



**CONFLUENCE**  
DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY+EXECUTION

# The Power of Online Reviews

AN EXECUTIVE BRIEF

April 2011



## Executive Summary

Encouraging online reviews is a proven way to increase local search rankings, website traffic, trust, and sales. Writing reviews is a popular activity with 32% of Internet users posting online reviews. And, while 90% of consumers online trust recommendations from people they know, 70% trust recommendations from people they don't know. Online reviews can increase search engine rankings as well as from online shoppers. To start, claim your business pages in Angie's List, Insider Pages, Judy's Book, Yelp, and Google Places or create a new business page. Regularly encourage satisfied customers to submit reviews by asking in person, adding review sites to your customer satisfaction surveys, posting reviews in your store, or in your Twitter and Facebook accounts. If negative reviews are posted, sincerely address them publicly or privately. Keep track of reviews and reviewer sentiment by using any of the many free or subscription-based tracking tools. Even though it takes time, the results are well worth the effort.

## Introduction

Before the Internet, business was all about the customer. It still is. But now, instead of sharing their experience with their friends and neighbors, consumers can tell the world—or, at least the part of the world with Internet access. Online reviews provide a unique feedback mechanism for both consumers and business owners.

Local online review sites such as Angie's List, Judy's Book, CitySearch, and Yelp have turned making personal recommendations into a national pastime. In fact, [32% of Internet users](#) claim they have posted product reviews or comments online. But while it should come as no surprise that 90% of consumers online trust recommendations from people they know, [70% trust](#) the opinions of online reviewers they don't know. The trend isn't slowing. The leading local review site, Angieslist.com, [grew 73.58%](#) over last year in unique visitors, and Yelp.com growing 61.55% over the same period. If you aren't taking advantage of online reviews to improve and evangelize your business, you are ignoring a powerful source of free advertising.

## Success Stories

Depending on your niche, you could find that reviews bring in a surprising amount of business. As the [San Francisco Chronicle](#) reported:

- One San Francisco wedding gown designer says his company had 500 inquiries from the Knot, an online wedding site with customer reviews and forums, but only three from the Yellow Pages.
- A Seattle window cleaner reports that she gained 18 customers from Judy's Book and Angie's List—nearly equal to the 22 she received from the Yellow Pages.
- A San Francisco fitness studio owner claims that 95 percent of her business comes from CitySearch and Yelp. "I always say to my clients, 'If you like it, review me,' " she says.

## SEO Benefit

In addition to driving business, online reviews help power local search engine rankings. Many review sites allow you to add a link to your website, which can benefit your keyword ranking. Even if a link is not permitted, the mere mention of your business or product in many locations across the web will confirm your geolocation in local search and help you to rank higher in the map listings. Higher rankings in organic search results equal more visibility, more website traffic, and greater brand awareness.

## Getting Started

Certain review sites are more influential than others. Search the following top review sites to see if your product or company already has a review page on the following sites:

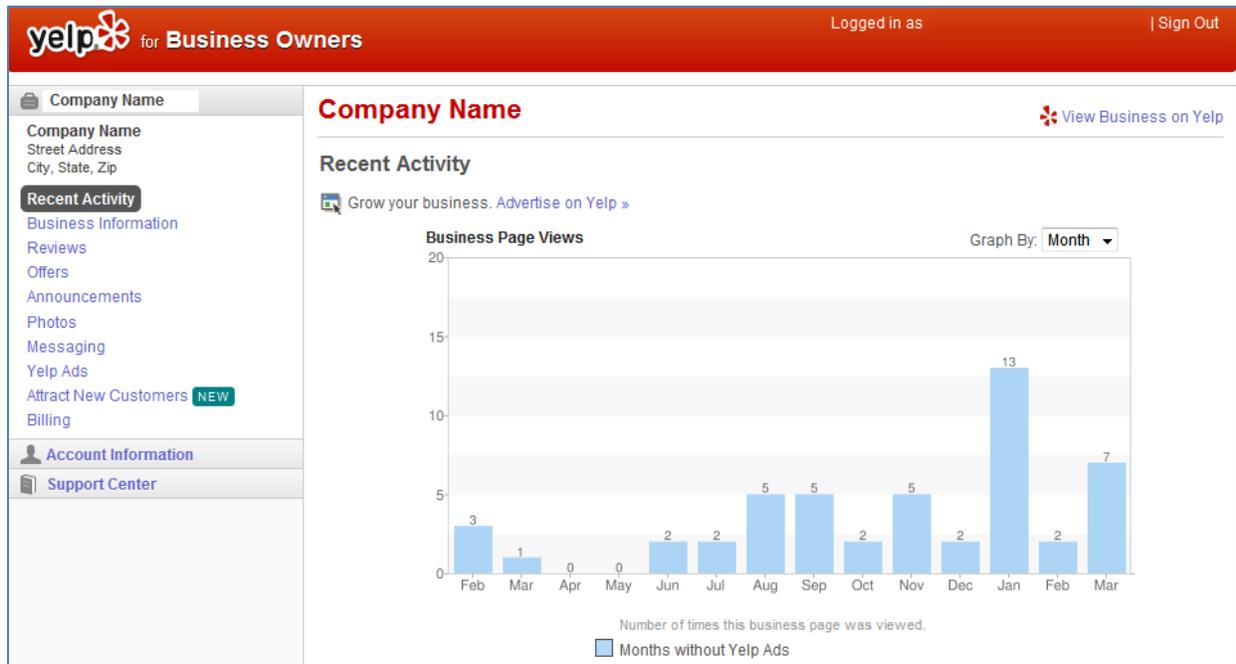
- [Angie's List](#)
- [Yelp](#)
- [Insider Pages](#)
- [Google Places](#)
- [Judy's Book](#)

