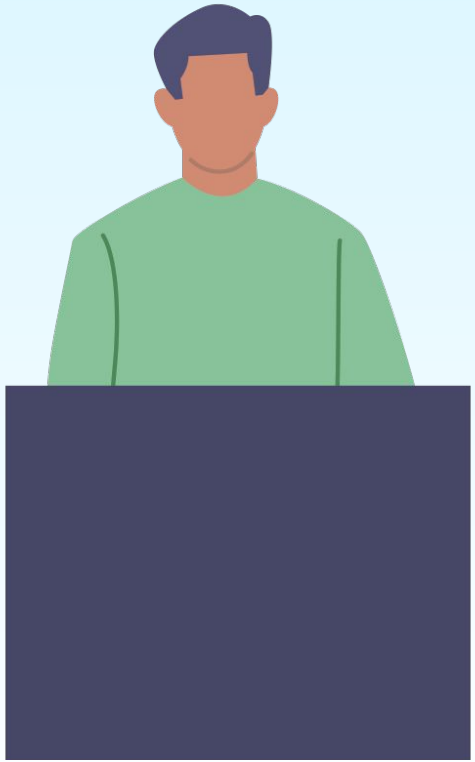
Neutral reviews typically include both positive and negative statements. One way to address mixed feedback is by using the positive sandwich method. By sandwiching your responses to the negative remarks with positive statements, you can recognize and respond to negative messages without emphasizing them.

1. Thank the guest

Address the guest by name and thank him or her for taking the time to write a review. As with any review, you should be appreciative that the guest cared enough to share their experience with other travelers.

2. Highlight the positive comments

Express delight that the guest had a good experience with some aspects of his or her stay. This personalizes the message and reminds the reader that the guest said good things about the hotel. You might say, “I am so happy to hear that you had great weather and were able to enjoy our pool and spa amenities.“





3. Address the negative comments

Apologize for the negative experiences discussed in the review, in a general way, and give details on any changes the hotel has made or intends to make. For example, “I am sorry that we missed the mark in other areas. I plan to share this feedback with staff to ensure that we address the issues immediately.”

4. Return to the positive

Highlight another positive aspect of the guest’s stay. This surrounds the negative comments with positive statements, which allows you to address issues without putting too much emphasis on any unflattering information about your property. For example, “Hopefully the warm reception you got from our Front Desk alleviated some of the frustration.”

5. Invite guest to return

Inviting your guest to return reminds the reviewer and readers that you value your guests and any feedback they have to offer. Even though this person said negative things about your hotel online, it says great things about you if you accept the feedback graciously.

Sample Neutral Review Response 1

Response from XXX

Responded 2 days ago

Name,

Thank you so much for taking the time to write a review. I was very happy to read that you enjoyed {insert detail} and will certainly let the staff know that they hit the mark there. We take feedback very seriously as it is extremely important to us. We discuss {insert detail} with our staff so that we can ensure it will not happen for any future stays. I hope to welcome you back in the near future so that you can experience the {detail}, that you loved. It would be our pleasure to see you again. Thank you.

Your name

Sample Neutral Review Response 2

Response from XXX

Responded 2 days ago

Name,

Thank you so much for your recent stay and review. I was happy to read that you {insert detail}. While I was disappointed that you didn't have a five star experience, I will be sharing your complete review with my staff to ensure that we learn and grow from your remarks. I hope that you will stay with us again on your next trip to {city}. Thank you.

