



Turn guests into ambassadors.

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# How to Respond to Online Reviews

A Practical Guide for Hotels

# Reviews are more important than you think

Hello and thanks for checking out this guide. We tried to avoid any business blah-blah and to really focus on a simple and practical approach to responding to reviews.

Since you're reading this guide, you're obviously aware that reviews have a huge impact on your business. They are one of the top reasons people book or don't book a hotel room. Don't take our word for it, just look at the numbers from industry studies but also independent researchers:

- 94% of all travelers read reviews
- Almost 90% say reviews are important when choosing a hotel
- 3 in 4 people are unlikely to book a hotel with negative reviews
- When the room price is the same, people are 3.9 times more likely to pick the hotel with the better reviews

So reviews can be a huge advantage for you or a big problem if you have (too many) negative ones. Fortunately, research also shows that you have an incredibly powerful tool to at your disposal:

## The Management Response

- Almost 90% of travelers say that an appropriate management response to a bad review improved their impression of the hotel
- 69% even agree they are likely to overlook negative opinions if the hotel responds with addressing the issue
- Hotels which respond to more than 50% of their reviews have on average 6.7 percentage point higher occupancy rate

Your response to bad reviews can convince 3 of 4 people to disregard those reviews. That's amazing. It directly impacts your business' success and you should start immediately. But don't do it the wrong way. Look at this finding of another study:

- Copy-And-Paste, non-personalized responses actually decreased the likelihood of a booking

Sources and further reading: [Survey by Wotif \(Expedia Group\) in 2015](#), [Research by TripAdvisor in 2015](#), [Study by PhoCusWright in 2014](#), Web reviews influence on expectations and purchasing intentions of hotel potential customers, Mauri & Minazzi 2013

# What you really want to achieve with your response

Okay, here is a common misconception:

*“The primary goal of my response is to continue the dialogue with the guest even after he left the premise.”*

Yep, that’s an honorable goal, but it shouldn’t be your first one. Why not? Because it’s just one person. Think about the thousands of website visitors looking for a room to book who will read your response. Those are the ones you want to focus on.

So here are your goals:

## 1. Making bad reviews irrelevant

You have read it before. With your management response, 3 out of 4 people will pay no attention to a negative review and maybe book a room, even though they had already crossed out your hotel from their list.

## 2. Winning users over

Your responses give the users on TripAdvisor and others the impression that you really care about their wellbeing and that their opinion matters. Not only that, it provides your faceless hotel profile with some personality. Name, title and tone can establish a form of intimacy which is usually hard to bring across over the internet.

## 3. Turning guests into fans

Even if it’s not your primary goal, making your guests happy even after check-out is a good idea. A friendly response to their review will encourage them to come back and to share their experience with friends and family.

## What your goal shouldn’t be

Don’t try to defend your business or coworkers.

Don’t try to explain what happened if something went wrong. Yes, there are always reasons why things happened the way they did. However, for potential guests this is irrelevant. They want to know what you have changed, so that they won’t experience the same problems during their stay.

# Let's get started: The Basics

## How often should I respond?

We highly recommend to establish a routine of checking and responding to reviews, best once or twice a day.

## Who should respond?

That's a tricky question. People like to see a response from the General Manager or another person with a title that sound important. At the same time, speed is an important factor. If you are a GM and have only once a week time to respond, it's better to hand the task over to somebody else.

## Where to start?

In general, you should respond to reviews as quickly as possible. This will underscore your commitment to your guests and will have the biggest impact on the review author. Always start with the most recent reviews, because they will appear first on your hotel's profile and users of the site will see them first.

## What about reviews in foreign languages?

What to do when a review is written in a language you don't speak? No worries. Remember that it's more important to make your reply visible to other users who read reviews than to the reviewer himself.

This means you can simply in English if you don't speak the language of the reviewer. Thanking the reviewer in his native language or adding a local greeting, is a great way to still personalize it.

