

The Complete Guide to Online Reviews



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Things Have Changed

Today's consumer is not the consumer of yesterday. She's smarter. She's tech savvy. She's resourceful. And she's definitely looking online to determine whether your business is the one that she's going to engage with. Potential customers in our modern era are flush with new technologies, apps, and habits to help them decide what to buy, where to buy, and when to buy.

These adoptions directly impact how businesses



compete at a local level.

Every type of business, from mom-and-pop to international enterprise, has seen the meteoric rise of online reviews in place of the traditional word-of-mouth referral. Online reviews provide consumers the kind of clarity into a business that a single recommendation cannot. In fact, 84% of consumers will trust reviews as much as personal recommendations as long as they meet their

requirements. Online reviews allow consumers to determine at a glance whether or not they should engage with your business. No longer can you rely solely on brand development, advertising, or even word-of-mouth referrals and stay competitive anymore. Online reviews are essential to the modern customer journey.

With this in mind, no digital marketing strategy is complete without online reputation management and reviews. Online customer reviews play a bigger part today in a company's SEO than ever before—and contribute to brand trust to a greater degree than even five years ago. That's why it's essential to build a strategy with a holistic approach that includes customer communication, effective data, and review generation and management.



01.

Review Generation

- Online Reviews and How They Work
- Why Online Reviews Matter
- Focusing on the Most Effective Sites
- How to Ask for Online Reviews

Online Reviews and How They Work

Online reviews are user-generated comments that current or past customers can post about businesses on online review sites like Google, Facebook, and other leading sites. Generally, a review site will structure a review to allow the customer to give a rating between 1 and 5 stars and add commentary to that review rating. Positive or negative, the reviews are displayed for other potential consumers to see.



Why Online Reviews Matter

Depending on the review site, online reviews can be displayed in search engine results. Those same reviews have a huge impact on local search engine optimization (SEO), the primary algorithm for getting found online. The image below shows a google business listing that has a high quantity of reviews in addition to a high average quality. When a business can maintain those two factors (quantity and quality), they generally rise to the top of the Google Map Pack.

A recent survey found that online review signals



such as review quantity, velocity, and diversity currently account for approximately 10% of the total weight of the over 200+ ranking factors in Google's search engine algorithm for local businesses.

This means that, on a local SEO level, small businesses have the advantage over national chains if they can consistently get new and authentic reviews.

Local SEO benefits, however, are just a means to an end. The real benefit comes from what happens

when your business ranks higher—namely, increased trust in your brand, and the potential for associated increase in revenue.

A recent study by Harvard Business School (HBS) found that a one-star increase in a restaurant review can lead to a 5-9% increase in revenue. That's simply from taking charge of your review ecosystem, giving a voice to your silent majority of happy customers on Google, Facebook, and other online review sites.

Reviews communicate a trust that choosing a certain business will lead to a better experience. According to research, 93% of consumers say online reviews have an impact on their purchase decision—and over two thirds of people would pay more money for the same product or service knowing that they'd have a better experience.





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Focusing on the Most Effective Sites

Not all review sites are made equal. Google reviews, in most cases, will carry more clout than your average niche, industry-specific review site. Facebook reviews, in general, will also carry more authority than most other sites. But each industry is different, and industry-specific review sites can also be an important part of an overall reputation strategy. So which online review site is right for your business and which should you focus on?

In a general sense, it's beneficial for all businesses to focus on Google and Facebook. Why? Because these



sites give your business a much larger audience and chance for exposure. Focusing on these sites, while supplementing with other niche sites, will give you the best chance of getting found.

Review Site Guide

Google has arguably the most prominent online review site. The world's biggest search engine puts a big emphasis on local reviews, meaning you have the potential to rise to the top of the Google Map Pack. Many businesses see this as the sole reason for focusing on generating Google reviews. While

Google's online reviews are a great starting place, they should not be the only factor to your online review strategy. Not every customer has a Google account to leave a review, so it's wise to supplement those efforts with other online review sites. Besides, Google isn't the only online review platform that can rank in the search results.

With around 2.5 billion monthly active users and over 1.6 billion daily active users, Facebook is also a powerful online review site. One main advantage to Facebook reviews is that most of your customers use Facebook and will already be logged in (via mobile or desktop) allowing you to easily direct them straight to your review page. While Facebook reviews arguably aren't quite on par Google reviews, the platform is fast-approaching.