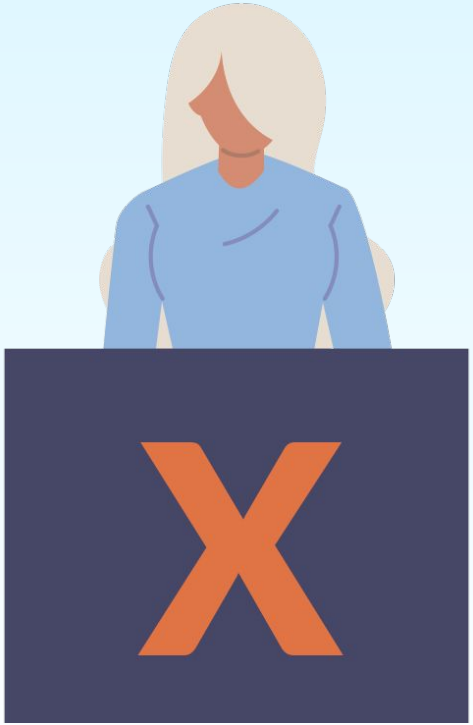
Your name

Responding to negative reviews

Negative reviews will happen. They're not fun for any hotelier but thankfully most review sites allow you to have the last word. (In other words, reviewers don't get the opportunity to respond to your response.) Guests also tend to read management responses more carefully than they read travelers' reviews, so use negative responses as opportunities to show prospective guests that your hotel pays attention to reviews and uses them to improve.

1. Research the incident before you respond

You should post your response within 24 hours of receiving the review. Before you pen your response, track down the details from your staff to see if there's anything you need to know about the stay. You never want to sound defensive, but you do want to sound like you did your homework.



“If a guest walked up to your front desk and gave feedback, would you not respond? Obviously not! When a guest leaves your public feedback online, it should be treated the same. Responding to online responses will make them feel heard and possibly have them returning as guests!”



Dylan Cole
Managing Director of Sales, APAC
@ Revinate



2. Thank the guest

Even if the negative review is aggressive or hurtful, you should thank the guest for taking the time to give feedback. Take a minute and remember that all feedback is valuable. And, if you handle the situation gracefully and professionally, it can mitigate the effects of the bad review in the eyes of future prospective guests.

3. Apologize for the guest's poor experience

Remember, an apology is not an admission of guilt or wrongdoing. For whatever reason, this guest's expectations were not met, which is disappointing for anybody. You should express sympathy that his or her experience fell short of expectations. Your apology should be generic and you shouldn't call out the specific complaints in your response. There's no reason to call more attention to them. For example, you can say, "Our hope is that every guest has a great stay and I am so sorry that we weren't able to provide you with that perfect stay."

4. Highlight any changes you have made or intend to make to rectify the problem

If the complaints are about a person or department, you can say that you will make sure to address the situation with the staff so it doesn't occur again. If the complaint was about the condition of a room you can say that you will ensure housekeeping does a thorough inspection of the room to ensure the problem is solved. This is also a good opportunity to take the conversation offline to avoid further public conflict. You can invite the guest to contact you directly so that you can discuss the details. Don't promise any form of compensation online to avoid setting a precedent.





5. Invite the guest back

If it feels appropriate, invite the guest back to show them that you want another shot at their business. You might say, “If you’re willing to give us another chance, I would love to personally oversee your next stay and ensure you leave happy. Please reach out to me when you are planning your next trip. I would love to help you.”

6. Evaluate the need for follow-up procedures

If you have the guest’s contact information, it’s a good idea to send them a personal email to express your apologies and offer compensation, if appropriate.

Revinate’s Hotel CRM solution makes it easy to learn about your guests and their stay history to tailor the perfect email.

Take advantage of in-stay surveys to identify service issues before they become negative reviews.

Sample Negative Review Response 1

Response from XXX

Responded 2 days ago

Name,

Thank you for taking the time to share your feedback. I was truly disheartened to read your review and want to apologize for not meeting your expectations. Please know that we take all guest feedback very seriously and will be reviewing the details with staff to ensure we do better next time.

If you're willing to give us another shot when you're back in town, please reach out directly as I would love to personally oversee your stay. I know we can do better and I want to prove it.

Thank you.

Your name

Sample Negative Review Response 2

Response from XXX

Responded 2 days ago

Name,

Thank you for taking the time to write about your recent stay with us. I was disappointed to hear that you had some trouble and am sorry that we didn't make it right before you checked out. We truly aspire to 100% guest satisfaction so please accept my apologies. I will be sharing this feedback with the team and I hope we can make it up to you on your next stay. If you're willing to give us another chance, please let me know when you are returning and I will make sure you have the great experience we want all our guests to have.

Thank you.

