All about Responding to Online Reviews, Surveys, and Guest Messaging

ReviewPro

INTRODUCTION

While the basic approach to responding to all types of guest feedback is more or less the same, there are some key differences between online reviews and guest surveys which call for a bit of a different approach.

The most important difference is that online reviews—and the responses to them—are shared publicly and may be seen by hundreds or even thousands of prospective guests. Surveys and survey responses, on the other hand, are shared privately between guests and hotel staff, so they don't have the marketing potential of online reviews. The same can be said of guest messaging, which normally takes place on private channels.

Another important distinction is that online reviews are often anonymous or posted under an unidentifiable profile name, so hotel staff don't always know who the guest is. With surveys, you can easily identify the guest and verify the details of their stay.

"The goals are different for each type of response. When responding to a review, we communicate publicly to an entire community of potential guests. We respond to reviews to increase our sales. When we respond to a survey, the guest is already a customer, so we want to build loyalty."

Barceló
HOTEL GROUP

Silvia Battistella,
Online Reputation Manager
at Barceló Hotel Group

RESPONSE FRAMEWORK

Regardless of the feedback channel, responses to complaints should include the following three elements:

1. Thank the guest for the feedback.
2. Offer a sincere apology.
3. Say how you're following up.

In some cases, a brief explanation may also be appropriate, although you should be careful not to come across as giving excuses.

Choose your words carefully

The words you use when responding have a direct impact on impressions.

If you say the wrong thing, you may create or reinforce negative impressions.

If you say the right thing, you can improve perceptions.

WORDS TO AVOID	WHY AVOID THEM?	BETTER WORDS
We can't, we won't, you shouldn't	Tell them what you can do, not what you can't do.	We can/we will/I assure you
It's against policy	Too rigid and bureaucratic. If necessary, explain the reason behind the policy.	Normally we strive to
Unfortunately/Sorry but	Conditional apologies can come across as disingenuous and patronizing.	We regret/I am sorry that/I sincerely apologize
Your problems/issue/incident	It's not the guest's problem, it's yours to solve.	Your feedback/experience/ concerns
I was disappointed to read your comments	It's not about you, it's about the guest.	I am truly sorry to hear about your disappointment
I was shocked to hear	Too dramatic. Again, it's not about you.	I appreciate your feedback
How staff behaved was completely unacceptable	Don't attack your staff in order to appease guests.	We regret that we did not handle the situation better
We dropped the ball	Sounds too casual and unprofessional.	I am sorry we fell short of our usual standards
In the future we will try not to	Too weak. Show your commitment to improving.	We will make every effort to ensure that no guest experiences the same
It wasn't our fault	Take responsibility. Even if it wasn't your fault, you can still show empathy.	I wish we had been able to assist you/We are sorry to hear of your disappointment
We would never do something like that	Sounds defensive.	We take pride in always striving to do our best
Don't you worry	Sounds patronizing.	Rest assured

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO REVIEWS

Here are some general guidelines for responding to online reviews. Remember that every business has a unique voice. Make sure you adapt these guidelines to fit your brand.

• Respond quickly, ideally within 48 hours, especially to negative reviews. But first investigate, to ensure that you understand exactly what happened.

• Don't feel obliged to respond to all reviews. Prioritize negative reviews and responses that add something meaningful and relevant to the conversation such as an apology, explanation or clarification.

• Prioritize the most popular and influential review platforms such as TripAdvisor, Google, major OTAs and other sites that help you reach target audiences and generate revenue.

• Address your response directly to the reviewer, use their site profile name even if you know who the person is in order to protect their privacy.

• Be brief. Thank the guest, offer a sincere apology if appropriate, and say how you are following up.

• Strive for a conversational, professional tone that reflects the personality of your hotel's brand and doesn't sound either too casual or overly formal.

• Be courteous and open to all types of feedback. Never sound angry or defensive, and don't say anything that might provoke the reviewer. If you're upset, draft the response, sleep on it, try again in the morning, and ask someone to review it.

• Show empathy. As the voice of your brand, you should demonstrate the same thoughtfulness, care and attention to detail online as on property.

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO ONLINE REVIEWS

• Be original. Personalize each response by addressing the specifics of the review.

• Reinforce the positive aspects of the guest experience mentioned in the review. If feedback is mixed, acknowledge the positive first and then the negative.

• Reassure travelers. If the guest had a bad experience, prospective guests will be looking for reassurance that the same thing won't happen to them.

• Personalize the response with your first name, last initial and title. If appropriate, say you hope to welcome them back.