Industry-Specific Sites

Once you've created a review inventory on either—or both—of these sites, industry-specific review sites are a great way to supplement your efforts. Reviews for legal experts can be found on Avvo. Healthgrades or Vitals.com host patient reviews for medical professionals; Houzz does the same for home builders. Foursquare is popular for restaurants, and Angie's List for service-related business. Every industry is different and usually has a couple of leaders for online reviews that should be part of your review strategy. Use them to your advantage, but only as a complement to the main review sites.



How to Ask for Online Reviews

Many businesses already know that collecting reviews organically isn't always the easiest thing to do. So what's the best way to generate them?

As a general rule of thumb, don't offer incentives for online reviews. Offering an incentive in exchange for a review might lead to a biased review that probably won't accurately reflect that specific customer's experience. It's also strictly against many sites' terms and services to incentivize reviews and can lead to penalties with your listing. And really, it just isn't best practice.

A good alternative to incentivizing is to make leaving



a review easy for your customers. The two key words? Timing and Convenience.

When asking for a review, timing is key. A wedding dress boutique had an average review rating of 4.5 stars, which didn't reflect the quality of the superb customer experience the team was providing. After some digging, Lynn (the owner) noticed that customers weren't leaving a review until after they had picked up their dress—but the moment they were most thrilled was after the gown viewing appointment.

The team began sending review invites immediately

following appointments. And began getting a flood of five-star reviews. A few months later, their rating bumped to 4.9, with 975 Google Reviews.

When asking your customers for reviews, it is important to find the optimal time within your customer journey to ask—like the bridal store did. Generally, try to do so immediately following the service, when their experience is fresh on their minds. Ask them verbally on site, (setting an expectation), and then send an invite afterwards—also, if possible, while the customer is still on site. Taking quick action to capture the experience in this way will give you quick and quality results that accurately reflect the value of your business.

But how do you make this convenient? For them and for you? Verbal requests alone require the customer to get online, search for your business, make an account (if they don't already have one), type up and then post a review. Hassle. And the odds of someone filling out an online review that



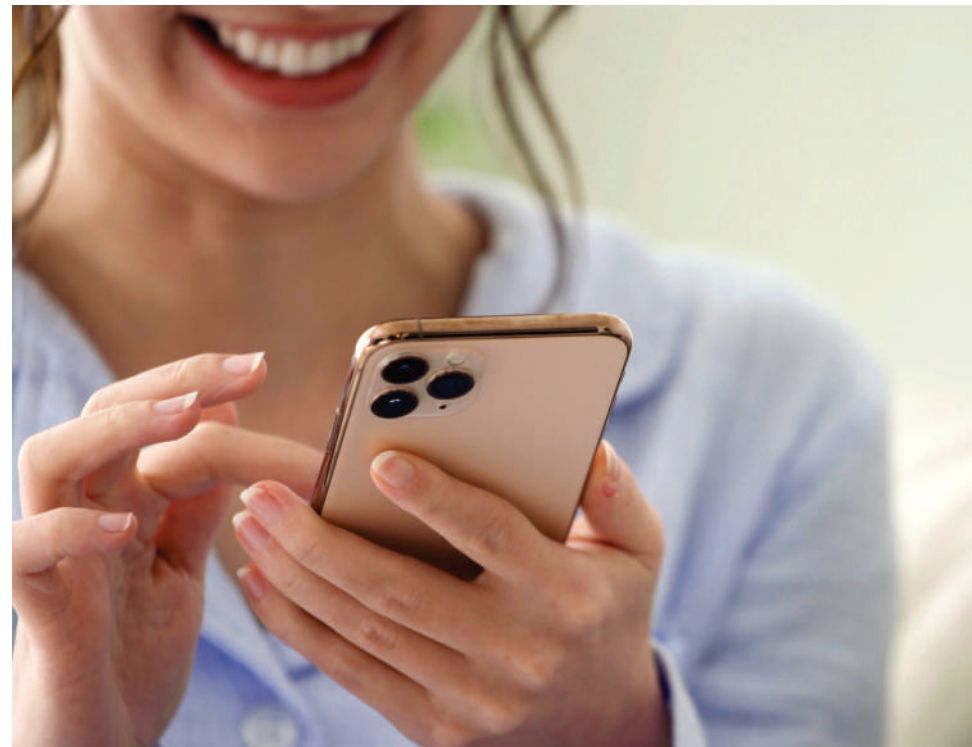
they receive via email or snail mail is very slim.

