

Yelping at Yelp

How you handle negative online reviews can leave a lasting impression.

By Mark Wright

Do you monitor Yelp or other consumer review websites to see what people are saying about your storage facility? The practice is smart business, but it's not for the faint of heart.

Some reviews glow and gush, while others slash and burn. Many are honest, straightforward descriptions of the customer's experience, and they include both positives and negatives.

For example, here are three actual reviews via Yelp—which is one of the biggest consumer review sites—about storage facilities in different parts of the U.S. (Company names and geographic locations are omitted in this article.) Yelp reviewers choose from a scale of five stars (the best) to one star (the worst). They are all subjective, so draw your own conclusions.

First, a brief five-star review:

"Clean facility built into the hills surrounding [street name] road. [Name], the receptionist, not only helped us get settled, she helped me in a jam navigate a tight turn, keeping my 24' truck wheels on the ground like a golf-cart driving, air traffic controller pro (but for trucks, of course). Even the biggest trucks can get into this facility."

(Take-away: Hooray for the customer-oriented receptionist.)

Next, an excerpt from a three-star review: "Seems well-organized enough, but not very clean..."

(Take-away: Time for a broom, maybe?)

Finally, an excerpt from a long one-star review posted by a very perturbed customer: "Every time I go in there, I think of how that would be a good place for Dexter to kill someone..."

(Take-away: Holy shivering box cutters, Batman!)

Welcome to the world of candid customer comments. Consumers today have so many online megaphones available to "share" the experiences they've had with a business

that savvy companies have little choice but to monitor online comments and "engage" with actual and would-be customers on a near-daily basis.

Limited Options

Every business loves positive feedback, of course, but what do you do when a comment is not only negative but, you feel, downright unjust?

"We've been a Yelp client since 2008, when we signed up all of our properties," said Andrea Carnes, VP of operations at Chicago-based The Lockup Self Storage. "We had one situation several years back when somebody made an unfair and inaccurate accusation in a review.

I pushed Yelp very hard, but they wouldn't take it down. The only thing you can do is respond to it right away. (Ironically, that person who complained is still a tenant!)"

She said The Lockup Self Storage uses a PR firm to monitor social media and consumer reviews. If a reviewer indicates there was some problem, a person from The Lockup's regional management team contacts that reviewer to follow up and find out whatever's needed to remedy a situation.

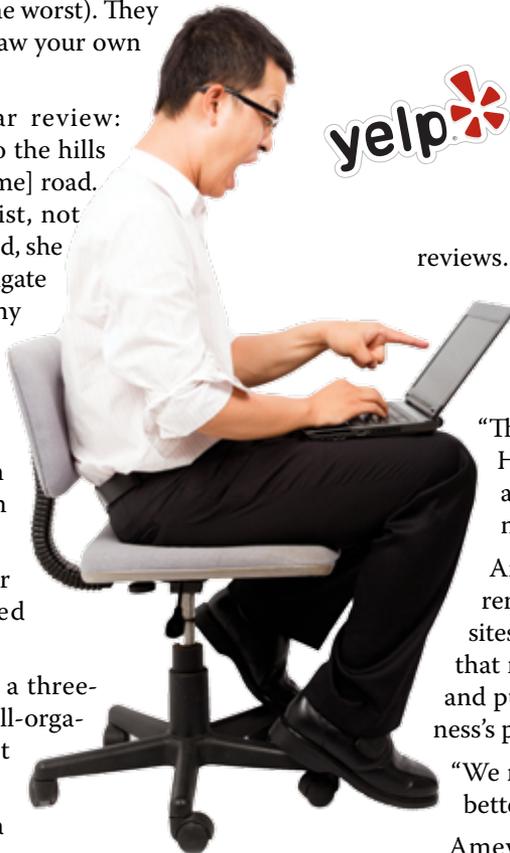
"The recourse is with the reviewer himself," said Heather Amey, senior client performance manager at G5, an Oregon-based digital experience management firm and SSA vendor member.

Amey explained that only the reviewer can edit or remove a review he or she posted on Yelp or similar sites. So, you as the business must communicate with that reviewer. On Yelp, you can do so both privately and publicly (assuming you have "claimed" your business's profile page there).

"We recommend a public reply first—the sooner the better," said Amey.

Amey said research has shown that 70 percent of people are influenced by online reviews, and 67 percent read six or fewer reviews. So, letting a negative review languish online can damage your reputation and your sales.

"There's such a population of people who rely on reviews now, you have to tell that next potential customer that the negative review about your company is either not true or that you're addressing the issue. A timely and public reply shows that you're listening and that you're willing to try to remedy customer complaints."



See *Yelp*, page 16

See a Bader
Team Member
at SSA Fall
Tradeshow
booth #
502

Congratulations to SSA Foundation Hall of Fame Inductee Bob Bader, founder and past president of Bader Company, for his outstanding contributions to SSA and the storage industry.

winning through Partnership

The Bader Company

For over two decades Bader has helped business owners and over 3 million tenants by providing affordable and reliable insurance. Bader Company was the first SSA partner and the company remains the exclusive SSA insurance partner to this day. Providing reliable insurance options to tenants has made Bader a leader in the self storage industry.