• Ask someone to proofread responses before posting, especially if the case is sensitive.

• Don't offer a discount, refund or any type of compensation as it may encourage abuse. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the policies of each review site.

RESPONDING TO POSITIVE REVIEWS

Negative reviews command most of our attention, but if you're running a good hotel, the vast majority of your reviews will be positive. While you shouldn't feel obliged to respond to all positive reviews, it's good practice to acknowledge your advocates. Travelers who share positive experiences and recommend your property are extremely valuable. Don't take them for granted!

That said, if you get a lot of positive reviews, you probably struggle with showing originality with each response. These tips will help ensure that each response is unique.

• Thank the guest.
• Share the excitement. E.g., "We are thrilled ..."
• Comment on the specifics. E.g., "I'm so glad you enjoyed the Grand Marnier soufflé in our ABC Restaurant, which is my personal favorite."
• Say you'll be sharing the comments with staff.

• Tell them you look forward to welcoming them back.

Also, it's good practice to mention the name of your hotel in positive reviews, but to avoid doing to in negative reviews. Response content on some sites is searchable.

REVIEW RESPONSE EXAMPLES

NEGATIVE

"Thank you for taking the time to share your experience. Please accept my sincere apologies that your stay was less than perfect. I have discussed your feedback with our front desk team to ensure that such issues do not recur. I hope you will give us the opportunity to redeem ourselves on a future stay."

MIXED

"Thank you kindly for your feedback, which I have shared with our team. I am happy to know that you found your room to be spacious and spotless. As for your check-in experience, we do our best to accommodate early arrivals, and I'm sorry that your room wasn't ready upon arrival. We hope you will visit us again soon."

POSITIVE

"How wonderful to hear how much you enjoyed your stay at the [Hotel Name + Location]! I'm particularly thrilled to hear that our pool attendants took such good care of your family. I will be sure to share your comments with the team."

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO SURVEYS

Response guidelines for guest surveys are similar to online reviews, with a few additional considerations outlined below. Remember that every business has a unique voice. Be sure to adapt these guidelines to fit your brand.

• For negative and mixed surveys, use responses to resolve issues privately and discreetly with guests. For positive surveys, use them to engage guests, build direct relationships and earn their loyalty.

• Respond quickly, especially to negative feedback—ideally within 72 hours. Prioritize negative comments and ratings that call for an apology or explanation. A quick and thoughtful response may prevent a negative online review.

• For in-stay surveys, speed is of the essence. Respond to negative feedback immediately or no later than two or three hours. A quick telephone call is usually the fastest and most effective way to resolve issues.

• Strive to respond to all or most surveys, even if it's just to thank the guest for the feedback. A survey tool with response templates can automate much of the process.

• Address responses from the general manager or another senior manager. Personalize them by addressing the guest by name and signing with the manager's full name, title and direct contact information.

• Be brief. Thank the guest for taking the time to complete the survey, offer a sincere apology if applicable, and say how you are following up.

• If feedback is mixed, acknowledge the positive first and then the negative.

• If appropriate, consider offering the guest a refund or discount on a future stay as compensation for a lapse in service or other disappointment.

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO SURVEYS

• If the guest seems angry or frustrated or the situation is complex or sensitive, pick up the phone and call the guest.

• If it's a frequent guest or loyalty member, thank them for their loyalty and make extra efforts to acknowledge their feedback and resolve complaints.

• Sign off by inviting the guest to contact you directly for further assistance and saying you hope to have the opportunity to welcome them back.

• Add a prompt in survey confirmations inviting the guest to post a review. ReviewPro's Guest Satisfaction Surveys (GSS) solution makes this easy. It also allows you to evaluate responses by asking guests if they found the response helpful.

SURVEY RESPONSE EXAMPLES

NEGATIVE

"I am truly sorry to learn of your disappointment with the quality of Wi-Fi in your room and the attitude of staff. I will discuss your comments with the team. We hope you will give us another chance. Please contact me directly on your next visit, and it would be my pleasure to make arrangements."

MIXED

"As a frequent guest of our hotel, your feedback is extremely valuable. I am happy to hear that you found the service and room quality to be excellent. As for your breakfast, I am sincerely sorry that it wasn't up to our usual standards. As a gesture of our regret, I have attached a gift certificate for complimentary breakfast on your next stay. We look forward to welcoming you back soon."

POSITIVE

"Thank you for taking the time to complete a survey regarding your recent stay at our hotel. Your feedback is important to us. We are thrilled to hear that you enjoyed your time with us. We hope to welcome you back soon."