Once you find your business, look for the button or link to claim the business as your own.



If you don't find your product or company page listed in a review site, after signing in, you will find that it is easy to add one. Submission buttons and links are prominently displayed. Make sure that you provide consistent information across all the sites, especially your basic name, address, phone number, and website address. Then, start asking for reviews.

The better review sites allow you to edit the information, add information and pictures, and respond to reviews. Yelp and Judy's Book offer business owners a dashboard so that you can monitor traffic to your review page or receive alerts when a new review is added.

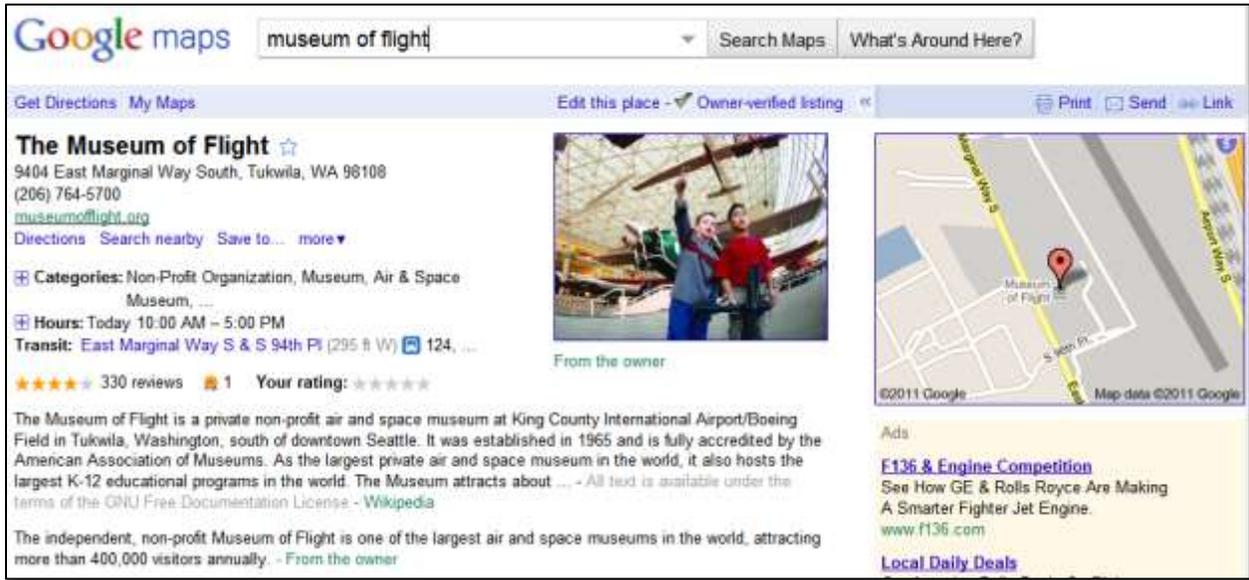


Review sites for specific industries also abound. For instance, restaurant owners should submit their restaurant information to Urbanspoon. To find a review site for your industry, search for your industry category and add the word “reviews” after it.

## Claim Your Google Place Page

The Google Place page is like a small website. It accumulates information that it finds about your business throughout the web and groups it all in one place. You can claim this page, too, just like a review site, and edit and add information and pictures. It has a very useful reporting dashboard that shows impressions, actions taken, the top search phrases, and where the searches originate.

Your Google Places page also aggregates all the reviews about your business from around the web into one location. This makes showing your outstanding reviews to your customers very easy.



Google adds your average star rating, the number of reviews, and a link to your Google Place page to the Google map. This is a great way to help your Website listing stand out in the very competitive search results listings. In addition, Google adds a link to its own review site, Google Hotpot, to encourage more reviews.



## Encouraging Reviews

Not only must reviews be plentiful, but they must be recent. Nobody trusts old reviews. Make it part of your business strategy to constantly ask satisfied customers for online reviews. Add the request to your customer satisfaction surveys and make reviewing easy by including the review site addresses. If you have a brick-and-mortar business, display your top or most recent review where customers can easily see it, like restaurants display their Zagat review. Offer to help non-computer-savvy customers to access review sites and provide alternative links for customers who are not review site members. Angie's List offers a separate page for reviews for non-members as well as a printed review form that can be returned by mail.