The Bader Team

Maureen Lee, *President*

Josh Nicholson, *Vice President, Sales and Marketing*

Bryan Johnson, *National Sales Director*

Tim Parnell, *Marketing Director*

Chuck Dodge, *Senior Account Executive*

David Brashear, *Account Executive*

Christy Lewis, *Senior Account Manager*

Richard Witka, *Account Manager*



BADER
Company

www.BADERco.com 888-223-3726

Don't worry about a thing.

'Cause with Deans & Homer, it will be all right.



Insurance solutions for you...
Insurance solutions for
your customers...
Insurance for peace of mind.
So, don't worry!

 **Deans & Homer**
Self Storage Insurance

800 - 847 - 9999

www.self-storage-insurance.com

CA License #0300517

Yelp, from page 14

Everyone understands that negative experiences happen, she added, but how the business handles a situation shows prospective customers a company's true colors. A public reply to a negative review demonstrates that the business is at least leaving the door open to resolve that customer's problem. A carefully and positively worded reply thus dilutes the impact of a negative review.

"That's really a storage operator's strongest recourse," said Amey. "They have to show their commitment to customer service regardless of the interaction."

In addition to the public response, as Amey noted, Yelp offers the ability to send a private reply. If that discussion goes favorably, she said, you can ask the reviewer if he or she would update or remove the review.

What you say in both your private and public overtures needs to be thought through and worded very carefully. Some reviewers would sincerely welcome your efforts to fix whatever the problem was; others might be further inflamed by virtually anything you say or fail to say, regardless of your offer to "make it right."

Sleep On It

Whatever you decide to say privately or publicly, it's best to write it out and then sleep on it before posting your reply, advised Marc Silverstein, president and CEO of Maryland-based On The Marc Media. "You want to respond properly and professionally."

Also, said Silverstein, if you have already had discussions with the reviewer regarding the problem they trumpeted in their review—for example, your facility manager already spoke with the customer on-site or over the phone to try to resolve their concern—you can include language in your public online reply to the effect that, "We're glad to learn of your complaint, but as we discussed when you were here at our office..." Doing so lets other readers see that there's some history to this and you've been trying to achieve a win-win outcome.

Realize, too, that a "private" reply might not stay that way. "Make whatever offer you want, but be aware the reviewer will probably make it public," cautioned Silverstein.

If the exposure you have on Yelp is making your head spin, you might want to sit down. Comments about your company could also be showing up on YouTube, Angie's List, Google Plus, Ripoff Report®, Facebook, Twitter, widely read "mommy blogs," as well as individuals' personal blogs, he said.

Carnes explained that Yelp is big in some areas of the country but not in others. "Negative reviews for us are few and far between, and we handle them right away, but for the most part we feel strongly about encouraging tenants to give us feedback and tell us how we're doing," she said. "Tenants tell us Yelp is easier to use than Google

See Yelp, page 18



The Most Proven Lock & Latch System in Self-Storage



- Easy one-person installation with stationary carriage bolts
- Designed to fit all industry door corrugations
- BEZEL™ locks available with or without overlock function
- BEZEL™ latches available in stainless steel, double-zinc or chrome-plate
- Stainless steel latches have the Magna Tongue™ to accommodate alarm switches
- All BEZEL™ locks are packaged for resale and will fit other industry latches



THE NATION'S SELF STORAGE BROKERAGE.

#1

ARGUS

SELF STORAGE SALES NETWORK

\$110 Million in recent sales transactions
\$120 Million in properties currently listed

Now is the time to take advantage of today's unique market conditions! Whether you are buying or selling, trust Argus, the nation's most experienced self storage brokerage network.

1-800-55-STORE
www.argus-selfstorage.com

Brokerage Services ■ Property Valuation ■ Property Management

Yelp, from page 16

Plus, because they have to log in to their Google account before they can leave a review via Google Plus, but no log-in is needed on Yelp.”

Silverstein said there's no easy way to find those comments. “You just have to check frequently. Using Google Alerts is a good idea, although some review sites don't allow crawling by search engines, so you have to monitor them manually.”

He said you might get a heads-up about such reviews via social media, though, since some reviewers like to tweet about a review they just posted or announce it via Facebook.

Carnes, Amey and Silverstein all recommended sometimes replying to positive reviews, too. “Thanking happy customers for sharing their positive experience with your business shows future review readers your commitment to customers' experience—both the good and the bad,” said Amey.

As Silverstein observed, “10 percent is what happens; 90 percent is how you react to it.”

“Reviews are everywhere these days for all kinds of businesses, from airlines to banks to everything, and not everyone will have something good to say,” Carnes said. “Some businesses are afraid of negative reviews, but I don't view Yelp that way—overall it's a good thing.” ♦



kiwi II

Steel Storage Specialists



SINCE 1982



IN-HOUSE INSTALLATION SINGLE & MULTI-STORY RV & BOAT CANOPIES
EXTERIOR FACE-LIFTS RE-ROOFS IN-HOUSE DESIGN & ENGINEERING

1-877-465-4942

WWW.KIWICONSTRUCTION.COM