## Help, there are so many reviews. Which ones are important?

Generally, you should strive to respond to all reviews, good and bad. However, if this is not possible or you want to prioritize, then pick these reviews first:

- Reviews with a low rating and very specific complaints
- Reviews which can damage your reputation (e.g. accusations of fraud, misleading descriptions, bed bugs)
- Extensive reviews in which the author put a lot of effort

# Let's get started: The Basics

## What should I not write?

- Avoid any aggression, don't take reviews personally.
- Don't try to question the truthfulness of a complaint. This can easily backfire.
- Accept criticism. Don't be defensive and don't deflect blame.
- Don't over-apologize. One time in clear wording is usually sufficient.
- It's better not to offer any compensation publicly (people might try exploit that).
- Avoid lengthy explanations. Say how you will do better, not why it happened.

## Why can't I just use a couple of canned responses?

We understand that you have only so much time every day to take care of online reviews, so using response templates seems like a good idea. Besides, other (welcome, feedback etc.) emails your business sends out are probably also standardized.

Don't do it in case of online reviews. Remember, you don't write your response primarily for the reviewer, but for all the users who will read the reviews and your responses. They will quickly recognize repetition. This can lead to more negative impression than not publishing responses at all.

Of course, there are ways to make writing a response easy and quick. Read on to learn how.

# An easy structure for your responses

|                    |  |  |
|--------------------|--|--|
| <b>Salutation</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• set the tone for the review</li><li>• use the reviewer's name</li></ul>  | <i>Dear John</i>   |
| <b>Thanks</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• thank the guest for the effort of writing a review</li><li>• or for staying at your hotel</li></ul>  | <i>Thank you for your review.</i>  |
| <b>Apology</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• only necessary if the review contains negative aspects</li><li>• use it to show compassion even if you're not at fault</li></ul>                                   | <i>I'm sorry to hear that you had difficulties logging into the Wi-Fi.</i>         |
| <b>Consequence</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• explain what you have done to avoid the same problem in the future</li><li>• don't write lengthy explanation about why it happened and whose fault it is</li></ul> | <i>We are looking into improving the instructions.</i>                             |
| <b>Highlight</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• draw attention to the positive aspects</li><li>• this also personalizes your response</li></ul>  | <i>It's great to hear you liked our breakfast.</i>                                 |
| <b>Invitation</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• invite the guest back</li><li>• make a personal suggest for the next visit</li></ul>   | <i>Try the fresh pancakes we added to the breakfast buffet on your next visit.</i> |
| <b>Closing</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• add your name and title</li><li>• not necessary if the website adds this automatically (e.g. TripAdvisor)</li></ul>  | <i>Kind Regards,<br/>Peter Boermans,<br/>General Manager</i>                       |

# Common situations and how to respond in them

|                               |   |  |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>One-line review</b>        | <i>"All good. No complaints."</i>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's okay not to respond</li> <li>• Or simply make an equally short response (e.g. <i>Thanks!</i>)</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Long, balanced review</b>  | Often several paragraphs with positive and negative points                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• properly thank the guest for the effort</li> <li>• many readers will only skim such reviews and instead read your response, so highlight positive and don't focus on the negative</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Short, positive review</b> | Usually 1 or 2 paragraphs, some minor drawbacks are mentioned             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• keep your response short as well</li> <li>• highlight a positive remark</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Justified complaint</b>    | <i>"Room cleaning forgot to put towels in our room."</i>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• apologize sincerely</li> <li>• explain what you've done to avoid a similar incident in the future</li> <li>• don't compensate with vouchers or otherwise as others could try to abuse this</li> </ul>   |
| <b>General criticism</b>      | <i>"It was so noisy, that I could hardly catch any sleep."</i>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• apologize</li> <li>• show understanding</li> <li>• make helpful suggestions (e.g. a room to the other side, free earplugs)</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Insolvable criticism</b>   | <i>"The rooms are tiny, I could hardly find a place for my suitcase."</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• apologize for the inconvenience</li> <li>• show understanding</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Serious accusation</b>     | <i>"I found some unexplained charges on my credit card bill!"</i>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fraud, theft &amp; harassment - treat these seriously because they can be very damaging</li> <li>• push people contact you by email or phone, e.g. by saying <i>"I'm not aware of this incident. Please contact email@hotel.com, so we can clear this up."</i></li> </ul> |

## Example responses to a negative review

### ***“DO NOT STAY”***

●○○○○○ Reviewed August 19, 2016  via mobile

Don't stay here if you want to get a good night's sleep. There is no air conditioning, so it gets horribly hot. Even at night.