Businesses today are taking advantage of the convenience that comes with texting. In fact, 99% of all text messages get opened—meaning a review request is much more likely to be seen, opened, and filled out. Using text-based requests, businesses are seeing review completions rates much higher than traditional email-based requests.

1. Text message-based review requests can be sent as or even before your customer leaves your place of business. And by using a feature like automation, sending personalized requests at the right time can be convenient for you as well. With the right messaging tools, you can send an automatic review request immediately following the transaction, or at any other touchpoint in the customer journey. Automation in review generation means perfect timing for you and your customer—and that results in completion rates up to 15x greater than traditional email-based requests.

2. Text message-based requests are easier for customers to access and respond to on their own schedule. The request comes in their preferred channel of communication, and they simply open the message and click the link to leave a review. Email-based requests are only opened on average anywhere from 20-30% of the time. Text-based requests see open rates close to 98%.

So, game plan. You provide an amazing service and ask for a review in person on site. Then, you send a text review request with a link—also on site. The customer clicks the link and leaves a stellar review (and if they dilly dally, you send a brief follow-up request). Your ratings rise, and another lead finds you and converts because you're killing it. Wash, rinse, repeat.



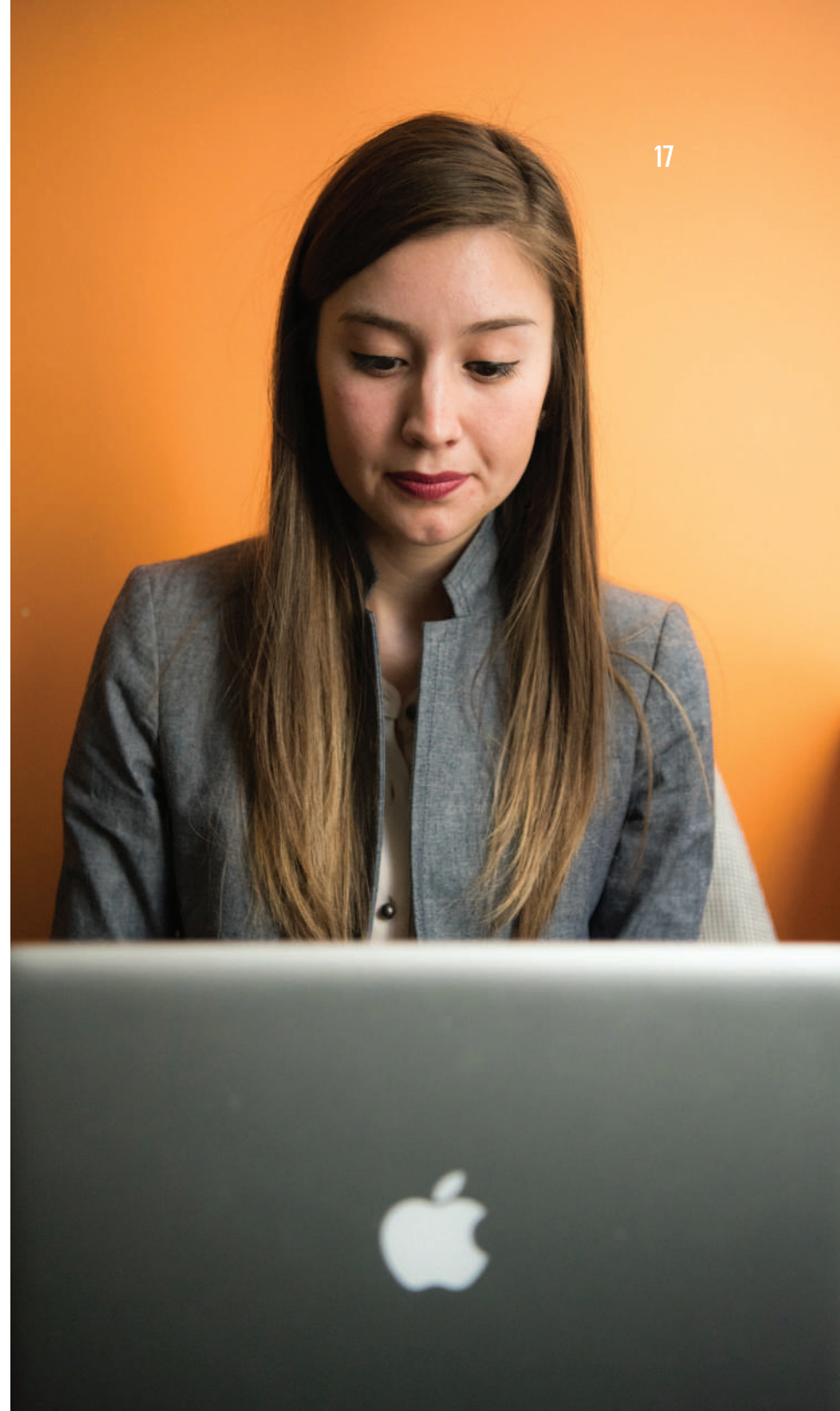
02.

