The Key to Reputation Success in 2020

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Why Recent Reviews & Responses Matter More Than Ranking

TripAdvisor Then & Now

For the last twenty years, any technological enhancements online have been met with businesses doing their best to make the most out of them. From the rush to purchase valuable domains to the now-defunct method of stuffing keywords into websites, the cycle always repeats in 3 steps: A new technology is created. It is taken advantage of to get more visibility. The technology evolves to keep up and give users a better experience.

One industry that sees this over and over again is online reviews. When reviews were first introduced, a lot of businesses felt they were unfair and just provided a platform for unhappy customers to complain. They probably didn't anticipate that there would also be a huge swathe of loyal customers that would take time out of their day to sing the praises of their favorite hotel, restaurant, or shop. Review websites later evolved to include business owner responses, booking capabilities, and extensive business profiles.

For hoteliers, TripAdvisor soon became the most important website for attracting new customers. Whether guests were going to book directly or just wanted to read reviews before booking on an OTA website, almost every traveler would check reviews on TripAdvisor first. Soon, it became apparent that the higher you rank on TripAdvisor for your city, the more bookings you would get.

So how do you rank higher on TripAdvisor?

Much like SEO, the algorithms behind reviews are constantly evolving. Before, simply having more 5-star reviews would put you at the top. Today, it's a little more complicated. In this white paper, we'll break down:

- TripAdvisor's current ranking algorithm
- Factors that impact actual booking behaviors
- How hotels can use their reputation to earn more bookings

The TripAdvisor Algorithm

When we talk about an algorithm, it simply means the behind-the-scenes factors that decide the order to show results. For instance, Google's algorithm powers which websites show up for certain keyword searches (which is why we focus on SEO). For TripAdvisor users, when they search for hotels in a city, these hotels are ranked in a certain order. The higher your ranking on this list, the more likely it is that people will view your hotel listing.

TripAdvisor's ranking algorithm consists of four key factors:

- **Quality:** your ranking score on a 1-5 scale
  - The Quality score is an average. If you have five 5's and two 2's, your quality score would be around a 4.1.

- **Quantity:** the number of reviews scoring you
  - Having 500/550 reviews of a 5 will rank you higher than having 50/55 5 rankings, even if the averages are equal.

- **Recency:** reviews from the last 12 months are weighted more highly than older reviews
  - After 12 months, the weight of a review drops drastically.

- **Performance Over Time:** the consistency of your business year to year
  - This could be to cut down on businesses "wiping" business profiles when they purchase a company with a low score.

TripAdvisor most recently launched a substantial update to their algorithm in 2018, resulting in hotels to jump or drop by dozens of spots in markets around the world. By only focusing on the overall rating of your hotel, you can be affected by the whims of an algorithm change. But by having a more holistic approach to your reputation online, you can make your hotel more attractive to people searching on review websites.

What many hoteliers don't realize is that **being #1** isn't the only way to **succeed.** While ranking higher than a competitor gives you an edge, there are other factors that affect what a person browsing hotels thinks of your business.

How Do You Stack Up?

Search hotels in your city on TripAdvisor. Use the toggles on the side to try different searches, such as by setting the price to your room rate per night and under, amenities you offer like free WiFi, and Deals like free cancellation.

As an example, we **searched Orlando** for hotels under $120 per night for an upcoming weekend with free breakfast and a "reserve now, pay at stay" offer. The top result, listed with a "#1 Best Value" notation on the search page, is actually the #180 out of 359 hotels in Orlando, The Floridian Express.