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO GUEST MESSAGING

Digital technology is changing the way consumers interact with businesses. Increasingly, communications are taking place not on the telephone, by email or in person but through SMS, web chat and messaging apps.

Messaging is a unique and "real-time" way to communicate that requires a different approach from other customer feedback channels. Most people hone their skills while chatting with friends and family and pick up habits that may not be appropriate in a business environment. If employees are slow to respond or come across as unclear, rushed or distracted, they risk confusing, frustrating or even angering the guest.

Below are guidelines for ensuring that employees communicate with guests clearly and effectively on messaging channels.

• **Reply promptly**. People expect quick replies in text and chat—often in a matter of minutes. Assign an internal workflow to ensure that employees monitor channels closely, know who's responsible, and respond as quickly as possible. Use auto-replies to assure guests that an employee will respond as soon as one is available.

• **Introduce yourself**. If you're messaging a guest for the first time, include your name and department. If you receive a message and don't know who it's from, don't say "Who is this?", say, "May I confirm your name and room number?"

• **Be clear and concise**. Keep in mind that guests may be on the go or multi-tasking. Keep messages short and to the point, but not so brief that you come across as rude or abrupt. Always remember the please and thank yous.

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO GUEST MESSAGING

• Be professional. Texting with guests is different from texting with friends. Avoid abbreviations, jargon and emojis which may confuse or be misinterpreted. When in doubt, type it out. Be conversational in tone, not too casual or too formal. Always check for typos before sending.

• Be alert. Be attentive to the guests around you. They won't know that you're texting with a guest, not a friend.

• Handle complex interactions offline. If the guest is confused or angry, or the topic is sensitive or complex, offer to call the guest to avoid making the situation worse.

• Build a library of FAQs. Maintain a database of quick answers to common questions to save time, reduce response times, and ensure accuracy and consistency.

• Have the right strategy, structure and support. Before implementing a messaging strategy, it's vital to have objectives, tools, staffing and processes in place. For example, some messaging tools offer features like quick answers, quick cases and workflows to ensure the streamlined, efficient handling of communications.

▮ ABOUT US

ReviewPro is the world leader of Guest Intelligence solutions, with more than 55,000 hotels in 150 countries. Globally renowned brands like Radisson Hotel Group, Kempinski Hotels, Red Lion Hotels, and Mèlia Hotels International rely on ReviewPro to consolidate all guest intelligence into one powerful platform.

The company's cloud-based Guest Experience Improvement Suite includes Online Reputation Management, Guest Satisfaction Surveys, Auto Case Management, and an innovative Guest Messaging Hub. The tools and processes that ReviewPro provides enable hoteliers to proactively turn guest insight into action to prioritize operational and service improvements, deliver better guest experiences and increase guest satisfaction, online rankings, and revenue.

ReviewPro's Global Review Index™ (GRI), the industry-standard online reputation score, is based on review data collected from 175 OTAs and review sites in over 45 languages. The GRI™ is used to manage online reputation by benchmarking an individual hotel or group of hotels, comparing results between properties or against competitors, and tracking the evolution of a hotel's performance over time.
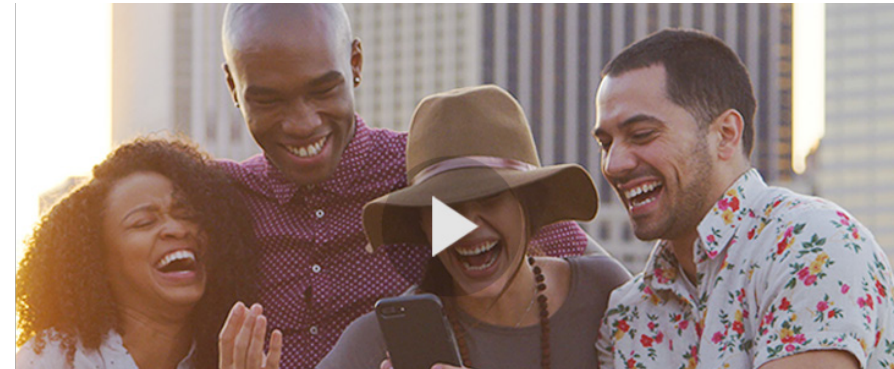
Click here to check out our GSS video

ReviewPro

WHAT WE DO

Data → Insights → Operational & Service Priorities → Action → Results

Guest Experience Improvement Suite™

› Online Reputation Management

› Guest Satisfaction Surveys*

› Guest Messaging Hub

› Case Management

*In-stay and post-stay surveys

ReviewPro

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