Review Management

- How to Manage and Respond to Reviews
- Driving Your Customer Experience with Online Reviews

How to Manage and Respond to Reviews

You've worked hard to get your reviews. Now, it's time to utilize them. While generating reviews is the goal, it's just as important to monitor and quickly respond to positive and negative online reviews. According to a recent study, 70% of respondents said their opinion was changed after a business responded to a review⁶. While responding to every review is ideal, not every team can realistically do that. So choose a review to response ratio that is actionable for your business and stick to it. A well-rounded review-to-response ratio is around 1 response for every 4 reviews.



Positive Reviews

Positive reviews are gold for your business. They tell your potential customers that you're the business to engage with, and they tell you what your business is doing well. When you receive a positive review, make sure to respond. This will show that your business genuinely cares about the customer and their experience. Responses that are personal, conversational, and authentic stand out and show that your business is value-oriented and engaged with your customers.



Responding to Positive Reviews

Review:

Loved my experience! Excellent service.

Response:

We're so glad to hear you enjoyed your visit. Your recommendation means the world to us. We hope to see you again soon!

Steps:

1. Thank the reviewer
2. Express hope that they will return ("We hope to see you...")

Negative Reviews

Negative reviews are obviously more difficult to digest than positive ones. But they give your business a few unique opportunities. First, negative reviews allow you to see what needs to be improved. Enterprise companies spend millions of dollars each year to find ways to improve their services and customer experience. With online reviews, you can see what needs to be improved for little to no cost. The major cost associated with a negative review is the possibility of lost business if other potential customers see that review—which is why promptly responding to every negative review is so crucial.

Taking the time to respond to negative reviews can have a huge impact. In fact, 41% of consumers see a brand's response to an online review as a sign that the brand really cares about its customers. This is a chance for your business to act fast and fix whatever



mistake the customer feels your business made. Best practice is to respond within 2 hours—24 max. You might also consider offering compensation in the form of waiving a service fee or comping their purchase to restore trust. If you're successful, their negative review could change into a positive one, or they might delete their original post.

It's critical not to take a negative review personally when responding. Even if the customer's review seems incorrect, a negative response will reflect even more poorly than the negative review did in the first place. Keep your response sincere, concise, and personal. The example below does a great job of taking a cool-headed approach in responding, following a few simple steps that can turn this negative into a positive for any potential customer.

Responding to Negative Reviews

Review:

Had a terrible experience! Wouldn't recommend.

Response:

We're so sorry to hear that your experience was a negative one. We'd like to do what we can to make it up to you. Please contact our customer service manager so we can resolve any issues.

Steps:

1. Apologize
2. Approach the review with a calm, collected response
3. Offer a proactive way to solve the problem
4. Ask to continue the conversation privately



Driving Customer Experience with Online Reviews

Online reviews, if responded to quickly and appropriately, can serve as a revolving feedback loop. By utilizing positive and negative online reviews you can effectively implement, test, and alter processes that affect your customers' experience.

For example, a customer might leave a 3-star review for an automotive dealership stating the cause for discontent was the hour she had to wait after the paperwork was finalized. That dealership might take this feedback and adjust their process to clean the car while the paperwork is being completed.



The next customer who comes in leaves a positive review, and boom. Higher rating. More business. More reviews.