Your name

Sample Negative Review Response 3

Response from XXX

Responded 2 days ago

Name,

As a hotelier, few things are worse than a bad review. I am truly sorry that we weren't able to provide you with a great experience during your last stay with us. However, your feedback will be shared with staff to ensure we continue to improve.

If you are willing to give us another chance, I would love to show you the hospitality that we are known for. Please let me know when you return and I'll ensure you have a great stay.

Thank you.

Sample Negative Review Response 4

Response from XXX

Responded 2 days ago

Name,

Thank you for taking the time to write a review. While we aspire to nothing short of 5 stars, we clearly missed the mark with you and for that I am truly sorry. Please know that your feedback is taken very seriously and will be used to improve our operations.

If you would like to discuss your experience in greater detail, please feel free to reach out to me directly. I would love to learn more about your experience and work to make things right.
Thank you.

Your name

05 What to do if you doubt the validity of a review

Every now and then, someone will attribute a review to the wrong hotel or write a malicious review that has no merit. If this happens, keep your cool and follow these steps.

Notify the review site

Almost all of the review sites have a policy for dealing with these situations. You must log into your business account to take action. Then, follow the site's instructions to flag the review in question.





Respond to the review while you wait for the site to take action

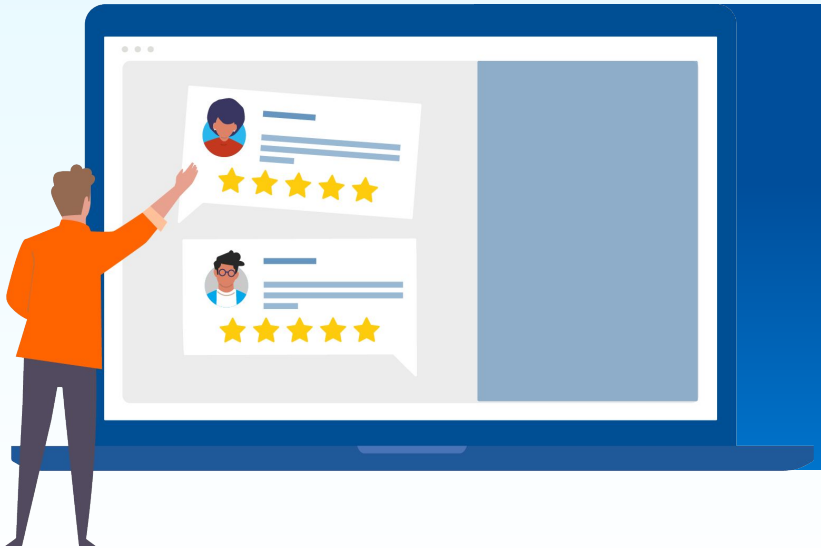
In this case, the point of your response is to let potential guests know that you don't believe this is a valid review. For example, you can say, "Thank you for taking the time to write a review. We take all negative feedback very seriously. Unfortunately, we were unable to find any record of your stay or the incident you mention. We think you may have erroneously posted this review to our listing. If this isn't a mistake, please reach out so that we can discuss your challenges."

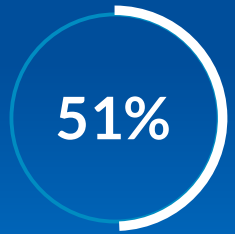
Take a deep breath

It's easy to lose sleep over a bad review - - and especially one that's unfair. But you can't control what people write so you're going to have to take it on the chin while you wait to see if the review site will remove the review. If they don't, don't worry. New, fresh reviews will soon take attention away from it.

06 How to encourage more reviews

Increasing review volume is often a goal for hoteliers, but many wonder how much they can impact the result. Rest assured, there are ways to influence guests and encourage them to write reviews. Here are a few tips on how to generate positive reviews:





Customers who use Revinate Surveys see a 51% increase in review volume.



Deliver exemplary customer service

This may seem obvious at first, but the real-time nature of social media has changed the current service standard. While online review sites have revolutionized the way customers go about selecting their destinations, interactive and viral social media platforms have also given hoteliers the ability to create truly unique service experiences.

