


THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY

TRAVEL COMPANIES
NEED ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT



Just this past November a bargain-hunter found a NYC hotel right on Central Park with a 35% discount off regular rates. A quick Google scan showed strong 4 star review averages across several booking sites. Then she noticed a different result on Yelp. That site showed a 2.5 star review average. Yelp's average was based on several hundred reviews whereas the other sites averaged several thousand, but both struck her as good sample sizes. It didn't make sense for the ratings to be so different.

She dug into the Yelp reviews. The 1 and 2 star reviews were dominated by complaints about elevator service, lack of notice about significant repairs and complacent staff. These themes stretched across the past five months. The 3 and 4 star reviews were focused on value: decent rooms and great rates for the Central Park location. The bargain-hunter also noticed all the 1 and 2 star reviews were answered by the same "business manager" – Kevin H.; some were answered on the same day but most were answered in five to fifteen working days. A few 1 star reviews weren't answered at all.

After thirty minutes of review research she decided against booking at the hotel. The location wasn't that important to her, so the basis for many of the best reviews wasn't terribly relevant. On the other hand, slow elevators and marginal staff were definitely in the mix for a bad experience. Having every review answered by the same person, sometimes immediately and other times after several weeks, made her wonder how much importance the hotel placed on even the appearance of caring.

She did take into account the other booking sites with strong 4 star review averages, but the more she thought about them the more suspicious those results seemed. They were almost identical yet very different from Yelp. In her gut Yelp seemed the most credible.

In December, a friend from Eastern Europe visited NYC on vacation and wound up staying at the same hotel she had rejected. When asked how it was, her friend said, "Central Park was amazing! It was like walking in a forest. I did it every morning. The hotel - it was the best communist hotel I ever stayed in! The rooms were boring, the elevators were slow or broken and the staff was as boring as the rooms were. But Central Park was great!" She thought to herself, and so is Yelp.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

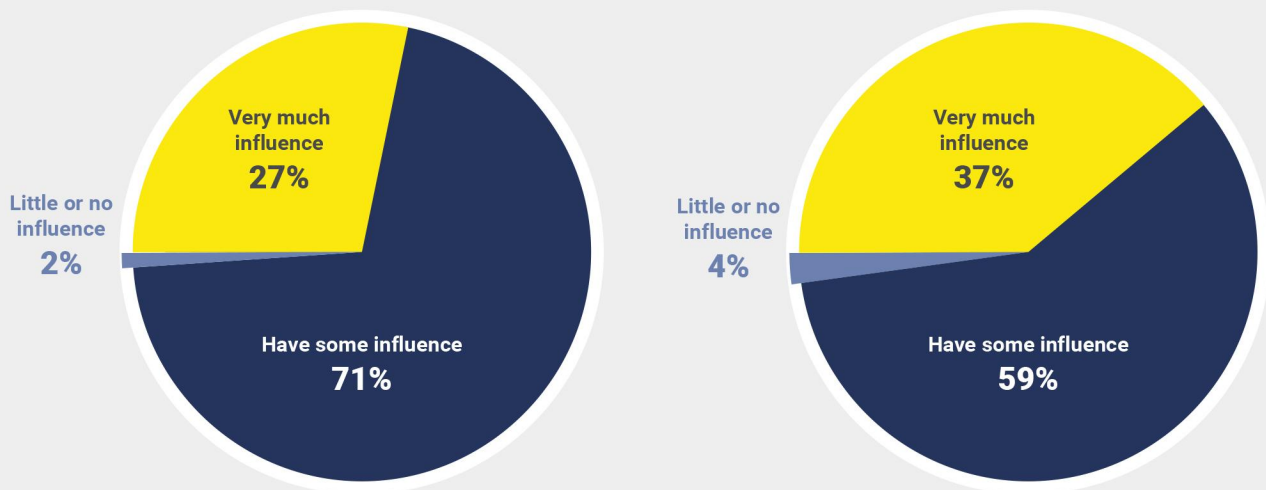
This actual online buying outcome goes to the heart of reputation management: online reviews became very important after price points were reached; the potential invested time and thought into a review evaluation and small details were used as clues or insights into what the travel experience would be.

Online customer reviews have become powerful forces for building or hurting a company's reputation. Today, the old saying, "Rumor has circled the globe before Truth has put on its boots" could be changed to, "An online review can influence potential travelers before a travel agency even knows it's been posted."