Online reviews can also help your business identify potential case studies and evangelists. Happy customers are powerful assets to your business; it's marketing you didn't have to pay for. In some cases, you can reach out to people who have left positive reviews and ask for case studies and quotes to use elsewhere in your marketing. Those stories draw others in, and the process repeats.

If I'm getting bad reviews, I want to know about it and I want to do something about it. Give us a bad review so I can know what's going on. If we get anything that's not five stars, we're reaching out to them to ask them what could we do differently to give them the five-star service that we're striving for.

Dr. Desai, CT Braces

03.

Choosing a Platform

- What You Should be Looking For
- Platform Components and Features

What You Should Be Looking For

When considering different options, you want to keep in mind that an effective review management platform should allow you to consistently: 1. generate new, authentic reviews and 2. successfully manage them to help your customers and your business. But actually, it should do much more than that. You'll want a platform that allows you to:

- Receive feedback
- Respond to customers
- See all of your reviews from all sources in one place
- Respond to all of those reviews in one place
- Generate insightful data to drive your business in the right direction



Having all these tools and data in one place allows your business to efficiently manage review activity, progress, and customer satisfaction. It also helps you understand where your customers are for marketing and advertising purposes.

Podium's Interaction Management Platform lets you take ownership of your online reviews.

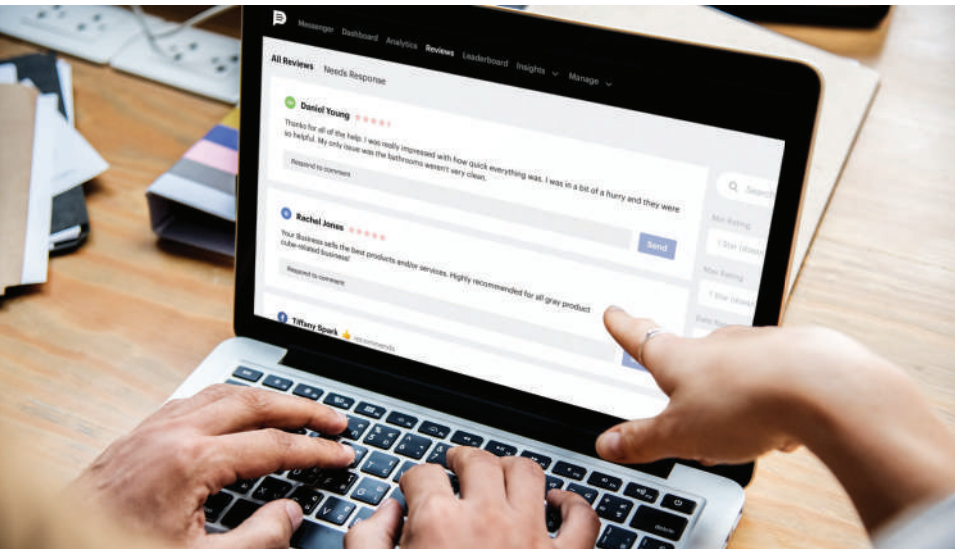
Podium's platform is a powerful suite of messaging tools that does all this—and more. The Reviews tool lets you not only gather reviews from dozens of review sites, but also manage, respond to, and interpret your reviews from one convenient dashboard. Features like notifications when negative reviews are received, time stamps, and automation help you stay on top of the game.

And all from one place. On your dashboard, you can see:

- Total number of reviews
- Overall average rating
- Most productive review sites
- Recent reviews from all platforms
- Employee leaderboard
- Response times

Additionally, Podium puts all your other interactions into the same easy-to-use inbox. This allows you, your team, and your customers to create a seamless customer experience together.

The results speak for themselves.

