

BEST PRACTICES: ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT



LISA GERBER



START WITH BRAND LOYALTY

Some brands just get it. Their reputation, and therefore their brand is so stellar, it's like they can do no wrong. Think Nordstrom, or Patagonia. How can smaller, mid-market less glamorous enterprises learn from them? After all, a manufacturer, B2B, or healthcare brand, isn't as fun and sexy as a Nordstrom - can you really cultivate brand loyalty and protect yourself when your reputation is threatened?

Absolutely. And this ebook will set you in the right direction. We'll start by talking about how to build a foundation of a positive reputation so you are more resilient when something goes wrong and trust us, something will go wrong, you're not perfect. From a negative review somewhere on the internet to a crisis situation, you want to be prepared.

The first and best way to do be prepared, is to already have that great track record with your audience.



Next, we'll talk about how to respond to negative reviews and lastly, we'll address the larger scale problem, and that is when your brand comes under attack on a larger scale.

BUILD A POSITIVE REPUTATION

Martin X is upset with Patagonia. He scanned a photo from the Patagonia catalog and posted to their Facebook wall with the following comment:

"Irresponsible Parent skiing with helmet-less child during blizzard conditions in BC, Canada via Patagonia Catalog promotion."

Patagonia responded:

Hi Martin,

As parents of the next generation of Patagoniacs, we fully agree that it's paramount that we protect our kids as much as we can as they explore their world. We also value the case-by-case judgement (sic) that a life in the outdoors requires and develops. Self knowledge, risk assessment, decision making and personal responsibility

are qualities that define the activities we love. In this case, little Casey's father assures us that as a veteran peak bagger, ocean swimmer and world traveler, Casey (and the giraffe) loved the powder run with Mom and returned to the cozy lodge all smiles and in perfect condition.

We appreciate your comments and concern, and thanks as always for being part of the Patagonia community.

Out of the 57 comments, everyone came to the defense of Patagonia. The mother in the photo commented about the love for her child and the safety of the situation. The father (and photographer) attested to the same, and many other customers agreed.

Now, I don't want to debate helmet safety or who is in the right or wrong. What I want to talk about are the 57 people who came to the defense of Patagonia in the face of negativity.

This is something each brand should strive for - to build a community so strong you don't even need to manage your own reputation. While brand loyalty and community building could each be their own books, let's

just highlight some qualities here that make for a brand people will fight for:

- **Be clear on vision and values.** Having a clear sense of the brand and what you stand for makes it relatively easy for the staff to understand how to behave. it also means you cultivate a loyal following of like-minded people. Patagonia demonstrated this in their response.
- **Show your personality.** You might not be for everyone. When you show personality, you risk showing a side of yourself people don't like. But if everyone likes you, you aren't doing it right.
- **Be helpful.** Instead of selling, you are helping. Content, service, social - always be helping, not selling.

- **Make your people feel loved.** I can't emphasize this one enough. Treat your employees and your customers well. It starts and stops with them. Honor your community.

No one wants to have to defend your reputation in a situation where you lack brand loyalty. It's not fun, trust me on this. Have an army of raving fans already in place. If and when the need arises, you couldn't ask for a better defense when your brand becomes challenged.



HOW TO HANDLE NEGATIVE REVIEWS

Online review sites are wonderful and terrifying at the same time. Totally wonderful in that they help consumers find that great little place that's just right for – best breakfast in town; great place to grab a beer; emergency 24-hour dry cleaner; you name it. They democratize the customer service process and allow consumers to do better due diligence before they make purchase decisions.