Whether it's thanking a guest at their check-in for their pre-stay tweet, or booking a reservation for a customer through a Facebook post, social media has presented numerous ways to create a personalized and unique customer experience. By monitoring social media, analyzing reviews and implementing operational improvements from this information you will have the necessary means to deliver truly remarkable service. As you create this service, your customers will naturally wish to share this experience because it is attentive, unique and personalized to each customer.

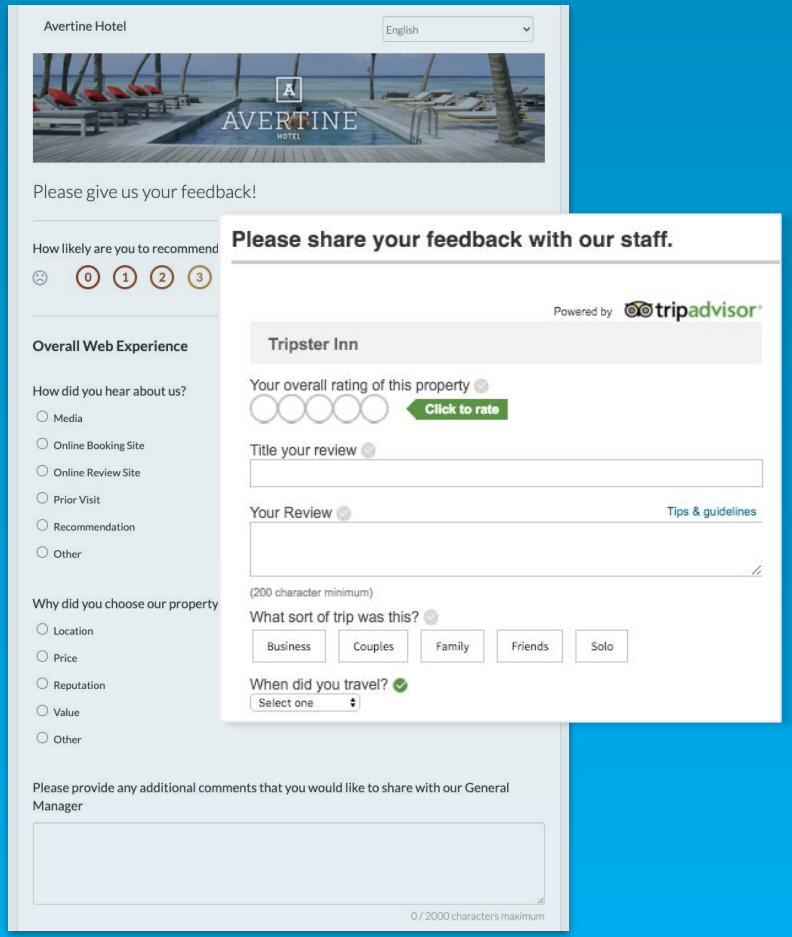
Ask guests for reviews

The best way to generate customer feedback is to demonstrate value in the customer's opinion. Asking for feedback at appropriate moments of service is a great way to generate customer reviews. Train all staff members to respond to a compliment with a request for a review. For example, "Thank you so much for those kind words. I would love it if you would leave us a review on TripAdvisor or Google so everyone can see your feedback."

Better yet, keep your finger on the pulse of your guests with a mid-stay, check-in through an SMS virtual concierge like Ivy Experience Suite, to uncover how guests are enjoying their stay. If they respond positively, take the opportunity to ask for a review.

> Tip: Many hotels have printed business cards that staff can give to guests as a reminder to write a review when they return home.





Use Revinate Surveys to increase review volume

Using Revinate Surveys to send out automated post-stay surveys to all guests is a great way to not only ingest operational feedback about their stay but also to generate guest reviews on TripAdvisor or Google. Our content syndication feature allows you to create a post-stay survey that is sent to guests after their stay. When the guest responds, the feedback is sent to you and it is published on either TripAdvisor or Google. It's a win-win!

