

WHAT'S TRENDING IN BLOWERS AND DEBRIS LOADERS?

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DO ONLINE REVIEWS REALLY MATTER?

93 percent of customers say online reviews are important in selecting service providers

As a business owner, you already know how important your reputation is in the landscaping industry.

For many of us, we're only as good as the last job we worked on.

What people say about your business matters, and that's especially true about what customers are saying online. Instead of a happy customer telling five of their friends how amazing your company is, they write an online review and hundreds, possibly thousands, of potential customers see it.

Sound great? It is. There is a downside to online reviews too – if you leave a client on not-so-great terms, they can do serious harm to your reputation with a negative review.

But just how important are online reviews? How influential are they to potential clients? Is there a way for you to control what's said about you online?

You might think that online reviews don't really matter to your customers, especially if they can see your work in their neighborhood, visit your website showcasing your best work with photos taken by a professional photographer, all while providing the best value services. If you have a reputation for bad service, all that isn't worth much.

The market has changed, when people are looking for a landscaping pro, they go online.

If you've invested in your website, it might pop up as the number one result on Google. If

you've claimed and optimized your Google My Business listing, it might be the high-lighted option on the right of the search results.

What happens if Google and social media is riddled with one-star reviews of your company?

All that hard work you've invested in online has to battle against a bad review from six months ago to persuade a potential client to part ways with their hard-earned money and hire you.

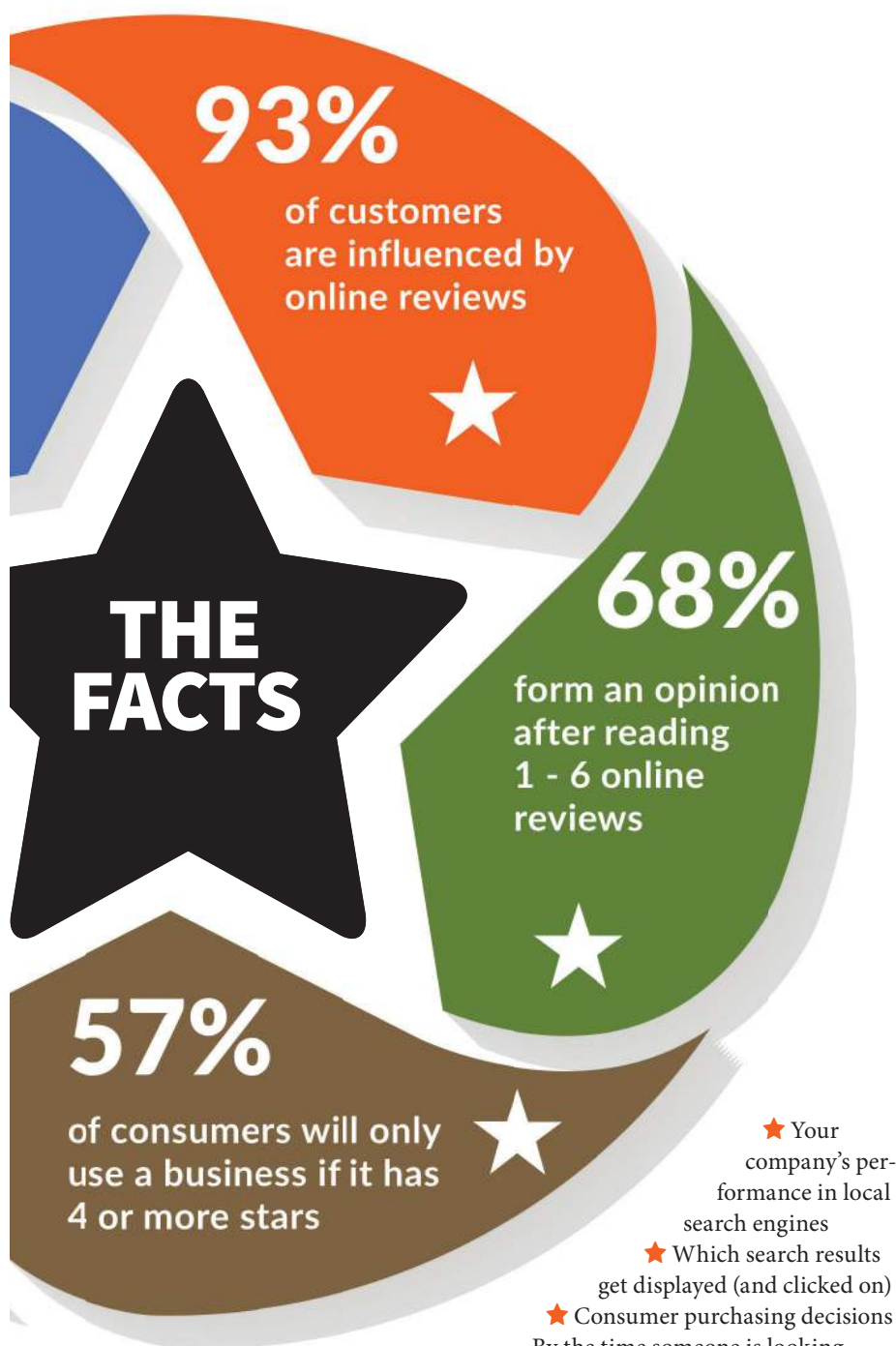
While online reviews may seem like a small piece of the bigger picture that makes up your online presence, people are relying on reviews more and more when deciding what companies to hire.