While online reputation management is important for every company and organizations – even public figures and celebrities - it has become particularly important for travel companies and the travel industry in general because the impact of online reviews is significant and growing stronger.

For example, Phocuswright research not only found 56% of online travel shoppers sought out and used travel reviews as part of their leisure travel booking activities, the influence of travel reviews is growing: between 2014 and 2015, the travel choices "very much influenced" by online travel reviews grew to almost 40%.

INFLUENCE OF REVIEW WEBSITES ON TRAVEL CHOICES



Source: Phocuswright

2014

2015

HOW TO MANAGE ONLINE REPUTATION

Unlike online personalities or celebrities, managing the online reputation of a travel agency, tour operator or Travel Management Company isn't about image. Instead, it's about achieving two much more important things: one - making sure online reviews or ratings don't cause buyers or existing customers to get the wrong idea about the company's products and services; two – using reviews to proactively improve the company's quality and customer service. The following guidance will help in both areas:

1 BE AWARE:

Be part of all the online channels customers use to assess travel companies. Having an active presence on travel rating sites will make it possible to monitor online travel reviews as they are posted, and travel technology should be leveraged so all channels can be monitored every day.

2 DON'T BE DEFENSIVE:

Bad reviews will happen. In fact, few or no bad reviews lead readers to become suspicious. The majority of readers seek out bad reviews to form an idea of what the worst outcome can be. Our bargain hunter is a good example for both points. The similar 4 star averages across several travel sites made her suspiciously wonder if they'd been managed or manipulated. She also correctly deduced the worst case - a poor experience uncompensated by a great location – and decided not to book.

3 MOVE QUICKLY:

Bad reviews become damaging when readers see slow responses or no response at all. Monitor reviews daily and respond immediately – even if only to acknowledge the review and provide a timeline for a complete answer. Millennials in particular, are a group that values quick and constructive engagement. After all, if an existing customer is neglected, why should a potential customer risk putting themselves in the same position? The buyer in our example did have her opinion of the hotel damaged by slow or absent responses.

4 BE PROACTIVE:

Online reviews are the closest a company can come to being inside the customer's head. This doesn't mean reviews are accurate or fair – which is why reputations must be managed – but it does mean lessons can be learned, root causes can be identified and proactive steps can be taken to avoid similar reviews in the future. Our bargain-hunter was reasonable; it wasn't just elevator problems, staff mediocrity and lack of repairs notice – it was a pattern of them over several months that troubled her. It was clear, little or no proactive measures had been taken.

5

SET GOALS & OBJECTIVES:

What does the company want its reputation to be? What type of word of mouth does it want to generate? Unless management and employees understand these goals it will be sheer luck if they are reached. Once set, these goals should be supported by objectives: for example, targets for 3 and 4 star reviews across sites; specific mention of new products or services; positive language for agents or customer service. Achievements should be recognized and rewarded.

80%

of travellers are most interested in recent reviews that provide the freshest feedback.

Travellers who say management responses to reviews make them more likely to book:

62% - in 2013

84% - in 2012

why?

TripAdvisor users who read reviews because it helps them:

83% - Pick the right hotel

68% - Know about attractions

80% - Have a better trip

64% - Find better restaurants

66%

of travellers ignore extreme comments when reading reviews.

Travellers who are less likely to book a hotel with aggressive, defensive responses to bad reviews

70% - in 2013

64% - in 2012

About dcs plus

dcs plus is a global leading IT solutions provider for the travel and tourism industry. Founded in 2002, dcs plus operates worldwide, offering adaptable, cutting-edge resources and tools for hundreds of travel and tourism professionals. The company is focused on delivering innovation and, through its solutions, aims to provide excellence to travel industry players, regardless of size, business model or market. The solutions offered by dcs plus translate into stability and boosted efficiency for the most demanding leaders in the industry.

INTERESTED TO FIND OUT MORE?



Visit our blog



Write us



Request a demo

CONTACT

Address: 215 Mihai Bravu Road, 5th floor, District 2, 021323, Bucharest, Romania

Telephone number: +40 (0) 21 302 31 32

E-mail: office@dcsplus.net / sales@dcsplus.net

Website: www.dcsplus.net

Social media:



dcs+TM
travel technologies