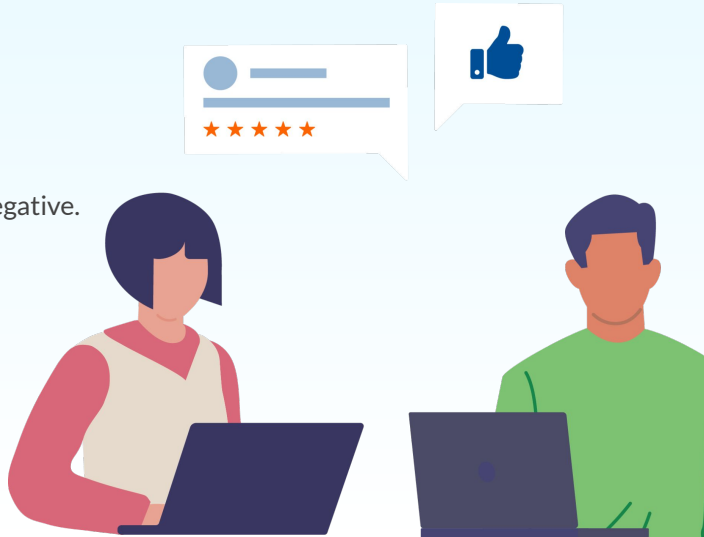
07 How to create a feedback-driven culture

By paying attention to what your guests are saying about your hotel online, you and your staff can get a better picture of what you're doing right and where you have opportunities to improve.

Here are some ways to operationalize guest feedback to increase your level of guest satisfaction, and ultimately, improve your hotel's reputation.

Read reviews in weekly meetings

Try using a positive sandwich to boost staff morale and get them focused on caring about guest feedback. Start with a good review, follow with a negative review, and end with a glowing review. Talk about the areas where your hotel is doing well. Discuss any consistent themes, positive or negative. For example, maybe your hotel's check-in is remarkably fast, but your bellhops need to be a little more friendly.