89%

of consumers read businesses' responses to reviews

84%

trust online reviews as much as a personal recommendation



How customers utilize online reviews

In the digital age, 93 percent of customers say that their buying decisions are influenced by online reviews.

Online reviews have major implications on many different things, including:

- ★ Your website's ranking on the search engines

By the time someone is looking at the reviews of your company, they've already decided they need someone that provides your services.

If they're not using Google to find their next landscaping pro, they're going to be using a review website (Yelp, Facebook, Angie's List etc.)

Half the battle is already won, they know they need the services you provide; they just need to be persuaded you're the best company to hire.

The buying decision from reading your reviews and hiring you is incredibly quick. Customers typically decide yes or no almost immediately.

For many people, checking online reviews is the last hurdle for a company to overcome before they hire them. A recent study found 68 percent of people form an opinion of a company after reading between one and six online reviews.

An overwhelming 84 percent of shoppers said they trusted online business reviews as much as a personal recommendation from friends or family. Now that's some serious power of persuasion.

As a small business, your online reputation can directly influence your bottom line.

A powerful tactic to gain trust

Every small business owner should welcome and actively encourage online reviews.

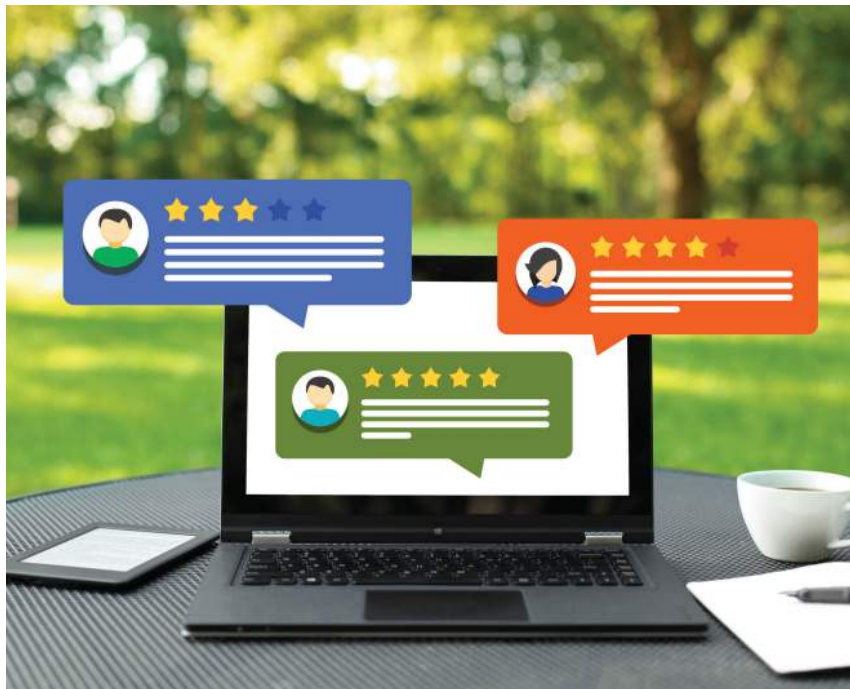
Had a great interaction with a client? Ask them to leave a review online.