Even though I was barely awake because of this, the breakfast was actually quite nice.

### Don't reply like this...

Hello,

Almost no hotel in Amsterdam has an AC unit, because usually it's not that hot. Unfortunately there's nothing we can do

- No compassion is shown, no apology
- The unusual circumstances are not mentioned
- The guest is being criticized
- The positive remark is not highlighted

### Do it this way:

Dear Chris,

Thanks for sharing your feedback.

I'm very sorry, that you couldn't sleep well at the Pluto Hotel.

I think you caught the hottest day of the year, but you're right, some rooms can get hot. Next time we can select a room with windows to the north for you. These should be cooler.

I hope you can enjoy our extensive breakfast buffet well rested the next time you visit Amsterdam.

Kind Regards,

Peter Boermans, Front Desk Manager



# Useful phrases

## Thanks

Thank you for your review.  
Thank you for your comments.  
Thank you for reviewing the Pluto Hotel.  
Thank you for sharing your thoughts.  
Thank you for sharing your experience.  
Thank you for your effort in writing this review.  
Thank you very much for your candid review.  
Thank you for your kind words.  
Thank you for taking the time to write such a detailed review.  
Thank you for bringing this issue to our attention.  
Thank you for highlight some areas of improvement.  
Thank you for your feedback.  
Thank you for all your compliments.  
Your review is very much appreciated. Thank you.  
Thank you. Your review is very helpful to us.  
Thank you. Your feedback is greatly appreciated.  
Thank you. Your feedback is very valuable to us.  
Our team thanks you for sharing this valuable feedback.

## Apology

I'm very sorry for the inconvenience.  
I apologize for the discomfort this has caused you.  
Please excuse the trouble with...  
Please accept our apologies for the problems...  
We owe you an apology for the issues...  
I want to tell you I'm sorry for...  
We were wrong on that. Sorry.  
I cannot express how sorry we are about...  
I hope that this did not cause you too much trouble.  
I regret very much that...

## Consequence

We will make sure this will not happen again.  
I have forwarded your feedback to...  
I will bring up this issue in our next team meeting...  
This issue has been resolved.  
We are considering to...  
We are currently discussing your feedback.  
I have informed the staff about...  
We will make changes to...  
We are reviewing our procedures in this regard.  
We have taken your feedback seriously and...

Your feedback was so helpful that...  
For your next visit we will...  
We will look at your suggestions...

## Highlight

I'm glad you enjoyed...  
It's very nice to hear that...  
I will forward your compliments to...  
We are happy that you liked...  
We try our best to...  
We're glad you appreciated...  
It is a pleasure to know...  
Thanks you for recognizing...  
I'm delighted to read that you appreciated....  
I'm pleased to see that...

## Invitation

I hope you will consider Hotel Pluto again.  
We would love to welcome you back some time.  
We hope to see you again.  
Until next time...  
We're looking forward to your next visit.  
Please stay again with us.  
I hope we can make it up to you the next time you stay with us.  
Hotel Pluto is always open to you.  
We loved having you. Come back soon.  
We hope to have the opportunity to host you again.

## Rerouting

(in case of accusations)