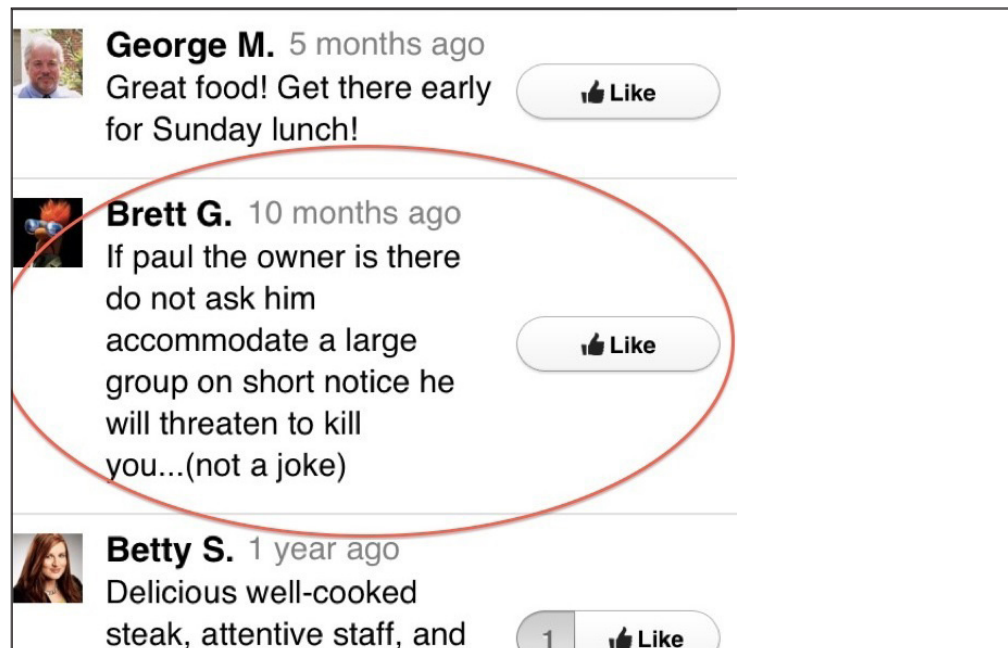
They also give marketers free market research and feedback so use this educational opportunity to your advantage! Not all bad reviews are bad.

Why terrifying? For the same reasons I just stated. They give consumers more say in the process. A Harvard Business Review study of restaurants in Seattle shows that a one-star boost in your Yelp rating can lead to a five to nine percent boost in revenue. Hate Yelp (or any other

review site) as much as you want, but it matters to business, and it puts customers in control.

So. You get a negative review. It might be fair; it might be unfair.

Whatever you do, never respond in anger or with emotion. Your goal is to put this issue to rest quickly with as little attention as possible. When you respond in anger, it only blows the situation up like [these owners of this bakery did](#).



As well, while the reviewer in question is a concern, our focus is on the readers of the review. You may or may not be able to turn the reviewer. He or she might be a lost cause. However, there is no telling how many people will later read the review and let it influence their decision to do business with you. For that reason, remember you are responding publicly and giving others a peek into how you operate. Let's stay classy.