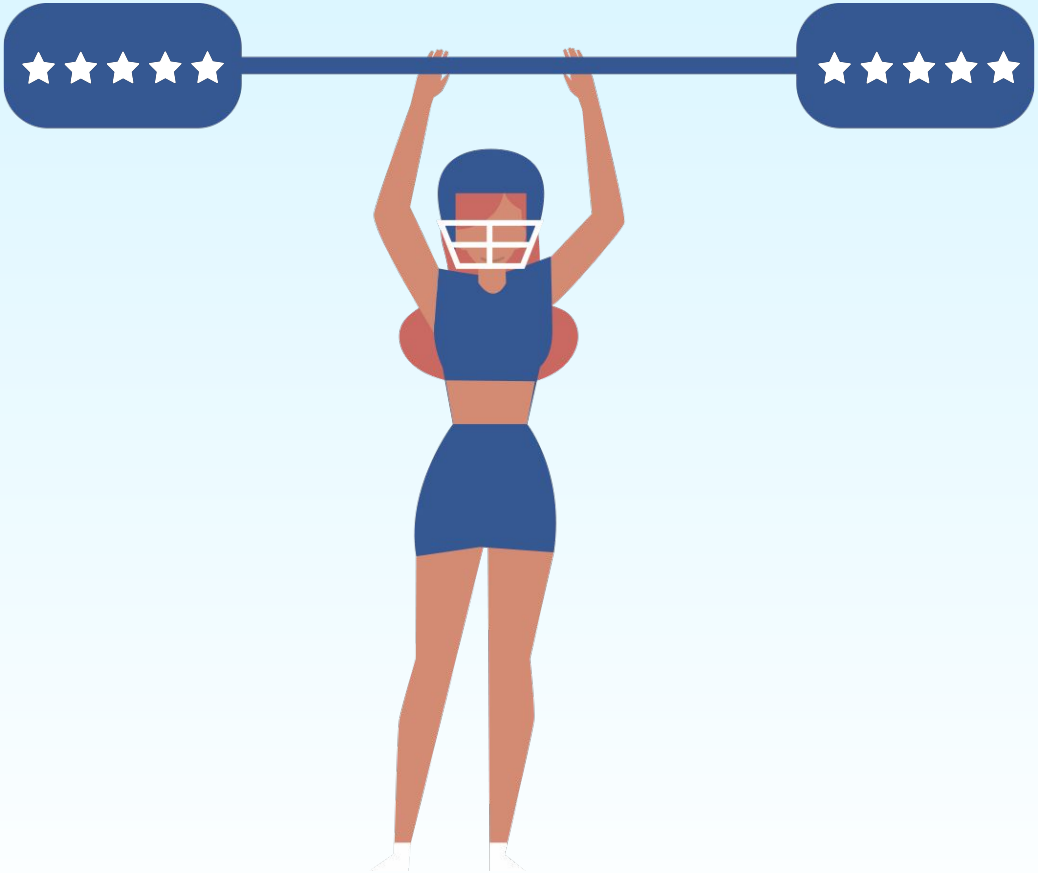
Celebrate review wins

When a customer goes out of his or her way to write a fantastic review, it means your hotel and every staff member he or she encountered exceeded expectations. Glowing reviews should be celebrated! Be sure to call out any staff members mentioned in good reviews. This is also a good basis for a potential incentive program—consider implementing bonuses or an annual raffle program for staff members mentioned by name in positive guest feedback. Creating a positive work environment is essential to creating positive customer service.

Train staffers to ask for reviews

While some hoteliers may be hesitant to solicit guests to leave reviews or fill out a guest experience survey, our clients see an average increase of 57% in review volume when they ask for reviews. The trick is to pick the right time to ask. Train staff to ask guests to leave reviews upon checkout, or at other staff-guest touchpoints, especially if the interaction has been a positive one.





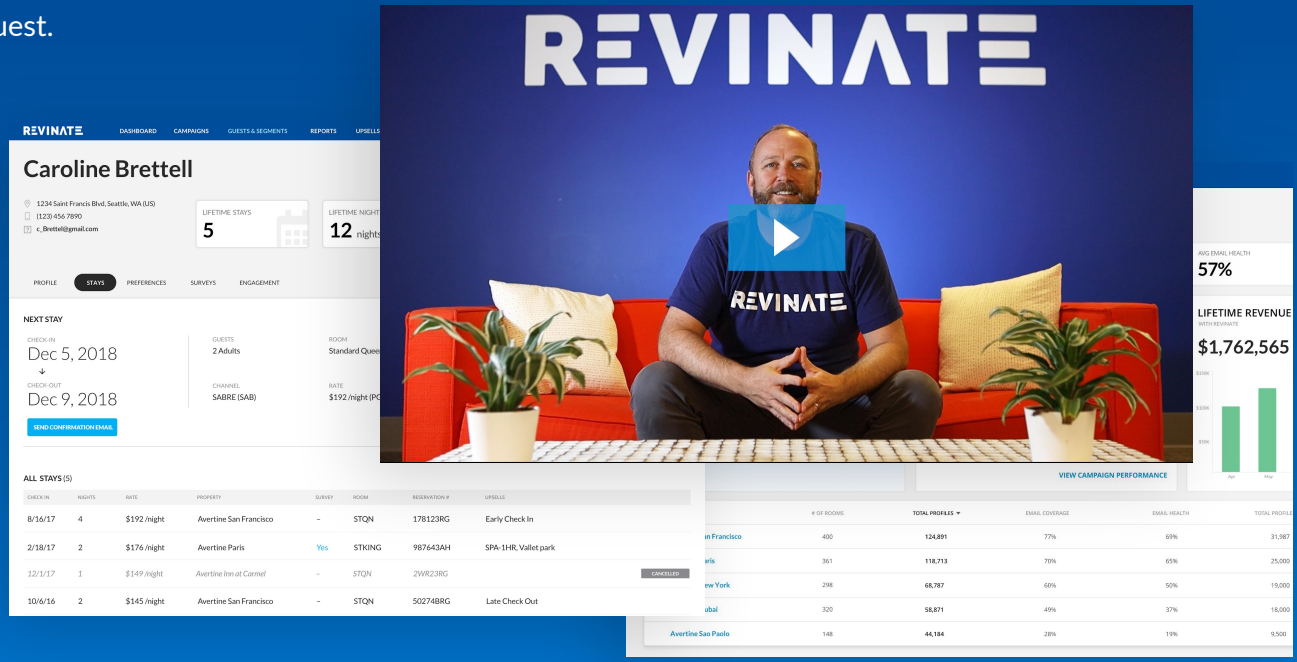
Use reviews as training exercises

Nothing prepares staff for troubleshooting guest complaints better than real world examples. Use both positive and negative reviews to run training exercises with staff. Ask each staff member: What was done right here? What could have been done better?