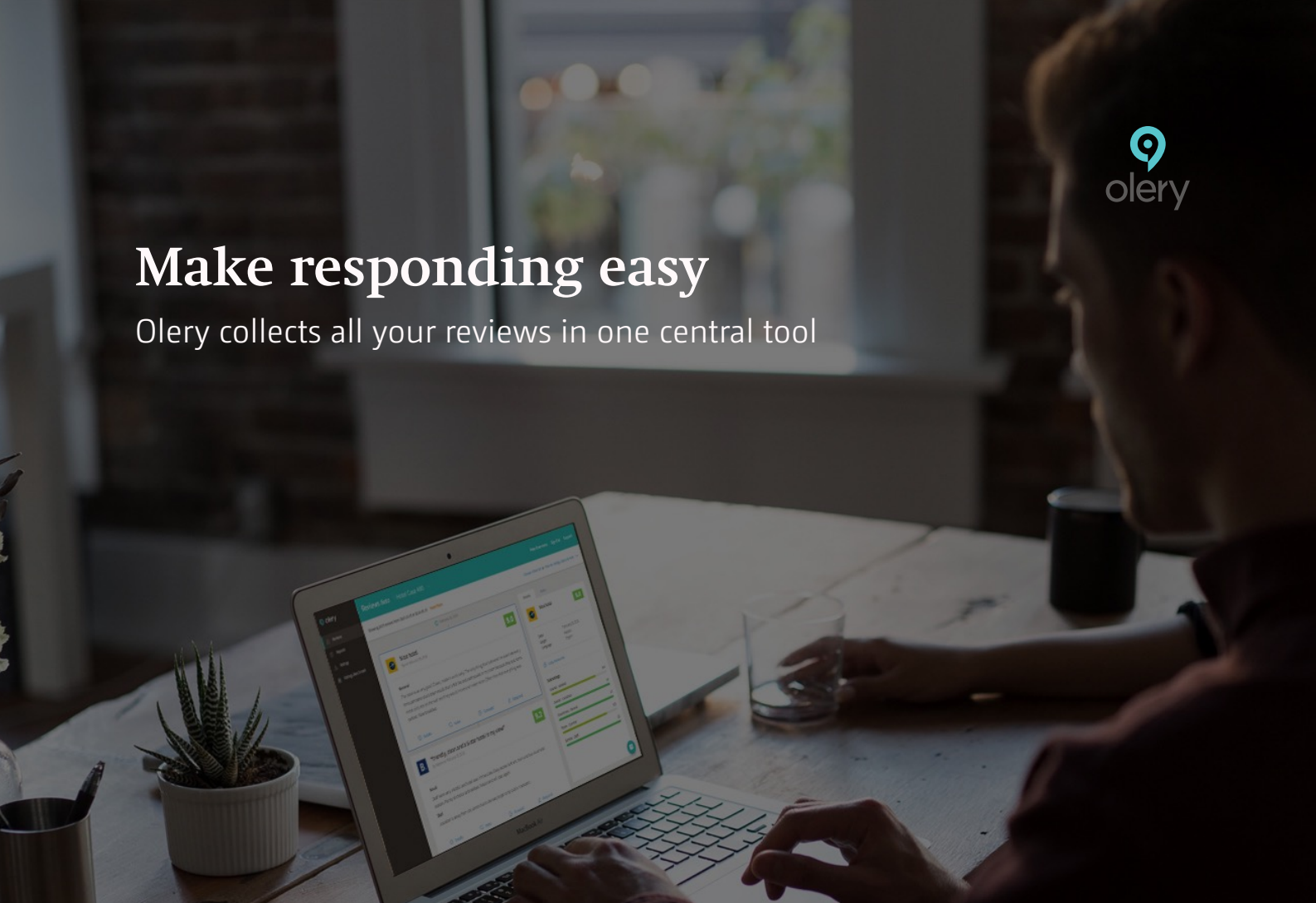
We need more details to resolve this issue. Please contact me at...  
I wasn't aware of this incident. Please contact me at...  
I will take care of this. Please contact me at...  
I would like to share some information privately with you. Please contact me at...

## Closing

Sincerely  
Thank you  
Regards

# Make responding easy

Olery collects all your reviews in one central tool



## Read, organize & respond to reviews

Olery collects all reviews for your property from dozens of sources. Read them in one comprehensive dashboard and easily write your response.

## Track your and your competitors' performance

All review ratings for your property are saved and analyzed. This way you can easily track your improvements and monitor your competition.

## Turn feedback into reviews

With Olery Feedback you can easily create multi-language surveys. The best part: Your guests can publish their feedback as reviews on sites like TripAdvisor. This will help to improve your rankings.

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