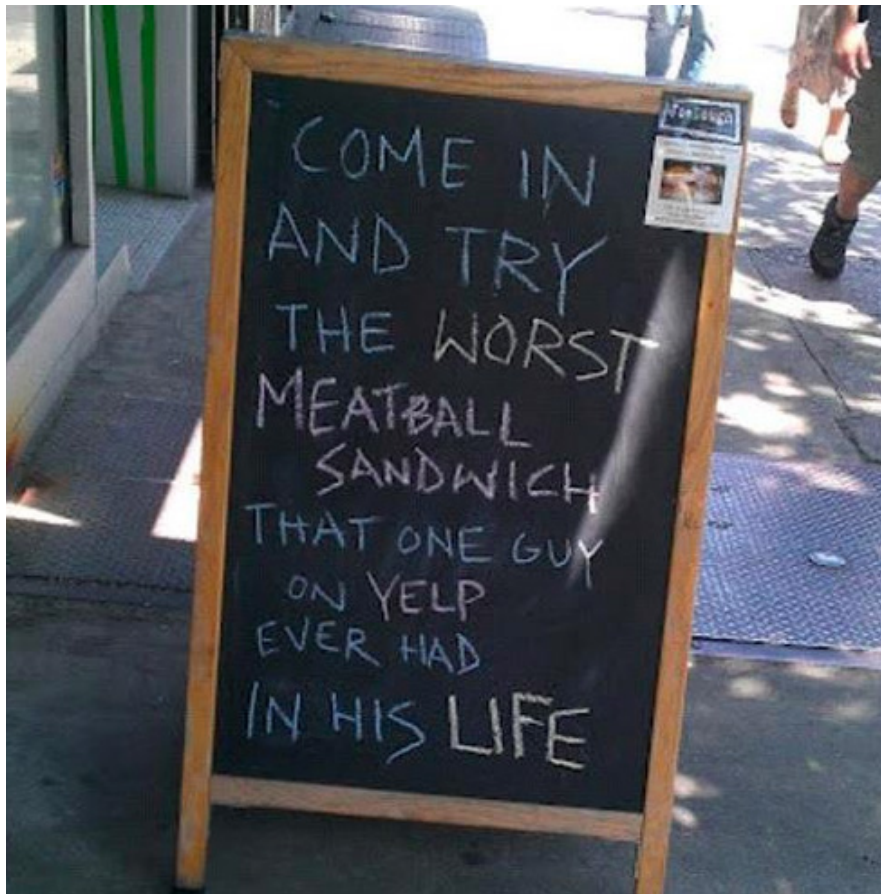
If you are able to, get a feel for the person who has

commented and look at their following. While every customer should be treated equally, we want to know if this person is hugely influential and is going to spread it wide and far.

THE ANATOMY OF AN ONLINE RESPONSE

- Show empathy: Show you understand how disappointing or upsetting the situation must have been. Most people just want to be heard.
- Apologize if you owe them an apology: We'll talk more about this in the next section.
- But sometimes you aren't wrong! So don't apologize: This is when it gets very frustrating. The customer might have been wrong but they are blaming you. It never helps to point a finger back at the angry individual. This will only serve to fan the flames and that's the last thing you want. Mostly, you want other viewers to recognize that this person is unreasonable and not to take this review too seriously. Follow steps 1 and 2. Apologize not for making a mistake but for the fact that they didn't have a good experience. Re-state your expectations, and what happens when they aren't met

**“IF YOU STOP AND KICK
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mutually. Speak in a factual way and stay professional.

- Thank the commenter. If appropriate. Getting constructive feedback is good. It helps you make your business better. Thank the reviewer for taking the time to comment and allow you to address the situation.
- Know when to stop engaging: Some people just love to complain. A troll is someone whose only mission on the Internet is to throw mud, complain, leave negative comments, and generally cause chaos for you in your social media space. Don't fall prey to this.

Address the situation head on. Empathize, listen and thank. If you're doing everything else right like building a community based on values you all strongly believe in, your community will come to your defense.

Don't fear the bad guys. A client said to me the other day, "If you stop and kick every barking dog, you'll never get anywhere." (by the way, I'd never kick a dog but I thought the expression worked.) You can't be everything to everyone and if they don't like you? Let them stroll on by to the next X, Y, or Z company. They just aren't the customer for you.

HOW TO APOLOGIZE



When crisis hits, it's often the reaction and not the event itself that draws public attention.

Your audience anticipates, analyzes and discusses ad nauseum. Your reputation is at stake, and the way you react will be your legacy.

Former BP CEO Tony Hayward downplayed events on the Gulf Oil spill until facts surfaced and his apology is now a model for how not to apologize: "There's no one who wants this thing over more than I do, I'd like my life back." Keyword here is former BP CEO.

Mastering the ability to apologize has never been more important than now with the amplified online conversation. The public watches, scrutinizing, with baited breath for a brand to make one mistake...then they pounce. Because of that, there is a feeling of one-upmanship in the world of apologies. Who can make the best apology? What will they do? Say?

It doesn't have to be that hard.

There is one thing that differentiates a good apology.