Hotel CRM was just the beginning.
Say hello to the GUEST DATA PLATFORM.

Purpose-built for hotels and property groups of all sizes, Revinate's Guest Data Platform solves the industry's most pressing need for a single view of the guest.

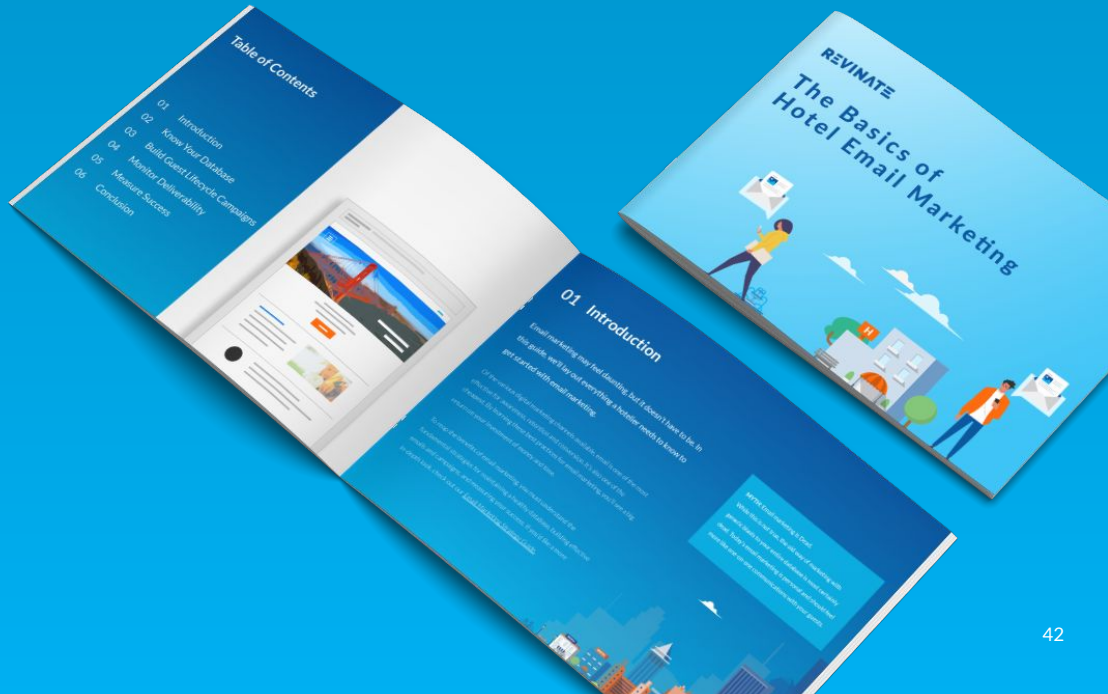
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The Basics of Hotel Email Marketing

New to hotel email marketing or looking to take your skills to the next level? This guide will give you everything you need to know to start sending emails like a pro.

GET IT NOW



In Summary

Today, travelers are pulling out their dusty suitcases and getting back on the road. As your hotel begins to book back up, so too will your review volume. You might be working with a smaller staff but your reviews are as important as ever so don't give up on reading and responding to reviews.

In the coming months travelers will be reading reviews to understand the new guest experience. Does the hotel feel safe? Does it appear to be understaffed? Which outlets are open and which are closed?

By responding to reviews, you can show past guests that you're listening and that you care. At the same time, you can drive new business.

We like to say that reviews are the gift that keeps on giving because the data helps you improve and encourages new guests to book.

As you get back into the swing of things, please reach out if you have any questions. We're standing by to help.