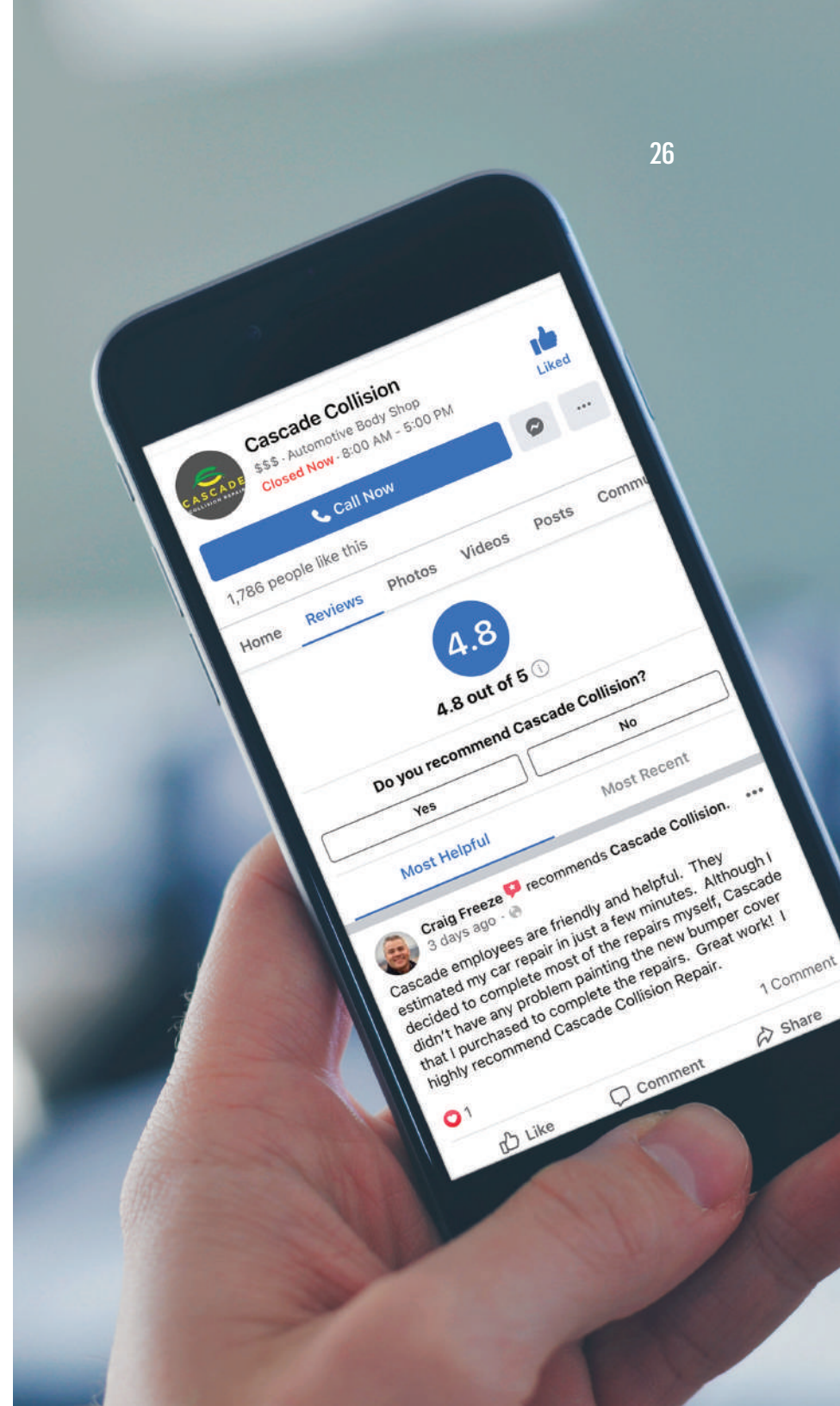


After implementing Podium, the team at Cascade Collision was able to streamline their communication and review generation and responses. Cascade now has a **4.8 average star rating with hundreds of reviews and has appeared in 59% more Google search results.**

With Podium, Lake Powell Paddleboards went from less than 100 reviews on TripAdvisor and only 11 Google reviews to nearly **300 reviews on TripAdvisor and 400 Google reviews—all with an average rating of 4.9 stars.**

Getting customer feedback, gathering leads from your website, and communicating at every touchpoint of the customer journey is all made possible through the power of text. It's never been so easy.

Own your reviews. Win leads. Repeat.



Before we engaged with Podium, we had maybe 3,000 online reviews across our entire system. Since starting with Podium, we've gained somewhere north of 50,000 reviews.

Chris Carson, Zerorez

Podium proves that messaging isn't just the better way to get reviews—it's the better way to do business.

Podium's messaging tools for local business let you connect with your customers where they're at—on their phones. From gathering and responding to reviews, to getting feedback and NPS results, to messaging with leads and team members, Podium gets it done all from one inbox through the simple power of messaging.

Call or text us at 1-833-361-4921.

We're in the business of modernizing local business.

Learn More