A good apology comes from the heart. Your audience is watching to see how you react because they want to see if you care. And you should care. Your audience wants to be validated in that you recognize they are upset/disappointed/let down.

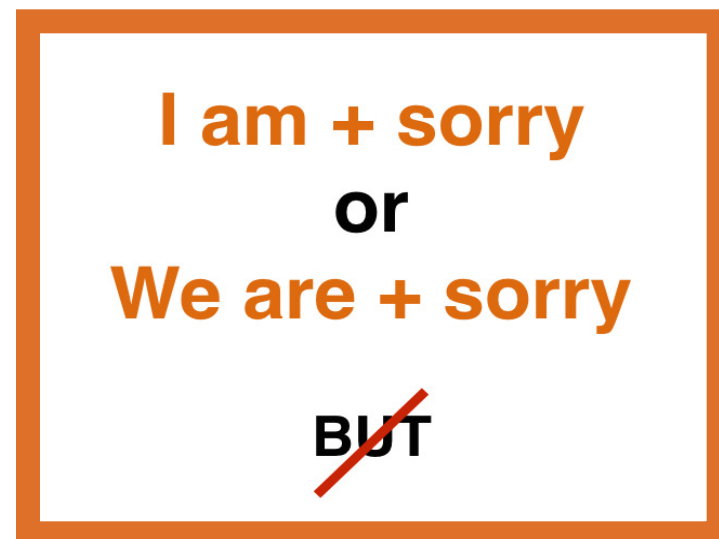
After a storm in 2007 led to 1,000 canceled flights and stranded passengers for days, [Jet Blue CEO David Neeleman apologized](#) on what many consider to be one of the first video apologies. He's not a great speaker, and you can tell that although he had talking points, he wasn't reading from a script.

The apology works because you can see he cares deeply. You can see he's upset, and that he is making changes organizationally to fix the problem. Towards the end he said:

"We want you to have confidence in us. We have taken care of you for seven years. We will be an even better company because of the very difficult things our customers and crew members had to endure over the past week."

It's humbling and we swallow a bit of pride when we do apologize and it's the difference between maintaining your reputation or not. So lose the script and the ego; and get real.

The anatomy of a good apology: add a graphic here:



- Start with the word “I” or “We” and the word “sorry” or “apologize.”
- Don’t follow it with the word “but.” Using the word “but” leads to deflecting accountability. Own up to the problem.
- Know the difference between an excuse and an explanation. Explanations answer our questions – why did this happen? Why did my Internet go down for 24 hours? Why did the plane crash? They aren’t excuses; they are causes to the problem, which you are then going to talk about how you will resolve moving forward.

- How can you tell? an excuse is usually preceded by the word “but.”

- Come from the heart. If you don’t mean it, it will show, and it will fall flat. It will possibly make matters worse and draw more attention to a situation you really want to go away. Just like BP’s Tony Hayward and the toy company’s apology.

Companies survive bad apologies every day. But you want to do more than survive. You want to thrive; to use crises as a teaching moment and to solidify loyalty with your audience. People are far more likely to forgive when you show your human side. We all err, but we don’t all apologize well.



ABOUT LISA

Lisa Gerber is founder and president of Big Leap Creative, an integrated communications agency focused on solving digital marketing and communication problems and helping businesses take the leap from where they are now, to where they want to be.



Lisa and the team at Big Leap help brands get discovered, generate leads, and convert those leads by way of digital communications.

With over 15 years of PR and marketing experience, Lisa, a member of the Executive Committee of the PRSA Counselors Academy, has a background rooted in traditional PR and media relations which has adapted over the years into digital media, online reputation management, content and social communications.

Her clients are scattered across the globe and vary from technology to aerospace, energy, financial services, urban and resort development, and mountain lifestyle sectors.

When she's not in her Sandpoint, Idaho-based office meeting with her team and clients virtually, she might be out in the mountains trail running, skiing, or mountain biking with her husband and Black Lab. That's where she does her best creative problem-solving.



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