If you don't ask your customers to write online reviews for your business, you're missing out on a powerful tactic to gain prospective customers' trust and persuade them to hire your company.

You also run the risk of letting the few customers who do write reviews having a huge effect on what everyone else thinks of your business. If hardly anyone writes reviews, one bad review has a much bigger effect than it otherwise would.

Before you start asking customers to leave you reviews, you need to claim your business on the main review sites. There's probably already an entry for your company on the likes of Google My Business, Yelp and Angie's List – all you have to do is follow the instructions set out by each site and claim it.

Once you've got your profiles optimized (like adding high quality photos, opening hours and directions to your



main office), you can start directing customers to leave you reviews.

The secret to getting happy customers to leave good reviews? Make it simple, make it easy.

If something is too difficult to do or takes up too much time, they won't bother. Give them easy-to-follow step-by-step instructions and link to the profile you want them to leave a review for.

Here are some tried, tested and proven simple ways to encourage customers to write online reviews for your business:

- ★ Add prominent links on your website where customers can review you (like a link to your social media accounts or your entries on Yelp and local directories)
- ★ If you have an office or shop, put signage up, such as Yelp decals, to let customers know which review sites you're featured



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A golden rule for online reviews: always respond. Always. Let your customers know you hear them. People like to be heard and feel like they're the only customer that matters to you.

If someone leaves you a negative review, respond to them in a positive way. Do not take a bad review as a personal insult. Ask them how you can make their experience better in the future.

If needed, apologize for their bad experience, let them know it won't happen again and you've dealt with the problem personally.

Whether the person that left the bad review will change their mind on your company is up for debate but

anyone that reads the exchange will see how professional and responsible your company is. Keeping a level head and being polite will help turn a bad PR event into a positive advert for your company.

Getting maximum exposure for your business

Once you've managed to secure a positive review from a customer, you want to use it to get maximum exposure for your company.

- Promote your latest positive reviews on your social media profiles
- Display positive reviews on the home-

page of your website

- Create a case study to highlight the work completed and use the good review as a testimonial
- Approach the customer to feature in a testimonial video
- Send out your latest reviews as a feature in your next newsletter

Getting a positive review from a customer is an amazing achievement and is a boost for you and your team.

Online reviews aren't something to avoid, they should be embraced. Getting online reviews is a opportunity to promote your business, on so many levels, so get started today. ➤



This article was written by Pam Haskel, owner of the website design & development company Chili Pepper Design, who has been solving clients' problems since 1988. She helps businesses in the landscaping and outdoor living space create and maintain a modern web presence along with online marketing and reputation management services.

ADVERTISERS INDEX

DeerPro	27
Edgit Corp.	33
Ford Motor Company	22-23
GIE+EXPO.	17
Irrigation Association	5
Isuzu Trucks.	44
JRCO Inc.	26
Kuriyama of America.	27
Naturalawn	26
Nearmap	13
Progressive Insurance.	11
Project EverGreen	29
Rotary Corp.	33, 40, 43
SiBore Drill.	41
Stihl Inc.	2
Sunbelt Outdoor Products Inc.	31
Vanair	19
Windy Ridge Corp.	40
Zoro Tools	7
Z-Spray	21

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