If you already have active Twitter and Facebook business accounts, include them in your review strategy. On Twitter, ask for reviews and direct them to your Facebook Review tab. While there, consumers just might decide to Like your Facebook page, too.



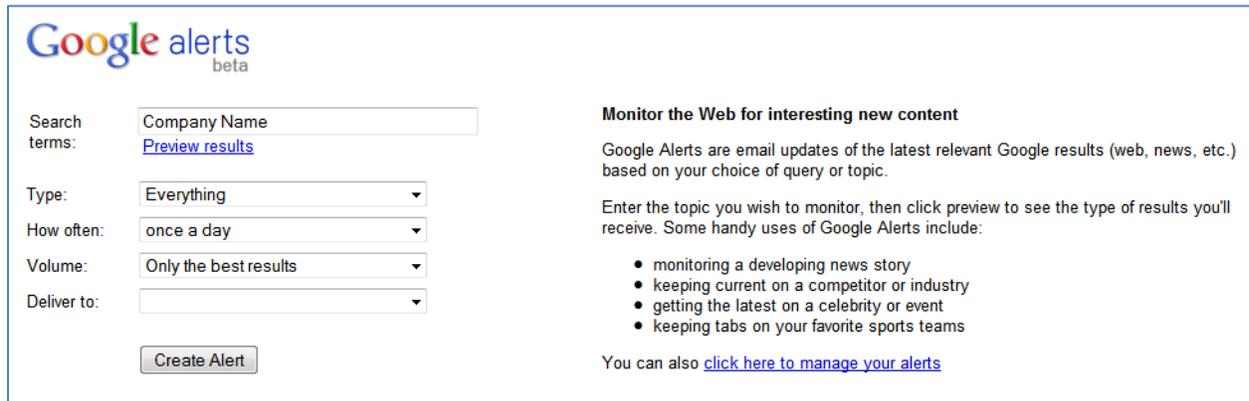
Go through your data base of past customers and call or email them to request reviews. It's a great way to remind old customers of your business. If you have a large list of past and present customers and no time to contact them all, your Angie's List representative will match your customer data base with their membership list and call customers who are Angie's List members for you.

## Don't Fear Negative Reviews

Many companies fear encouraging reviews for fear of the occasional negative review. Surprisingly, in a [Keller Fay Group and Bazaarvoice study](#) across all US clients, they found that 80% of product ratings are 4 or 5 stars out of 5. An absence of negative reviews, however, can erode trust. Online consumers are well aware that reviews can be gamed by friends and employees of the business and are suspicious at a lack of negative comments. Even if you do get the occasional negative review, many review sites allow you to respond privately or publicly to the reviewer. By sincerely responding or offering a discount on a consumer's next visit or purchase, a customer may decide to change their review. Some companies even use online comments in their internal reviews to improve their processes and products.

## Keeping Up with Reviews

With all the reviews sites and social sites, how can you keep up? There are a number of free and subscription-based tools available that automatically monitor social mentions. The simplest way is to set up [Google Alerts](#) and [SocialMention](#) to notify you by email when they uncover a mention.



The screenshot shows the Google Alerts beta interface. On the left, there is a form with the following fields: 'Search terms:' with a text input containing 'Company Name' and a 'Preview results' link; 'Type:' with a dropdown menu set to 'Everything'; 'How often:' with a dropdown menu set to 'once a day'; 'Volume:' with a dropdown menu set to 'Only the best results'; and 'Deliver to:' with an empty dropdown menu. Below these fields is a 'Create Alert' button. On the right, there is a section titled 'Monitor the Web for interesting new content' which explains that Google Alerts are email updates of the latest relevant Google results. It includes a list of handy uses: monitoring a developing news story, keeping current on a competitor or industry, getting the latest on a celebrity or event, and keeping tabs on favorite sports teams. At the bottom right, there is a link to 'click here to manage your alerts'.

## Conclusion

While encouraging, tracking, and responding to online reviews may seem like a difficult addition to your already hectic professional life, the increased business, search engine rankings, product evangelization, brand awareness, and customer feedback are well worth it.

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## About the Author

Margery Spears is a practicing Search Engine Optimization expert at [Confluence Digital, LLC](#). Margery has been doing organic search engine optimization full-time since 2007. Born in Pennsylvania, she has lived in many parts of the US before settling down in Seattle. She is the proud friend of two cats and a dog, and can be found on weekends on one of the many bike paths in Seattle under many layers of rain gear. Follow her on Twitter [@MargeryS](#).

## About Confluence Digital

Confluence Digital, LLC is a Seattle-based digital marketing consultancy providing search engine optimization (SEO), paid search (PPC), web analytics and other search engine marketing, online advertising and strategy solutions to B2B and B2C clients. Follow us on Twitter [@ConfluenceDigtl](#).