While this hotel has an overall 3.5 ranking, it consistently receives about a half dozen reviews a month that are usually positive, and they respond to nearly all of them. This can make a traveler feel more confident booking a hotel that falls just into the bottom half of ranked hotels that they may not have considered otherwise.
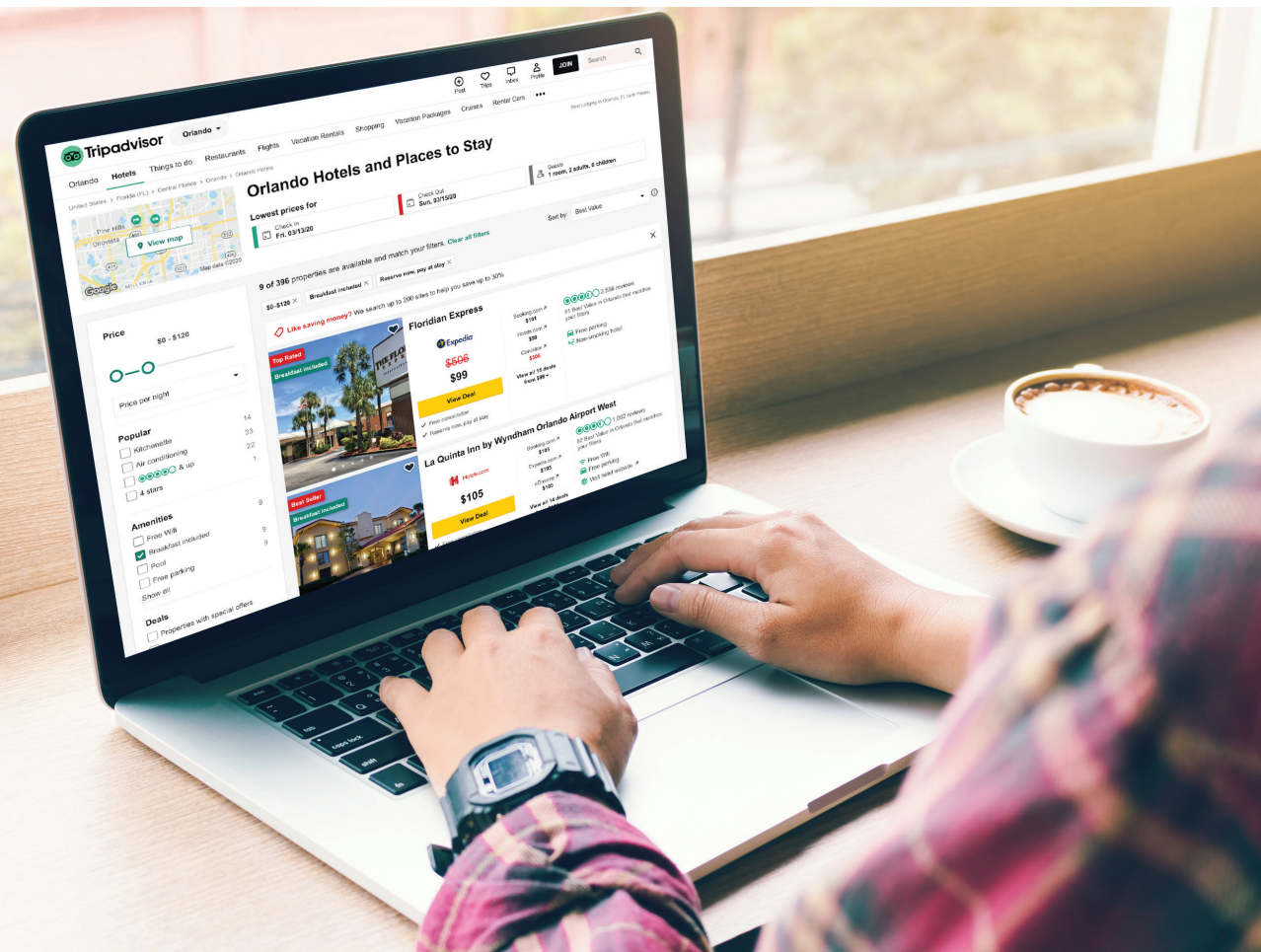
Earn Bookings Through Reputation

To get the best shot at earning the trust of prospective guests, you need to be focused on **recency** and **responses**. The most recent reviews hold the most weight for travelers. They know that staffing can change and improvements can be made at any time, so a recent guest review and hotel response can go a long way.

Take for instance if a hotel's most recent review was 6 months ago. It praised the hotel staff's attentiveness but they noted that the beds were uncomfortable and too firm. With just this information to go off of, a researching traveler can only assume that the beds are in the same condition, or worse.

In contrast, imagine if there also was a review from a month ago, praising the comfort of the rooms. The researching traveler can now make a number of assumptions – perhaps that guest from six months prior preferred a firmer mattress, requested a mattress cover, or the beds were replaced.

In a best case scenario, the hotel would have responded to both the reviews. They could note that the mattresses were actually just replaced, and that's why they're firmer than the first guest's liking. Or, they could thank them for their input and say they would address the mattresses soon. Either way, the researching traveler will feel more confident that the hotel is taking their thoughts into consideration.

GET THE BEST SHOT AT EARNING THE TRUST OF PROSPECTIVE GUESTS.

How to Make Better First Impressions

It's undeniable that reviews directly impact traveler booking behaviors. So what can hotels do to stand out from the competition? Become an active participant in the reviews process – not a bystander waiting for the reviews to show up.

1. Actively ask guests to leave reviews
2. Make improvements based on the feedback you receive
3. Respond thoughtfully to each review you receive

Currently, TripAdvisor only shows 5 reviews per page. That means that it's more important than ever to stay on top of responding to these reviews, or else at a glance it may seem like you don't read guest feedback.

If you find that review management and responses often get put on the backburner due to the multitude of other tasks involved in running a hotel, invest in tools that can help. You can automate email reminders for guests to leave feedback after a stay. And, outsource the writing of responses so that you receive all the vital feedback but can rely on professional responses.

In most cases, you'll find that the positive impact on your reputation on review websites will result in more bookings, easily covering the cost of these services. Plus, you'll get intel into the exact topics that are impacting your scores the most so you know the best places to invest your time and money in your property.

Invest your time and money in your property!

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